

Twentieth-Second Annual

TRUTH IN LOVE
LECTURESHIP

Theme:

**“There Is
Something Better
Than...”**

May 16-20, 2012

PAUL SAIN, DIRECTOR

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FOREWORD

What makes Satan so successful? Deception seems to be the greatest tool in his arsenal (2 Cor. 11:3; John 8:44). He makes bad things appear to be good and good things appear to be bad. Consequently, we live in a world under the sway of the wicked one (1 John 5:19). The church has been divided and conformed to man's likings. The home has been abandoned and has become the birthplace of the next, more wicked, generation. The picture is bleak. Why aren't more people sounding the alarms? Why do so many people dive head-first into sinful lifestyles without thinking twice? It is because our culture is deceived. Satan deceives us into thinking that everything is fine. "*Take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry*" (Luke 12:19).

The inspired penmen never minced words when they described the condition of people in sin. Jesus said that people who are overcome by sin are lost (Luke 15:24; 19:10). They are in darkness (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13), and have been blinded (2 Cor. 4:4). Paul said that these people are "without Christ," "separated" from God, "strangers," and they have "no hope" (Eph. 2:12). He said that they are guilty in their sins (1 Cor. 15:17; cf. John 8:24), and that they are "dead" (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13; cf. Luke 15:24). This is tragic.

We have all seen both the effects and affects of sin. Divorce affects many more than two people. Addiction has serious effects on one's physical and mental health. These are just a couple of examples out of thousands that could be mentioned. The saying is true: "*Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want*

to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.” What can be done? Is there any hope for our beguiled world?

The rays of the light of Christ burst onto the scene of our dark world (cf. John 1:4; 3:19-21). He illuminates the pathway; He speaks truth; He gives life (John 14:6)! He seeks the lost (Luke 19:10), even leaving the ninety and nine to find the one sheep who has gone astray (Luke 15:4-7). He points us to the Father, and shows us a righteous example of obeying the Father’s will (John 6:38; cf. Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Peter 2:21).

True followers of Jesus will change their hearts to conform to righteous thoughts (Matt. 12:35; 22:37-38), and they will change their actions to conform to righteous deeds (Col. 3:17). They will heed the warnings and yield not to temptation (cf. Matt. 6:13; Luke 22:31-32; 1 Peter 5:8). In so doing, they will secure hope in Christ (1 Peter 1:3; Heb. 6:19), and they will be blessed. “I have come that they may have life,” Jesus said, “and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

God’s children have an incredible message to bring to the lost world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49). There is God’s great love! There is freedom from sin! We do not have to live under Satan’s deceptive sway. We do not have to suffer from continually living in sin. Those living in sin can get out of Satan’s grip and can come into the marvelous light of the gospel! There is good news! There is something better!

Do not settle for the world’s definition of what is good or what is right. Choose the better way – God’s way – and you will see the great results.

Robert Hatfield

DEDICATION

A congregation is not **great** because of its size, wealth or popularity. The world often judges a religious group by these standards. A congregation is **GREAT** when in the sight of Almighty God they are comprised of members who are faithful, loving, serving, working, zealous, joyful, united, committed, and determined to endure to the end.

A congregation (such as East Hill) is comprised of individuals who personally exhibit the above qualities. While none are perfect (without sin), it is possible to be “*faithful*” and “*saved*” from our sins. How wonderful to be a child of God and daily walk with others “*of like precious faith!*” How marvelous to be a member of the glorious body of Christ!

There are many at East Hill who sacrifice of their time, energy, talents and financially. There are many who have served the Lord faithfully for many years and deserve words of appreciation – but they would often prefer to do their work in secret, without fanfare.

Without doubt, the couple we seek to honor in the dedication of this year’s lectureship volume would humbly prefer to merely go about their work – but they have been such an inspiration to their spiritual family that we feel it necessary to acknowledge our sincere appreciation.

When something is needed – often when this couple learns of the need – consider it done – from

DEDICATION

painting inside and outside, to repairing and refinishing the exterior columns, from tree pruning to tree planting, assisting with every project (physically and/or financially), housing students from the Memphis School of Preaching, preparing and delivering Thanksgiving baskets, countless treasured notes of encouragement,



visiting the sick and shut-in, contacting members, door greeting, and various other activities –

Joel & Dot Orton have graciously and sacrificially given of

themselves for the overall good of the Lord's work. We lovingly dedicate this book in their honor.

Paul Sain
Director of the Lectureship

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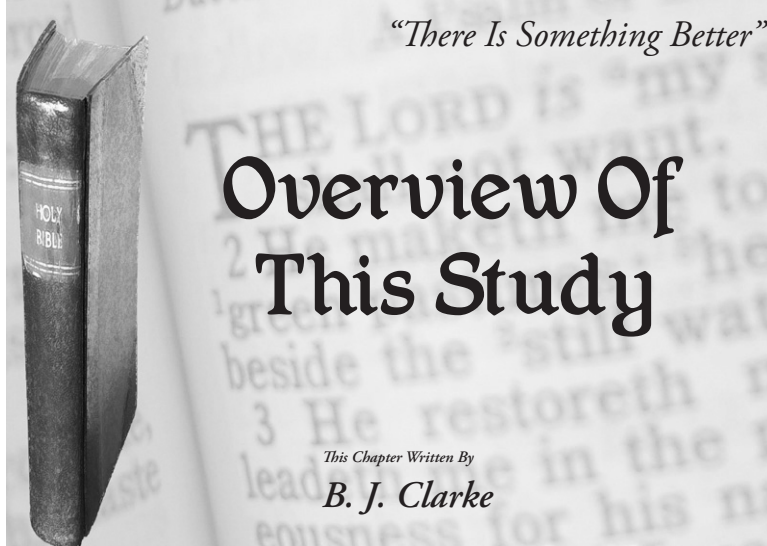
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***“There Is
Something
Better Than...”***

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Introduction

How would you like to be able to buy anything you wanted the moment you wanted it? How would you like to own multiple mansions, with all of them situated in the midst of beautifully landscaped property? How would you like to have servants at your beck and call? How would you like to have your own personal singers and musicians available to play your favorite song upon command? On top of all this, how would you like to be known as one of the smartest, if not the smartest, people in the world? King Solomon had all of this and more—and he was downright miserable. Wine, women, and wealth surrounded him. Yet, he looked on it all and concluded that it was all *“vanity”* (Eccl. 2:1-11). He spent most of his life looking for something better.

His quest for something better has been played out over and again throughout the centuries.

Technologically, we are never quite satisfied. We cannot wait for the new and improved gadget to hit the stores. We have to have it, not because the gadget we have already does not work, but because the new one is so much better, or so we have been told.

To be sure, there are times when something new is better than the old. For instance, the Hebrews writer declared that Jesus Christ was/is a better mediator, Who has established a better covenant with better promises (Heb. 8:6-13). As we carry out our task to take the whole gospel to the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16), we must be prepared to show the world that there is something better than what Satan has sold them. We must be prepared to show them that there is something better than...

Atheism

If atheism is true, then there is no rational explanation for how things came to be. It is all the result of accidental chance and happenstance. There is no purpose at all to anything that exists. Everything is random. You have no reason for living. Moreover, according to atheism, there is no Creator who cares for you, or even knows you exist, because no Creator exists. So, don't bother bringing your grief and heartaches to God—because He is not there. You must go it alone. And if your loved one is dying, prepare to say goodbye—forever—because there is no hope of ever seeing them beyond the grave.

If you get sick personally, and are dying, you will no doubt seek some hope and comfort on your

deathbed. Forget it. There is nothing for you. You are about to die and go out of existence. There is no place of pain, but neither is there any place of pleasure. There is no one waiting for you on the other side. All relationships will cease, and you will leave the earth, never to return. How depressing and sad!

But do not lose heart, dear reader. There is something better than atheism. There is a God in heaven (Dan. 2:28), who created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). He created man in His image (Gen. 1:26). He knows you exist and He cares about what is happening in your life (Psm. 33:13-15; 1 Peter 5:7). Thus you can cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you (Psm. 55:22).

The God of heaven cares so much for you that He sent His only begotten Son from heaven to save you from your sins (1 Tim. 1:15), and to invite you to come and live with Him (John 14:1-3). In the next place, there is something better than...

Agnosticism

Some proudly announce their allegiance to agnosticism, i.e., the idea that one cannot know with certainty whether there is a God. In fact, the basic meaning of the word agnosticism refers to “*not knowing*” the truth about anything. Consequently, you can never know anything for certain. You cannot know where you came from, what you are doing here on earth, and where you will go, if anywhere, when you leave the earth. You are stuck in the land of ignorance!

Thankfully, there is something better than

agnosticism. You do not have to wander through life uncertainly. You can know that there is a God in heaven (Dan. 2:28; Psm. 19:1). You can know the truth that will set you free (John 8:32) and purify your soul (1 Peter 1:22). You can know where you came from (Gen. 1:26), what you are doing here on earth (Eccl. 12:13), and where you are headed when this life is over (Matt. 25:46). There is something better than ignorance! There is also something better than...

Deism

If deism is true, you can know there is a Creator, but you should also know that He is totally detached from any concern for His creation. Deism admits that there is sufficient design in creation to evidence the existence of a Creator. However, deism is not much better than atheism because, if God is there, but does not care about you, how does this offer any comfort or hope? Don't bother bringing your heartaches and grief to God because, even though He does exist, He does not care about you. When your loved ones are sick/dying, you must go it alone. When you are sick/dying, you must face it alone, and there is no hope for you beyond this life. God cared enough to create man, but did not care enough to provide man with any hope for the future. Such is the doctrine of deism.

Hallelujah, there is something better than deism. Theism affirms that God is (Heb. 11:6) and that He cares enough to reward them that diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). He cares enough to provide for those who seek first His kingdom (Matt. 6:33). He will never let

the righteous be forsaken, nor let their children go hungry (Psm. 37:25). He hears the cry of the hurting (Psm. 102:18-21), His eyes are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers (1 Peter 3:10-12).

Of course, the greatest exhibition of God's care for His creation is His willingness to send His only begotten Son to die for the sins of the world (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-8). To know that Jesus loves me is much better than the cold, impersonal, detached God of deism. There is something better than deism. There is also something better than...

Darwinism

To believe in Darwinism, you must believe the views advanced by Charles Darwin concerning the evolution of the world, natural selection and the survival of the fittest. It is important to note that Darwinism argues for more than mere change within a species over time. Darwinism argues that one species evolved into a completely different species. Most Darwinists are atheistic; they do not believe that God exists, or that He had anything at all to do with triggering/guiding the evolutionary process.

On the other hand, some have tried to merge Darwinism with Theism; they take the position that there is a God in heaven, but they affirm that over a period of millions and millions of years, He used evolution, natural selection and the survival of the fittest to "*create*" the world. Ultimately, both atheistic, and theistic, Darwinism concludes that life began in a primordial soup of ocean slime, which turned into this,

which turned into that, which turned into something else, which turned into an ape, which ultimately turned into man. The major difference is whether God had anything to do with initiating and guiding the process. Either way, there is something better than Darwinism.

1. **There is something better than atheistic Darwinism.** We have noted already why theism is superior to atheism, philosophically speaking. It should also be observed that theism is scientifically superior to atheistic Darwinism. Of course, the scientific world affirms that Darwinism is an established fact. The renowned English biologist, Sir Julian Huxley, (the grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley, "*Darwin's Bulldog*,") said near the close of the 1950's:

The first point to make about Darwin's theory is that it is no longer a theory but a fact. Darwinism has come of age so to speak. We are no longer having to bother about establishing the fact of evolution...No serious scientist would deny the fact that evolution has occurred, just as he would not deny the fact that the earth goes around the sun.

These are bold words, indeed, but Mr. Huxley is not alone in his assessment. Dr. Richard Goldschmidt, a world famous geneticist from the University of California, affirmed: "*Evolution of the animal and plant world is considered by all those entitled to a judgment to be a fact for which no further proof is needed.*" Philip Wheelwright of the University of California recently said, "*It may be said without fear of serious rebuttal that*

the hypothesis of evolution has been established beyond reasonable doubt.” Even more brashly, M. J. Kenny stated: *“Of the fact of organic evolution there can at the present day be no reasonable doubt; the evidences for it are so overwhelming that those who reject it can only be victims of ignorance or of prejudice.”*

It is not hard to see the intimidation couched in the language of the above statements. We are told that *“no serious scientist”* would deny the fact of evolution. Furthermore, according to Dr. Goldschmidt, the only ones entitled to a judgment about the veracity of evolution are those who believe in it. Besides, anyone who rejects evolution is the victim of *“ignorance or prejudice.”*

Despite the intimidating language to the contrary, the facts just will not support the theory of evolution. Although George Gaylord Simpson, known as *“Mr. Evolution,”* said that Charles Darwin *“finally and definitely established evolution,”* Darwin was not nearly so bold in his claims. In fact, in his two books, **The Origin of Species**, and **The Descent of Man**, *“the phrase, we may suppose, or some similar clause, occurs over 800 times.”* That doesn’t sound much like the language of certainty to me! Moreover, as Darwin began chapter 6 of his book **The Origin of Species**, he noted: *“Long before the reader has arrived at this part of my work, a crowd of difficulties will have occurred to him. Some of them are so serious that to this day I can hardly reflect on them without being in some degree staggered.”*

If Darwinian evolution occurred, then the fossil record should begin with very simple life forms in

the oldest rocks (which are generally on the bottom). From there, we would expect to find a very gradual transition from simple life forms into more complex types of creatures. Perhaps most importantly, if evolution is true, the fossil record should be littered with “*transitional*” creatures that bridge the gaps between different species.

Charles Darwin was convinced that the fossil record would be teeming with these intermediate creatures, i.e., one species in the process of changing into another species. For instance, he believed that the fossil record would produce some fossils that would be part fish and part salamander since it is believed that the one evolved into the other. He thought that some creatures would have reptilian as well as mammalian characteristics. He also believed that some fossil creatures would be difficult to categorize because they would have distinct characteristics of two different types of animals.

What does the fossil record actually show? The first undisputed fossils to show up in the fossil record are from the Cambrian period. Evolutionists date the fossils in this stratum to be 600 million years old. However, the amazing thing is that the animals found here are fully developed creatures. There is absolutely no evidence that the animals in this stratum were in the process of evolving when they died. In fact, every major invertebrate alive today is found in Cambrian rocks.

George Gaylord Simpson knows something about the fossils found in the Cambrian rocks—he devoted

his life to studying them. He regarded the sudden appearance of fully developed invertebrates in the Cambrian rocks to be “*the major mystery of the history of life.*” David B. Axelrod, editor of **Biological Science**, shares Simpson’s bewilderment:

One of the major unsolved problems of geology and evolution is the occurrence of diversified, multicellular marine invertebrates in lower Cambrian rocks on all the continents and their absence in rocks of great age. However, when we turn to examine the Precambrian rocks for the forerunners of these fossils, they are nowhere to be found. These sediments were suitable for the preservation of fossils because they are often identical with overlying rocks, yet no fossils are found in them.

If evolution is true, then what, pray tell, happened to all the creatures who allegedly evolved from single-cell animals into complex invertebrates? Why is there no evidence of them in the fossil record? The same question can be asked in regard to fishes. Dr. Richard Flint wrote, “*The fossil record offers few clues as to how sea animals acquired hard parts; so we have to fall back on speculation. . . . As yet we have found no fossil representatives that might have been ancestral to fishes.*” In other words, when fish show up in the fossil record, they are fully developed, with no evidence of any transitional creatures—not even one!

A good summary of the inadequacy of the fossil record to support evolution is offered by Niles Eldredge, one of the world’s leading experts on invertebrate fossils. Although an evolutionist, He still candidly

confessed the following about the absence of evidence for evolution from within the fossil record:

No wonder paleontologists shied away from evolution for so long. It never seems to happen... When we do see the introduction of evolutionary novelty, it usually shows up with a bang, and often with no firm evidence that the fossils did not evolve elsewhere! Evolution cannot forever more be going on somewhere else. Yet that's how the fossil record has struck many a forlorn paleontologist looking to learn something about evolution.

Dr. Lyall Watson, also an evolutionist, agrees that the fossil record is completely void of any evidence to support the theory of evolution:

Modern apes, for instance, seem to have sprung out of nowhere. They have no yesterday, no fossil record. And the true origin of modern humans—of upright, naked, tool-making, big-brained beings—is, if we are to be honest with ourselves, an equally mysterious matter.

Fortunately, for the Christian, there is nothing mysterious about the origin of man. On the sixth day of creation, God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:26-27).

2. **There is something better than theistic Darwinism.** As noted earlier, some are called "*theistic evolutionists*," i. e., those who believe that God created the world through evolutionary processes. These

individuals believe that Genesis 1 must be interpreted in such a way as harmonize with evolution. Although theistic evolutionists (sometimes called progressive creationists) claim that they are honoring God by assigning Him a part in the creation, more often than not He is credited with no more than setting things in motion and then sitting idly by while nature took its course. That is most definitely not what Genesis 1 ascribes to Him. The Psalmist declared: *“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth...For he spake and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast”* (Psm. 33:6, 9). Genesis 1, taken at face value, clearly teaches that God spoke things into existence over the course of six days, and then rested on the seventh. Moreover, language could not be any plainer than the Mosaic declaration of Exodus 20:11: *“For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.”*

In an attempt to escape the clear teaching of Genesis 1, the theistic evolutionist seeks to insert vast eons of time into the record. Some make the arbitrary and groundless claim that millions and millions of years elapsed between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. Commonly known as the gap theory, it is without any scriptural support. It is a fanciful attempt to try and accommodate the evolutionary theory. In fact, the theory cannot be true because it argues that death and destruction occurred before Adam, whereas Paul says that sin and death entered into the world as a result of the sin in the garden (1 Cor. 15:21; Rom. 5:12).

Furthermore, there was no pre-Adamic race of men for Adam was “*the first man*” (1 Cor. 15:45).

Others try to incorporate the time needed for evolution into Genesis 1 by interpreting each of the “*days*” of creation as being equivalent to vast epochs of time (Day-Age theory). Entire books have been written to show the fallacy of such thinking, and space limitations won’t allow an exhaustive refutation. However, it is sufficient to ask, “*If the days in Genesis 1 are equal to millions of years, then what would the word ‘years’ in Genesis 1:14 be equal to?*” Moreover, if millions of years elapsed between each day, then the earth was in darkness for a good portion of this time, because the days had both an evening and a morning (Gen. 1:5, 8, et. al). This would present an insurmountable problem for the time between day 3, wherein God made plants, trees, etc., and day 4, wherein God made the sun. How, pray tell, did the vegetation made on day 3 survive for vast epochs of time without the sun, and in the midst of periods of total darkness? Finally, the days of Genesis 1 must be literal, 24-hour days because whenever the Hebrew word **yom** is preceded by a numeral, it always carries the meaning of a 24-hour day.

It would be one thing if science could prove that evolution has occurred. On the contrary, the fossil record proves that Darwinian evolution has never happened, theistically or atheistically!

Hedonism

Since the word hedonism is not a part of our everyday vocabulary, it is necessary to define the term.

In **A Dictionary of Philosophy**, hedonism is defined as *“the principle that happiness (defined in terms of pleasure) is the sole and proper aim of human action.”* The hedonist believes that the ultimate purpose of life is to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Years ago, a commercial on television reminded its viewers that you only go around once in life—therefore *“Go for the gusto!”* Get all of the pleasure you can while you can!

Eventually, the Greek philosophers elevated the philosophy of hedonism to the level of being a religion. They argued that one who was in a normal state of consciousness could never find the knowledge necessary to living a fulfilled life. Hence, one had to turn to the Greek god Dionysius in order to find release from the limitations of human knowledge. The method for accomplishing this goal was to drink oneself into a drunken stupor until he became free of all inhibitions. R. C. Sproul explains:

People believed that in a drunken stupor they could make contact with the supernatural world during their mystical experience of “euphoria,” an experience called not “getting low,” but “getting high.”...Added to this was an array of sexual involvements including temple prostitution. The prostitutes were able to help a person break down his inhibitions so that he could make contact with the gods and experience the feeling of ecstasy that was the release of the soul.

Actually, hedonism predated the Greek philosophers. Although the word *“hedonism”* does not appear in our English Bibles, the word translated

“pleasures” in Luke 8:14 and Titus 3:3 is a form of the Greek word **hedone** (hay-don-ay). A similar form of the word is translated “*pleasure*” in 2 Peter 2:13 and the word is translated as “*lusts*” in James 4:1,3. Moreover, the English word hedonism does not have to appear in the Bible for us to be able to find hedonistic conduct in the Bible, i.e., those who were pursuing their own selfish pleasures at the expense of obeying God. Its origin can be traced all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Throughout the Scriptures we see various characters pursuing pleasure above all else. A quick study of these episodes provides proof positive that there is something better than hedonism.

1. Ask Adam and Eve if there is something better than pursuing the pleasure of the moment? Long before the Greek philosophers advanced the notion of hedonism, one hedonistic act by Eve (and Adam) in the Garden of Eden introduced sorrow and pain into our world. Was the pleasure of eating the forbidden fruit better than the pleasure of walking in daily fellowship with God?

Centuries later, John summarized worldliness as “*the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*” (1 John 2:16). Eve was motivated by the lust of the flesh when she saw “*that the tree was good for food.*” She was motivated by the lust of the eyes when she saw that the fruit upon the tree “*was pleasant to the eyes.*” And she manifested the pride of life when she partook of the fruit because of her desire to be wise, like God. Adam succumbed to her influence and participated in this transgression against God. Consequently, they

were expelled from the Garden and life on earth took a dramatic turn for the worst.

Their story reminds us that it does not take a life of unceasing hedonism to bring about disastrous consequences. One isolated act of pleasure seeking can bring about a lifetime of consequences, not only for the thrill seekers but also for those who are affected by their decisions. How many times has someone, seeking the pleasure of an alcoholic high, brought devastating and permanent consequences into his/her life (and the lives of countless others) by deciding to get behind the wheel and drive while intoxicated? There is a better way to live!

2. The residents of earth before the flood.

With the exception of Noah, and his family, the human beings dwelling upon the earth before the flood were thoroughgoing hedonists, so much so that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). Moses described the antediluvian world as "*corrupt*" and "*filled with violence*" (Gen. 6:11). "*God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth*" (Gen. 6:12). Tragically, mankind's obsession with worldly pleasure came at a great price: destruction in the flood and loss of the soul (Gen. 6:13). Ask the residents on earth who died during the flood whether there is something better than pursuing fleshly pleasures?

3. The residents of Sodom and Gomorrah.

According to Genesis 13:13, "*the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.*" The

Lord described their sin as “*very grievous*” (Gen. 18:20). The description of their tawdry behavior is recorded in Genesis 19. Their hedonism came in the form of homosexuality. Their destruction was the consequence (Gen. 19:24-29). Ask the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah whether there was something better than wickedness?

4. **Esau.** A classic example of seeking the pleasure of the moment is Esau’s decision to exchange his birthright for the immediate gratification of a bowl of soup (Gen. 25:29-34; Heb. 12:15-17). In essence, Esau was willing to forfeit the blessings of the future for the pleasure of the moment. He was so consumed with satisfying the hunger pangs of the moment that he lost all sense of reason as to what mattered most. Esau may very well have enjoyed that bowl of pottage, but his pleasure was short-lived. If you could ask Esau, “*Was there something better than the pleasure that one bowl of soup brought to you?*” how would he respond?

Similarly, there are millions of men and women on earth today who possess the shortsighted mentality of Esau. An African tribe elects a new king every seven years. It is understood that during his seven-year reign the king of the tribe possesses all power over the tribe. All of his wishes are granted. He has access to all wealth. Any woman of the tribe he desires is required to satisfy his urges. One other thing is understood about the seven-year reign of the king: at the end of his reign the people of the tribe will, in accordance with tribal custom, surround the king and kill him. Now, you would think that upon seeing this savage event

just having taken place that no one would step forward and volunteer to be the next king. Yet, there is never a shortage of men desiring to become king. In essence, these men are willing to sacrifice the remainder of life's expectations if they can have anything they want for seven years. We are tempted to write off their attitude as the result of being raised in a savage and barbaric climate. However, the same malady of the mind affects countless "*civilized*" Americans. They want what they want and they want it right now—even if it means forfeiting the future blessing of a home in heaven.

5. **Achan and Gehazi.** Although God had expressly forbidden the Israelites to personally partake of the spoils of victory over Jericho (Josh. 6:18-19), Achan's thirst for the pleasure of being rich outweighed his passion for pleasing God. As he looked at the spoils of victory he saw a "*goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight*" (Josh. 7:21). He coveted these items, took these items, and hid them in the earth under the middle of his tent. He knew that he was doing wrong but the pleasure of the moment became more important to him than the threat of punishment in the future.

As it turns out, Achan learned what so many pleasure seekers have learned—the temporary pleasure of the moment is not worth the enduring pain and consequences that come in the future. He and his family were stoned and burned to death (Josh. 7:25). If Achan could speak to us from beyond the vale, what would he say about the hedonistic motto of living for

the pleasure of the moment? He would no doubt tell us that there is something better than pursuing the pleasure of material possessions.

A man of kindred disposition to Achan was Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. After the leper, Naaman, was cleansed of his leprosy, he offered Elisha a gift (2 Kings 5:15). However, Elisha refused the gift and sent Naaman on his way. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, could not believe that Elisha had allowed Naaman to get away without receiving the riches Naaman had to offer. So Gehazi decided to run after Naaman and “*take somewhat of him*” (2 Kings 5:20).

When Gehazi returned home he took the money and the merchandise he had gained under false pretenses and hid them in his house. Then he went in and stood before Elisha. When Elisha asked him where he had been, he lied, saying that he had not gone anywhere. However, little did he know that Elisha was aware of what he had done. Elisha rebuked him and pronounced a curse of leprosy upon him and his seed forever (2 Kings 5:26-27). Ask Gehazi if it was worth it to pursue pleasure above integrity?

6. **David.** Ask David if yearning for a moment of pleasure is better than practicing righteousness and clean living? If David had not been so intent on fulfilling his lusts with Bathsheba, then he would have never dreamed of conspiring to murder her husband. Although it is wonderful that David later repented of his sins (Psm. 32; 51), his passion was the prelude to life-lasting problems!

7. **Two Rich Fools.** The book of Luke records the

stories of two men who failed to learn that “*a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*” (Luke 12:15). To prove this point, Jesus told the parable of a certain rich man whose wealth continued to grow and grow. However, rather than glorifying God for the abundance of blessings he had received, the rich man took all of the credit for what he had done. Furthermore, instead of being rich in good works, and ready to distribute his surplus to the needy (1 Tim. 6:17-18), the rich man adopted the Epicurean philosophy of keeping it all for his own pleasure, and saying to his soul, “*take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*” (Luke 12:19). God pronounced the man a fool due to his arrogance and shortsightedness. He also announced that his soul would be required of him that very night. Accordingly, all of his earthly riches would be left behind for someone else to enjoy.

Another prominent rich man in the New Testament is described in Luke 16:19. He “*was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously everyday.*” His life was one of lavish extravagance while Lazarus, the beggar, lived in the depths of poverty. Although the text does not explicitly label the rich man of Luke 16 “*a fool,*” his conduct is no less foolish than that of the rich man of Luke 12. He hoarded all of his wealth for his own selfish pleasures, completely oblivious to the needs of the beggar who was laid at his gate.

When the rich man died he found himself in “*torments*” (Luke 16:23). Meanwhile, Lazarus, who had also died, found his fortunes reversed. No longer was he hungry and in pain. Rather, he was in the comfort of

Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22). The rich man was no longer rich. In his spiritually impoverished condition, he was now the beggar. He begged Lazarus to "*dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue*" (Luke 16:24).

In reply, Abraham reminded him of the pleasures he had enjoyed in his lifetime upon the earth (Cf. James 5:5), and of the pain Lazarus had received, pain which the rich man could have helped to alleviate. Now, however, the rich man's pleasures had come to a screeching and irreversible halt. Never more would he know joy; pain would be his eternal companion. Was it worth it? Were all of the earthly pleasures he had known worth this unceasing torment? One of the biggest falsehoods associated with hedonism is the idea that we will never suffer any consequences for pursuing earthly pleasures. Two rich fools tell us a different story.

8. The Prodigal Son. Jesus, in Luke 15, paints one of the more vivid pictures of hedonism in the Bible for us. He tells the parable of two sons. The younger of two sons had grown weary of waiting for his father to die and pass on his inheritance. So he boldly asked his father for immediate distribution of the goods he had coming to him. Then the text declares: "*And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living*" (Luke 15:13).

Abandoning all sense of responsibility, the young son pursued pleasure with a ravenous appetite. He was so obsessed with his quest for pleasure that he paid no

attention to how quickly his wealth was evaporating. Soon, “*he had spent all*” (Luke 15:14). To make matters worse, a mighty famine arose in the land and he was completely broke. He had nothing. In desperation, he took on a job feeding swine in the fields. When he observed that the swine had more food than he did, the harsh reality of his hedonistic binge, and its consequences, came crashing down around him. He remembered that even the household servants back at his father’s house had more than enough food, while he was starving. Hence, he made the decision to go home and beg for no more status than that of a hired servant. However, the father would give him far more.

Upon his return, he received the compassionate welcome and embrace of his father. Moreover, his father clothed him with the “*best robe*” and put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Furthermore, the fatted calf provided more than enough food for this hungry son. Like so many hedonists before him (and after), he learned that the pleasures of sin last for only a season (Heb. 11:25). On the other hand, the pleasures available to us in the Father’s house are the purest and most permanent of pleasures!

9. **Demas.** One of the saddest statements in the entire Bible is recorded in 2 Timothy 4:10. Therein, Paul wrote, “*For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.*” A co-worker of Paul in the ministry of the gospel (Col. 4:14; Phile. 24), Demas exchanged it all for the fleeting pleasures of the world. Paul does not give us all of the details as to how Demas apostatized. When did this love affair begin? Did it

happen abruptly, or gradually? We are not told, and it really does not matter. Paul does tell us that the root cause of his departure was that he fell in love with the present world. The result is the same.

Apparently, Demas was blinded to the fact that the joy of worldly pleasures can never equal that of heavenly treasures. Sadly, the spirit of Demas is alive and well today. How many times have we seen a once faithful member of the Lord's church fall away because of the lure of worldly pleasures?

10. **Solomon.** In Solomon's inspired diary, the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon gives us a glimpse at some of the things he had pursued in an attempt to find happiness. By his own admission, he had lived as a hedonist. Consider his words: "*I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure*" (Eccl. 2:1, emp. mine, BJC). In his quest for fulfillment in life, Solomon immersed himself in pleasure. He tried to find it in wisdom and knowledge only to find that the more he knew the sadder he became (Eccl. 1:16-18).

He experimented with alcohol to see if it could give him the pleasure that he was desperately seeking. He said, "*I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom*" (Eccl. 2:3). Solomon did not set out to become an alcoholic. Rather, he wanted to drink socially while maintaining his dignity and wisdom.

He became a workaholic, spending all of his time building houses, planting vineyards, gardens, orchards, and pools. He populated his palace with

servants, maidens, and children born to these servants and maidens. Men singers and women singers and the delights of the sons of men serenaded him. Moreover, he became wealthy beyond all description, owning staggering amounts of cattle, silver, gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces. He was so wealthy that he could purchase anything upon which he laid his eyes. In direct opposition to God's instruction, He surrounded himself with hundreds and hundreds of beautiful foreign women (1 Kings 11:1-3).

And what did Solomon's hedonistic frenzy leave with him? Listen to his words:

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit...Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun (Eccl. 1:14; 2:11).

Solomon's pursuit of pleasure left him empty and dissatisfied. Moreover, his wives turned away his heart from God and cost him his kingdom (1 Kings 11:4-12).

There was a better way to live, and Solomon spelled it out at the conclusion of his book: "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man*" (Eccl. 12:13).

Judaism

Judaism affords one the opportunity to believe in God, and to acknowledge His righteous requirements in

the Law of Moses. It is better than Atheism, Agnosticism, Deism, Darwinism, or Hedonism. Nevertheless, there is something better than Judaism. The Hebrews writer affirms so in his comments concerning how Jesus “*is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises*” (Heb. 8:6). The Law of Moses was always designed to bring us unto a better Mediator, a better Law, and a better Covenant (Gal. 3:1-28; Rom. 7:1-6; Heb. 8:6-13).

There is something better than knowing that you are a sinner, and that is knowing that the blood of Christ is powerful enough to take it all away (Gal. 3:19; Acts 2:38; 22:16). There is something better than the physical temple of the Old Testament, and that is the spiritual temple of Christ, the church (Eph. 2:19-22). It is great to be under such a blessed covenant! In connection with this subject of religion, there is something better than...

Denominationalism

We are told that a plurality of different religious groups, wearing different names, and teaching a variety of different doctrines, is a good thing, because it offers a variety of church options to a variety of people. It sounds so American to have so many church choices, but a study of the Scriptures reveals that there is something better than denominationalism. It would be better for the world to come together and be members of the one church established on the Day of Pentecost, than to fragment and divide into different groups teaching different doctrines.

Which church was established on the Day of Pentecost? We know that a church was established on the day of Pentecost, because the Lord was adding the saved unto it (Acts 2:47), but which church was it? Perhaps the better question to ask is “*Whose church was it?*” Would anyone dare to affirm that the church established in Acts 2 belonged to the Pope of Rome? Was it the church belonging to Martin Luther? John Calvin? Was it the church of John Wesley? Whose church was it, anyway? Obviously, the church we read about in Acts 2 was the church belonging to Christ. After all, He is the builder of the church (Matt. 16:18), the purchaser of the church (Acts 20:28) and the head of the church (Col. 1:18).

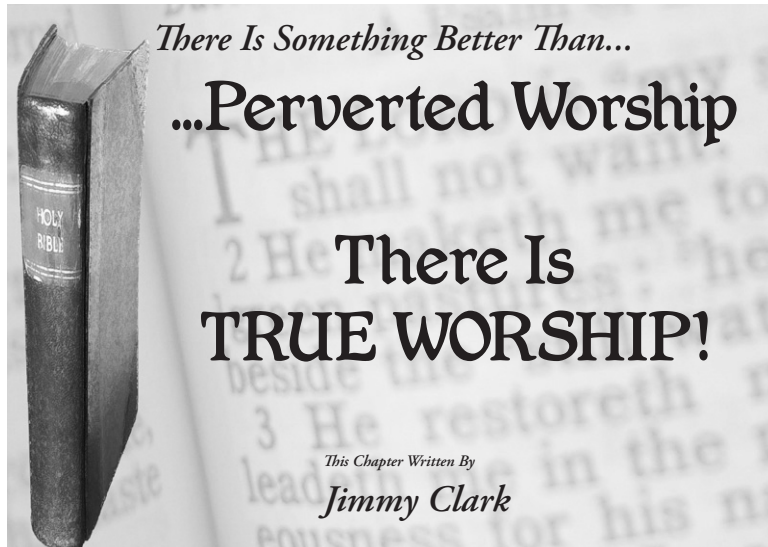
If you had been present on Pentecost, and you had asked those who were baptized to tell you what church they were members of, how would they have replied? Would they have identified themselves as members of some well-known modern day denomination? If someone had asked those who were baptized on Pentecost, “*What denomination did you just join?*,” they would have been bewildered and confused by the question; there were no modern day denominations in existence at that time. There were sectarian religious groups in existence (such as the Pharisees and the Sadducees) but there were no modern day denominational churches in existence at that time. Indeed there was a church in existence at that time, but it was not a manmade denominational organization. Those who were baptized on Pentecost were added to the church of Christ, i.e., the church that belonged to Christ.

Consequently, when Paul wrote the Romans he said, “*the churches of Christ salute you*” (Rom. 16:16). When Paul referred to “*the churches of Christ*” he was referring to that group of individuals who had been called out of the world to become members of the church built and bought by Christ, the church of Christ!

One thing is absolutely certain—there is not a word said in Acts 2 about the 3000 who were baptized joining a denomination thereafter. On the contrary, the moment they received the remission of sins is the same moment they were added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:41, 47). No one voted them into a denomination; there were no denominations in existence, and since God had already added them to the church of His Son Jesus Christ, they did not need to join a manmade denomination.

Conclusion

There is something better than the godlessness, aimlessness, and hopelessness of human philosophy (Col. 2:8). There is something better than the fleeting riches of this material world (Psm. 37:16; Prov. 15:16-17; 16:8, 16; 28:6; Matt. 6:19-21). There is something better than a covenant that has been nailed to the cross and taken out of the way (Col. 2:14). There is something better than the doctrines and commandments of men (Matt. 15:8-9). If we follow the better Mediator’s better covenant, we will end up in a much better place!



Worship has always been an interest of mankind. Paul addressed the subject among the Greek philosophers of his day. Luke recorded,

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you (Acts 17:22-23).

John recorded a dialogue between Jesus and a woman of Samaria,

Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye

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know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews (John 4:20-22).

Both Jesus and Paul knew that people outside of the Jewish nation were doing something called worship. Ignorance, however, was the factor behind those efforts to draw nigh unto the object of worship. God now calls all men everywhere to repent of such ignorance (cf. Acts 17:30).

The vital importance of the subject of worship is summed up in the words of Jesus to the woman at Jacob's well on that memorable day. John recorded,

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

There are several things found in these two verses that epitomize the difference between perverted worship and true worship. To say that worship of any sort is acceptable as long as it suits the "needs" of the worshipper is to ignore the clear teaching of Jesus in His personal teaching on the subject as well as the inspired teaching of His apostles after His return to heaven. If man could acceptably worship as he designs, why give any instruction on the subject at all?

The Object Of True Worship

Worship has at its core the homage paid toward some object. Every example of the attempt to worship

is the worshipper doing something toward the object of worship. The zeal of perverted worship shows that there is something or someone beyond the worshipper where reverence is made.

One of the great examples of such zeal is the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Elijah set forth the challenge.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it into pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken (1 Kings 18:21-24).

The zeal of the prophets of Baal is greatly magnified when they had called upon Baal for several hours and nothing happened. After Elijah had mocked them (cf. 1 Kings 18:27), the text states, *“And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them”* (1 Kings 18:28). The object of their worship had failed them because it was a perversion of man's imagination.

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Any object of worship that is not the right object is perverted.

There are occasions recorded in the New Testament where well meaning zeal in worship was halted. When Peter came to the house of Cornelius, the record states,

And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshiped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man (Acts 10:25-26).

John recorded of his own actions in an attempt to worship that was forbidden. John wrote,

And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10).

One would think that John would not repeat such an act having heard what he was told. However, before the book of Revelation ends, John is given a glimpse of great heavenly things and he records again,

And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God (Rev. 22:8-9).

God alone is the object of worship as Jesus Himself stated. He said to the devil, "*Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*" (Luke 4:8). Again, Jesus stated clearly to the woman of Samaria,

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him (John 4:23).

Jesus addressed worship as being given to God the Father. The book of Hebrews states that the Father commanded the angels to worship the Son (cf. Heb. 1:6). Therefore, deity is the object of worship which makes true worship much better and easier. Consider the fact that if man attempted to cover every so called god known to man how that it would be as confusing and fearful as those in Athens, Greece when Paul beheld their many devotions. Jesus showed the difficulty of multiple devotions, where He said,

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24).

Even the sin of covetousness is idolatry (cf. Col. 3:5).

Since worship is an expression of faith toward the object of faith, it is easily seen how much better it is to worship the true and living God than any perverted object of worship. First, true worship ties its faith

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to what is scriptural. Faith to the true worshipper is not a blind leap in the dark or a figment of man's imagination. True faith comes by hearing and that hearing by the word of God (cf. Rom. 10:17). When Abel offered to God *"a more excellent sacrifice than Cain"* (cf. Heb. 11:4), it was because his faith applied what was divinely guided. He could clearly know what to do to be accepted by hearing the instructions and applying with the whole heart.

Again, true worship ties its faith to seeing God, who is invisible, by seeing with the *"eye"* of faith, that is tied to reliable testimony. It is stated of Moses, *"By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible"* (Heb. 11:27). The entire life of the child of God is a walk by faith, not by sight (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). Perverted worship often seeks that which principally appeals to the physical senses. True worship is tied to the spirit of man drawing nigh to God, Who is Spirit (cf. John 4:24).

Finally, true worship is tied to a faith that is satisfying. Jesus said, *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"* (Matt. 5:6). John wrote to God's children, *"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full"* (1 John 1:4). The book of Hebrews addresses those who died in faith,

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Heb. 11:13).

They all believed *“that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”* (Heb. 11:6). True worship has better revelation, better realization, and better recognition of the truth than the confusing maze of perversion in the ignorant world. Perverted worship only worships a perverted god of the mind of man, not the God revealed in the Bible.

The Offering Of True Worship

Once the object of true worship is established, it is needful that the true worshipper be taught what the Father desires. Jesus declared this as much when He stated, *“they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24). Demons believe that there is one God (cf. James 2:19), but even Satan sought for Jesus to worship him (cf. Matt. 4:8-9). Jesus not only knew the proper object of worship (cf. Matt. 4:10), but He also knew that there are matters of worship that are a must (cf. John 4:24). The phrases *“in spirit and in truth”* denote the general nature of what the Father seeks for the worshippers to give (cf. John 4:23). It is therefore important to properly understand the meanings of the two phrases and quickly apply.

To worship the Father in spirit denotes a transaction that is guided by the Holy Spirit’s instructions for the spirit of man to reach out to God who is Spirit. The entire gospel of John looks deeply into this area of life. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus in the previous chapter of John 3, He stated,

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That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit (John 3:6-8).

That which is of the Spirit deals with the inner man or soul. Worship, therefore, is more than just outward expressions of the mouth, eyes, ears, etc. Worship is the stretching out of the soul of man to God. A good illustration of this point is seen in the prayer of Hannah at the tabernacle. When Hannah was praying, the text states, *“Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken”* (1 Sam. 1:13). Eli, the judge and high priest at that time, rebuked her believing her to be drunk (cf. 1 Sam. 1:14). Hannah’s response shows the worship in spirit that was given, where she said, *“No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord”* (1 Sam. 1:15). There was something going on in her heart while her lips were moving yet not making a sound. When Paul wrote of the singing of God’s people in the praise to the Lord, he gave instruction, *“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* (Eph. 5:19). The parallel passage in the book of Colossians says, *“singing with*

grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). Notice that both passages address the heart or inner man doing something to the Lord. True worship by true worshippers does what Peter stated to those first century Christians,

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

To worship the Father in truth denotes a practice that is consistent with the nature of God, Who is truth (cf. Deut. 32:4). Man would not know the truth with reference to spiritual matters without divine instructions. Jeremiah stated, "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*" (Jer. 10:23). Again, the gospel of John states the meaning of truth in spiritual matters, where Jesus prayed to the Father, "*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth*" (John 17:17). Jesus said further, "*And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth*" (John 17:19). The words of Jesus and those of His chosen apostles are to be respected and followed by those who would draw nigh to God. There is a clear warning concerning all who would not teach and uphold those words. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy,

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing

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nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, (1 Tim. 6:3-4).

The Lord God gave clear instructions as it related to drawing nigh to Him through the Old Testament system. It is written in the book of Hebrews as a reminder of conforming to the truth revealed,

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount (Heb. 8:5).

Jesus clearly declared what would happen to man's worship if he rejected the truth of God's commands and followed the doctrines of men. "*But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*" (Matt. 15:9). Paul warned of some who would pervert worship, by saying,

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh. If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God (Col. 2:20-3:1).

True worship offers sacrifices that count, service that mounts to the highest heights, and a spirituality that is paramount.

The Outcome Of True Worship

While the activity of true worship is the appeal of man toward God, there are some benefits that come to man in drawing nigh to God through worship. Space is limited to note all the benefits that come in true worship. Space would also fail to list all the downfalls of perverted worship. To accentuate the positives of the outcome of true worship, consider three that stand out.

First, true worship is the only worship that is acceptable to God. Looking again at Peter's writing in the first of his epistles, he states of our holy priesthood "*to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*" (1 Peter 2:5). It is written in another place,

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased (Heb. 13:15-16).

Regardless of what may please men, if God is not pleased, all conflicting worship is in vain. Idolatry at its core is an attempt to please man while believing all along that such pleases the object of worship. Any form of self-righteousness is deceptive to the core.

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Second, true worship is the only worship that is appreciated by all who are God's people. It is written in the psalms, "*I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts*" (Psm. 119:63). The beginning of the church saw such favor among brethren. Luke recorded,

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:41-42).

Finally, true worship is the only worship that appropriates a taste of the unity that will be true in heaven when time is no more. If religious people are truly serious about unity, let all seek the unity that Jesus provides. Jesus prayed,

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

Joint services between differing religious groups may appear to show unity, but when those same brethren assemble without the others present, it is "*business as usual*." People worship according to what they believe is appropriate whether it is authorized or not. Worship must be in spirit and in truth as Jesus declared (John 4:24). True unity is Bible unity (John 17:20-21). There is no reason to compromise the truth of God

to be accepted by the religious world. The religious world needs to see distinctive New Testament worship manifested before them by the Lord's church. If many do not accept it, truth must still be maintained. If some do love the truth but have not learned of it, true worship gives the inexperienced the opportunity to understand. This is seen in a statement that Paul made to the congregation at Corinth.

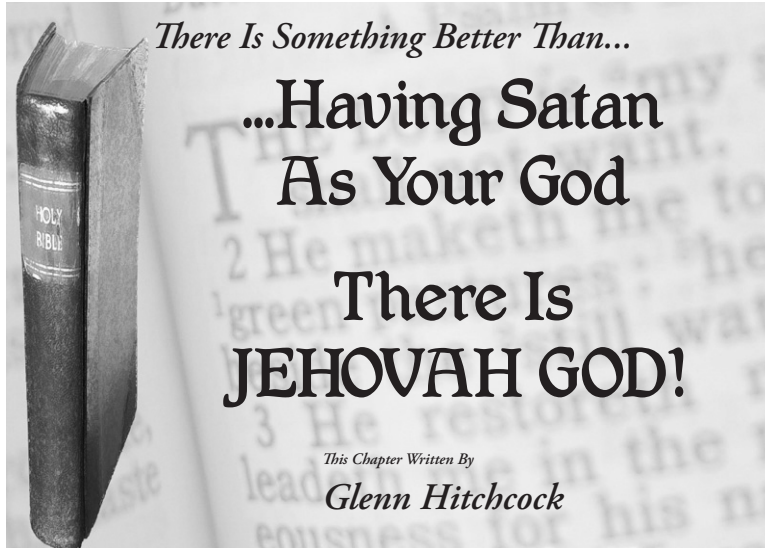
If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth (1 Cor. 14:23-25).

Perverted worship is not a part of the life of the saved. They were begotten by the word of truth (cf. James 1:18) and they will walk in that light (1 John 1:7). It is necessary for man to know that "*He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son*" (2 John 9). There is a stern warning about compromising truth in this same paragraph.

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 10-11).

THERE IS TRUE WORSHIP!

True worship is not only better than perverted worship. It is the only acceptable worship.



Palmer Hartsough's memorable "*I Am Resolved*," in the very first stanza expresses well the sentiments of our study: "*I am resolved no longer to linger, charmed by the world's delight; things that are higher, things that are nobler, these have allured my sight.*" Of a truth, there is something better than the delights of this world and Satan. The higher and heavenly calling of our loving Father must be our response to the god of this world. The very hope of our world is the great consolation of discovering that there is something better than the universal deceiver! There is Jehovah God!

The Holy Spirit through Moses challenged Israel to choose life, obey God, and therefore continue to experience His blessings:

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His

THERE IS JEHOVAH GOD!

ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:15-20).

God doesn't force His will on anyone. He allows us to decide whether to follow in His steps or reject Him for the false and devilish ways of an evil world (1 John 2:15-17). It is axiomatic that we understand that our rendered choice regarding submission and service to our master is a decision that is eternal and without a middle ground; life or death (Rom. 6:16; 2 Cor. 5:10; John 5:28-29). Our loving Father wants mankind to realize that there is, indeed, something better than having Satan and death—Jehovah would like us all to choose life! Why? Because of the true blessings that are reserved for the heavenly followers of Christ.

An objective biblical study of our subject provides an insurmountable body of proof for every person to choose the name of Jehovah over Satan. Let us limit our study to four very critical areas:

- (1) There is something better than having Satan as your god — there is Jehovah God in **Identification**.
- (2) There is something better than having Satan as your god — there is Jehovah God in **Association**.
- (3) There is something better than having Satan as your god — there is Jehovah God in **Motivation**.
- (4) There is something better than having Satan as your god — there is Jehovah God in man's ultimate **Destination**.

There Is Something Better Than Having Satan As Your God — There Is Jehovah God In Identification

Many have trouble even at the thought of describing oneself. God describes Himself to man. The occasion was when Moses was interceding the second time for the people of God and the Law of Moses is renewed:

And the Lord said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain. And no man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain; let neither flocks

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nor herds feed before that mountain.” So he cut two tablets of stone like the first ones. Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone. Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped (Exod. 34:1-8).

The Lord descended and all creation attends (Exod. 34:5). Jehovah proclaims His name, “*The Lord, the Lord God...*” (Exod. 34:5-6). The lesson was very apparent to Israel and it should be to our generation — I AM THE LORD, THE LORD GOD! The One and only self-existent One made without hands (Exod. 3:14). Jehovah is the One Master without any higher over Him (Heb. 12:29). He is Jehovah, The Lord God. No other name can honor (Acts 4:12).

Jehovah further discloses that He is “*merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...*” (Exod. 34:6-7). What a great message of identification to a people who had openly transgressed before Jehovah back in Exodus

chapter 32! What a lesson to us today who have openly forsook Him, the Fountain of Living Waters (Jer. 2:13). God is gracious and kind. He is ready to bestow undeserved benefits to those who would seek condemnation (Exod. 34:7). Lives are spared today because of God's benefits! A longsuffering God keeps mercy for thousands (Exod. 34:6; Isa. 30:18; 2 Peter 3:9)! The following chart represents a snapshot of the practical benefits of the Christian's identification with Jehovah:

**Identification With God:
Is He Your Choice?**

EL-SHADDAUI	THE LORD IS SUFFICIENT	(Ex. 6:3)	He Is Our Dependency!
JEHOVAH-NISSA	THE LORD OUR BANNER	(Ex. 17:8-15)	He Is Our Victory!
JEHOVAH-EL-OLAN	THE EVERLASTING GOD	(Gen. 21:33)	He Is Our Enduring Hope!
JEHOVAH-ELYM	THE MOST HIGH GOD	(Gen. 14:18-20)	Even When We Were Enemies, He Loved Us.
JEHOVAH-JIREH	THE LORD WILL PROVIDE	(Gen. 22:14)	He Is Perpetual Providence To Our Needs!
JEHOVAH-RAPHA	THE LORD OUR HEALER	(Ex. 15:26)	He Remains Our Great Physician!
JEHOVAH-SHALOM	THE LORD	(Judg. 6:24)	He Is Our Ultimate Peace!
JEHOVAH-SHAMAH	THE LORD IS THERE	(Ezek. 48:35)	He Is An Ever Present Help To His Children.
JEHOVAH-TSYDHENN	THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS	(Jer. 23:6)	He Is Righteous, Leaving Us An Example To Follow.
JEHOVAH/YAHWEH	"I AM"	(Ex. 3:14)	He Is The "Self Existent" One.
JEHOVAH-TSEBAOTH	THE LORD OF HOST	(1 Sam. 1:3)	The Almighty God Is Ready To Fight For Us!

There Is Something Better Than Having Satan As Your God — There Is Jehovah God In Association

In this study, the term **association** has reference to the child of God's communion and relationship with the Godhead. As it pertains to the present dispensation, the Bible teaches that the child of God is a member of the one body or church of Christ (Acts 2:47; Rom. 6:1-8; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27). While God and Satan invite all men to identify with their respective way (John 8:24; Rom. 6:16), intimate association with Jehovah is vastly contrasted to the person of Satan. God's fellowship is never with the ungodly and disobedient (2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 John 1:6-7), but with faithful Christians (1 John 2:3-6, 28-29). Christ is very clear regarding intimate association with His Bride, the church (Eph. 5:23-32). Our Lord invites man to choose life by departing from an association in satanic seduction and joining Him in humble submission (Matt. 11:28; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; Rom. 7:4; Heb. 11:6).

The Christian's association in Christ represents a complete fulfillment of needs. It is when the Christian allows the tempter to blind him to the source of true completeness in his association with Jehovah that he fails to glorify God. The Apostle Paul contrasts the Christian's superior completeness of association in Christ to that of the fragmented and faulty association with Satan and his world.

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As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power (Col. 2:6-10).

Oftentimes, the Christian will grow weary in well-doing (Gal. 6:9) and will detour out of the heavenly way. Paul reminds us: *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor. 10:12). By taking heed to those powerful links that bind us together in love, our association in Christ and each other will not be detoured. The suggested chart below represents five spiritual reminders of completeness with Christ:

**Five Spiritual Reminders
Of The Christian's Completeness
In Association With God**

Discipline	Authority	To Shape My Life	Col. 3:16f; Heb. 4:12
Dependency	All-Sufficient	To Supply My Needs	Matt. 6:33; Gal. 2:20
Dwelling Place	Area of Association	To Shelter & Secure	Matt. 16:18; 2 Cor. 5:17
Defense	Avenger	To Settle My Soul	Phil. 4:13; Rom. 8:37
Delight	Answer to Prayer	To Show Me Heaven	Matt. 11-28-30

**There Is Something Better Than Having
Satan As Your God —There Is Jehovah
God In The Motivation To Fidelity**

The greatest incentives that Jehovah gave to mankind are bound in His promises. The ole Devil would have man to believe his fictitious promise of an absence of judgment and a coming Lord. Others, including some Christians, are convinced of an absence of hell and eternal punishment (2 Peter 3:3-8).

In contrast to those who contradict themselves with falsehoods, there is something better; there is Jehovah God's motivation that correlates to faithful conduct. The very core of Christianity is hinged on the unfailing promises of God! Without these

vouchsafe promises there would be little incentive beyond mankind merely existing (Matt. 24:38; 1 Cor. 15:12-19). Let's continue with a textual analysis of 2 Peter chapter three:

The Caution (8-9) —

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Peter now contrasts the contradictors of the promise of God to the caution to remember the truth that our timetable is not the same as God's (vs. 8). A second caution now resonates soberly; Jehovah, Who is longsuffering, will not fail on His promise to return! The final caution, the Lord expects repentance in this life, not the next (Heb. 9:27). This caution should suffice as a motivator to fidelity!

The Coming (10) —

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Peter's inspired words demonstrate the essentiality of a prepared life in view of a coming Lord. Paul would add, "...in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and those who do not

obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thes. 1:8). The coming of the Lord will be sudden and unexpected for the unprepared. In contrast, His coming will be welcomed with admiration and thanksgiving by the prepared people of God (2 Thes. 1:10-12). Are you prepared or unprepared?

The Conduct (11) —

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.

Unlike the expected conduct of Satan for his followers to live ungodly and worldly (Titus 2:12; 1 John 2:15-17), Our Father desires and expects that His children conduct themselves appropriately as sanctified vessels to His glory. Christians have been washed by blood to be set apart for the Master's use. Christians are model representatives of holy and godly behavior (Rom. 12: 1-2; 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Thes. 4:1-7)!

The Consummation (12) —

Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Christians who are intimately associated with Jesus Christ are motivated by the Lord's return. Their

faithful service before God can lead to a hastening of the consummation. The great consummation will signal the end of earthly trials and the realization of eternal bliss with God. Truly heaven will be worth it all.

The Challenge (14-18) —

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever.

Peter now challenges the brethren to: (1) Expect the promises of God, verse 14; (2) Find peace in Christ, verse 14; (3) Guard your soul from sinful practices, verse 14; (4) Engage or embrace God's longsuffering to your advantage (resulting in your salvation), verse 15; (5) Avoid the errors of the wicked, verses 16-17; (6) To grow up in grace and knowledge — not the wicked ones, but in Jesus Christ, verse 18. These challenges will prepare us for a serene life

of fidelity because we are assured and are standing on the precious promises of our God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

Question: Are you motivated by the unfailing promises of God?

There Is Something Better Than Having Satan As Your God—There Is Jehovah God In Man's Ultimate Destination

To conclude our study, we should plead with all to prepare now for the Lord's return and the judgment. Many will be unprepared when that time comes. In Christ's parable of the ten Virgins, "*Five of them were wise, and five were foolish*" (Matt. 25:2). The five wise virgins were prepared for their meeting of the bridegroom, whereas the five foolish virgins were unprepared. At the judgment there will be only two groups: the prepared and the unprepared. There will not be a third group; some too bad to go to heaven and too good to go to hell (Matt. 7:13-14). When the judgment takes place, no one will be able to borrow fitness (preparedness) from others, because preparation time is over. When death comes, it is too late to prepare for the Lord's return and the judgment (Luke 16:19-31). The five virgins who failed to make preparation are called "*foolish*" three times (Matt. 25:2-3; 8). God does not desire "*that any should perish;*" He wants all to "*come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). He, by His grace, has made it possible for every man to have his sins forgiven through the shed blood of

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Christ (Eph. 2:8-10; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:37-38; 22:16).

However, there is danger if we delay in obeying the gospel (2 Thes. 1:7-9). When Paul preached before Felix and Drusilla, *“he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come.”* The sermon was so powerful that the governor *“trembled;”* yet he did not obey. He said: *“Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee”* (Acts 24:25). He never obeyed the Lord, so far as it is known, but died as he had lived. That *“convenient season”* never came. Only by accepting Christ, obeying His will and remaining a faithful Christian is one prepared always for Christ’s return. Those unprepared should prepare now to meet Christ in judgment (2 Cor. 6:2).

William Russell of England, on the scaffold about to be beheaded, took his watch from his pocket and gave it to a Dr. Burnett, who was attending him. Russell told the Doctor, *“my timepiece may be of service to you; I have no further occasion for it. My thoughts are fixed on eternity.”*

Dear reader, Jehovah God has set before you this day life or death. He will not force your choice. Fix your thoughts beyond the temporal and materialism of this world and lock on eternity with God. Satan cannot deliver you to God’s intended destination because he too will have his day of reckoning, *“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever*

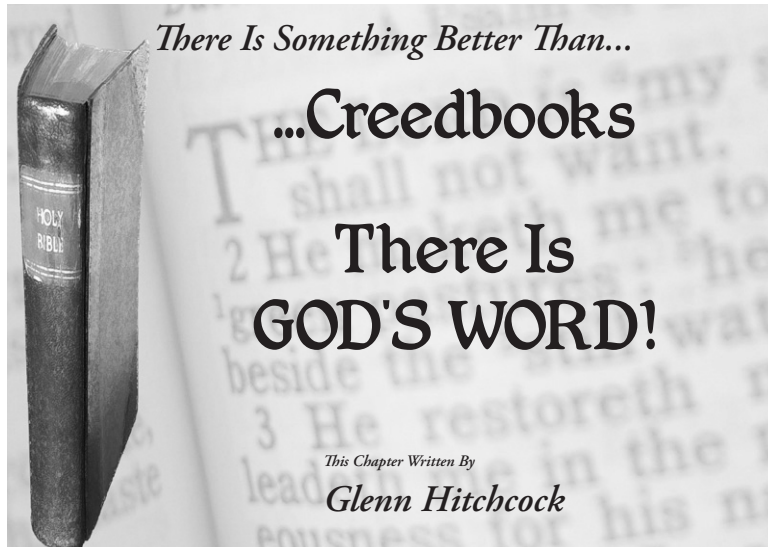
and ever” (Rev. 20:10).

Let us resolve to go to the Savior, leaving sin and strife. He is the true One, He is the just One, and He has the words of life. There is something far superior than Satan and death — it’s called eternal life; choose it now (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Cor. 6:2).

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The topic for discussion involves a question of authority. Authority is defined as “*a legal or rightful power that involves the right to command or act as it pertains to law.*” In order to glorify God, what standard of authority must we follow in religion: the Bible or man-made denominational creeds? We live in an age of creeds, deeds and needs. Every man can be content to have his own creed book, and he is permitted (at least in America) to make his creed a part of the deed to share meetinghouse property with those who are likeminded. They are able to comfort themselves with the notion that their spiritual needs are being met. While all along, the devil with his pernicious methods works to validate the comfort level of those who have erred from the superior Way of God’s Word (Jer. 5:30-31; 2 Thes. 2:9-12). Satan’s pseudo-authoritative comforter to the unlearned and the often unsuspecting soul is none other than creed

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books. The insatiable desire to have different creeds, unauthorized traditions, and church laws contribute to the sin of religious division and confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). Should we obey the authority of human religious laws or the inspired Scriptures, which is better? The chart below list basic definitions of terms used:

Bible	Collection of the " <i>God breathed</i> " inspired writings of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments.
Creed	A source of authoritative beliefs or opinions which a group recognizes as a standard of guidance for church doctrine.
Creed book	A codification of doctrine used for standard religious practices and ceremony.
Tradition	Handing down of statements, beliefs or customs from one generation to another.
Authority	Power or right to give commands to enforce laws.
Doctrine	That which is taught as the principles of religion.
Sect	Dissenting religious body holding opinions in opposition to the commonly received doctrine.
Dogma	Doctrine or belief taught as truth.
Orthodoxy	A holding of correct truth.
Synod	A consultative council of clergy.

Confessions Of Faith	A statement of doctrine very similar to a creed, but usually longer and polemical, as well as didactic.
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Our study is a demonstration of the weakness of human creeds against the superiority of the Word of God. This lesson will examine God's attitude on creeds, the one adequate choice, man's amenability to the Bible, and the eternal consequences of your choice.

God's Attitude On Creeds

The Word of God ably demonstrates the attitude of a jealous God over His inspired instructions leading man from earth into eternity. God's attitude about the Bible has always been unchanged and man simply cannot improve it! Parents will give specific safety instructions to their children, because they love them and wish to protect them. No parent would appreciate their children suffering danger and harm due to any unauthorized changes to parental instructions! This is exactly how our Heavenly Father feels about those who would interject unauthorized changes that will ultimately lead one to eternal destruction! Jehovah, in His jealousy, is always hurt whenever His children go after other gods with their false claims of authority (Deut. 5:9; 6:14-15; John 12:48).

God is dogmatically opposed to those who would presume superior knowledge in amending His Will. The Father has an expectation of strict adherence to

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His commands. Moses was denied entrance into the Promise Land after he presumed upon God's authority in striking the rock instead of speaking to the rock as God ordained in Numbers 20:7-12:

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals." So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

Upon experiencing Jehovah's strict adherence to His authority, Moses was inspired to write Deuteronomy 4:2: "*You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.*" This warning should serve as a prejudgment warning to all religious leaders and teachers: "*God means what He says!*"

God possesses an attitude of hatred for those

who would falsify His Way. The Psalmist records: *“Through Thy precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way”* (Psm. 119:104). Every effort on the part of man to augment or change God’s precepts represents an attack against His authority. These satanic attackers are the objects of God’s hatred as they change truth to a lie! They are also viewed as transgressors:

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other (1 Cor. 4:6).

Jehovah has an attitude of condemnation for all who would seek to justify creed making. Condemnation because they have changed the priority from Heaven to Hell!

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight! (Isa. 5:20-21).

It may be that many of our friends and neighbors consider the use of creeds to be insignificant. How tragic. This view is such a contrast to the mind of our Heavenly Father! Instead of *“believing every spirit”* the will of God is that we *“try the spirits whether they are of God.”* But why should we? *“...Because many false prophets are gone out into the world”* (1

John 4:1). The devil wants you to believe creeds are insignificant. Do not believe him!

As God is firmly opposed to the pseudo-authoritative decrees of men in religion, so ought the people of God! Barton W. Stone was one of the foremost leaders for religious freedom on the western frontier during the first half of the Nineteenth Century. Born in Maryland in 1772, Stone resolved to preach when he was nineteen years of age and soon after he was ordained a minister in the Presbyterian Church. In 1801, Stone moved to Cane Ridge, Kentucky to preach. He soon discovered that what he read in the Bible was different from the Calvinistic doctrines being taught in the Presbyterian Church. Motivated strongly by the belief that one should be guided by the Scriptures only, Stone led a movement which resulted in several preachers leaving the Presbyterian Church.

In 1804, Stone and others began wearing the name "*Christian*." They also appealed to their denominational friends to denounce human institutions and creeds and to be members of the Lord's church which they read about in the Bible.

One of the most extraordinary religious documents produced in the early Nineteenth Century came out of Stone's early efforts to achieve religious freedom. *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, written in 1804, was signed by Stone and five other preachers who repudiated the right of human creeds to govern them in religious matters and questioned the authority of organized human institutions such

as synods and presbyteries. Five of the twelve items it satirically proclaimed were:

- We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.
- We will, that our name of distinction, with its Reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name one.
- We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.
- We will, that each particular church, as a body, actuated by the same spirit, choose her own preacher, and support him by a free will offering, without a written call or subscription—admit members—remove offences; and never henceforth delegate her right of government to any man or set of men whatever.
- We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell.

This document ended with an appeal for all Christians to practice mutual love and to work for the unity of the people of God.

The Christian Messenger was a twenty-four page monthly periodical which had Christian unity as its central theme. In the first issue Barton W. Stone wrote: "It is frequently asked, Why so much zeal in the present day, against authoritative creeds, party names, and party spirits? I answer for myself: because I am assured, they stand in the way of Christian union, and are contrary to the will of God." No child of God can afford an insignificant attitude concerning any authority that challenges God's authority!

The One Adequate Of Choice

God's all-sufficient Word adequately supplies man in his earthly conduct and for the transition into eternity. Any and all other choice that claims to conduct man on earth and into eternity are inadequate counterfeits! Satan is too cunning to try to deceive men with bare-faced lies, so he mixes some truth with his error. The gospel, thus watered down with doctrines and traditions of men, is sapped of its saving power. A counterfeit gospel becomes a damnable doctrine rather than the means of salvation. There is no such thing as "*denominational Christianity*." Denominationalism is a synonym for division and division is of Satan and a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:20).

The Bible is God's perfect standard of authority. It completely satisfies everything we require as God's

only acceptable guide in this life and in eternity. It is complete. If the Bible did not answer some question that was essential to man's salvation, then we might need some other guide. But the Bible contains all the information we need to please God and to be saved. The Holy Spirit guided the Apostles into all truth. They wrote in the Scriptures what they received from the Spirit (John 16:13; 14:26). The Scriptures furnish us perfectly or completely to all good works. They answer every essential religious question (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God has given us "*all things that pertain to life and godliness*" (2 Peter 1:3). An amazing truth to remember; any information which is not provided in the Bible is information which is not essential to our salvation.

It is understandable. If the Bible was written in such a way that men could not understand it, then we might need another standard. But the Bible can be understood by every honest person of normal intelligence, sufficient to receive salvation. Jesus instructed the multitudes of common people. He said every one of them should understand what He spoke (Mark 7:14). The Scriptures are able to make men wise to salvation, and are profitable for doctrine, reproof, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:15-16). But the Scriptures can so profit us only if we can understand them. This is a lesson that Satan would never want taught! God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). But if, as some creed makers claim, the Bible cannot be understood, then God would be the author of confusion. Since He

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is not the author of confusion, the Word of Truth is understandable (Prov. 2:1-9; Isa. 55:11; Eph. 3:3-5).

It is eternal. If the Bible has been so corrupted since it was written that it no longer contains the truth, then we would require a new standard. But the Word of God is eternal. The Scriptures were written so people would have the message of inspired men even after those men were dead. It was intended for future generations:

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease (2 Peter 1:12-15).

Peter further reminds us that the “*Word lives and abides forever*” (1 Peter 1:22-25). It is not like imperfect creed books that are always subject to revision and change! Here is authoritative truth that will last forever (2 John 2)! John states that this Divine Creed that needs no revision will last into judgment and will be God’s standard for our eternal destination (John 12:48; Acts 17:30-31).

These same promises were made regarding the Old Testament (Psm. 119:152,160; Isa. 40:8; 30:8). The promises were fulfilled so completely that the message was preserved hundreds of years till Jesus’

lifetime. It was so perfect then that He and His apostles repeatedly cited Scripture as Divine authority without ever once implying anything was missing or inaccurate.

These same promises have now been made regarding the entire written Word, so we can be sure that God, by His power has likewise kept this promise. The record written by the inspired men will always exist and be available to guide honest people (Jude 3; Matt. 24:35; Psm. 12:6-7).

It is infallible (inerrant). If there was any possibility of mistakes being in the Bible, we might need another guide. But there are no mistakes because it is the Word of God.

God's Word is truth (John 17:17). God's word is right (Psm. 33:4). Man may be wrong, but God's Word is never wrong. Creeds are wrong, but God's Word is never wrong. God cannot lie or make mistakes. Since the Bible is the Word of God, it is right in everything it teaches. Why would you want to settle for a fallible substitute? The Gospel is "*the Perfect Law of Liberty*" (James 1:25). We need no other guide but the Bible.

Alternative standards are imperfect. The very fact these standards are human in origin proves they are imperfect. What does man ever do perfectly? Further, by comparing them to the Bible, we see they are vastly different. Whenever men take something that is perfect and then change it, they make it imperfect.

There are three possible ways for a man-made standard to be different from the Bible. (1) It

may contain more than the Bible. It may teach us to practice something which is not authorized in the Bible. This would be "*adding to*" God's word. (2) It may contain less than the Bible. It may release men from practicing something which God's word teaches us to practice. This is "*taking from*" God's word. (3) It may substitute for what the Bible says. This is both taking away what God says and then replacing it by adding something else God did not say.

Man's Amenability To The Bible

Since there are no alternative standards that can save, God's superior Word requires uniform amenability on the part of all men. Note Luke in Acts 17:30-31:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

The universality of the judgment is predicated upon the world-wide amenability of mankind to comply with the God's Word. Paul, in his letter to Titus, instructed that "*the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men*" (Titus 2:11). God's grace is universal in scope and it further shows that as grace was being dispensed, it was also teaching. As the teacher named "*Grace*" appeared to bring salvation, grace also instructed all men to deny

ungodliness and worldly lust. All amenable men are taught to live soberly and righteously (Titus 2:12). So in addition to be amenable to God's authority, we are also required to obey God in all things.

Unlike the divisiveness of creeds, there remains something far superior in the form of God's Word. Amenability and compliance to the Bible will always promote unity. With God's standard we can: (1) Share Uniformity of Speech. (2) Shed Our Divisiveness. (3) Share in Uniformity of Mind [by having the mind of Christ]. And (4) Share in Uniformity of Judgment:

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

In stark contrast the unity that originates from the pure and perfect Word of God, please note a sampling of expressions from the creeds of men:

Methodist Discipline (p. v):

Traditionally United Methodists have not only been happy to be guided by the Discipline as a book of church law, but they have also usually regarded it with a certain degree of reverence...
—1973 edition.

Nazarene Manual (p. 27):

...We, the ministers and lay members of the Church of the Nazarene ... do hereby ordain,

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adopt, and set forth as the fundamental law or constitution of the Church of the Nazarene the Articles of Faith, the General Rules, and the Articles of Organization and Government here following... —1972 Edition.

Page 44 tells how this Constitution may be repealed or amended by 2/3 vote.

Presbyterian Book Of Confessions (section 9.04):

The United Presbyterian Church ... is guided by the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds from the time of the early church; the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Second Helvetic Confession from the era of the Reformation; the Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism from the seventeenth century; and the Theological Declaration of Barmen from the twentieth century —1967 edition.

Roman Catholic Catechism

Page 9: Do we get from the Bible alone all our knowledge and certainty about what God has told us? No, there is also Sacred Tradition ... What is tradition? The Word of God handed on to us by the Apostles in their preaching and by their successors in the Church to the present day...

Page 51: Did God intend that the Bible alone should be the guide to salvation? No, because certain things in the Bible can be misunderstood, and because the Bible does not have everything God taught.

Page 56: Does Jesus require us to follow the Pope in matters of religion? Yes, because

obedience and loyalty to the Pope are among the chief requirements of Our Lord's plan for unity in His church — *A Catechism for Adults*, 1975 edition.

Book of Mormon

...Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews? ...Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written... for out of the books which shall be written, I will judge the world... For behold, I shall speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all the nations of the earth and they shall write it (2 Nephi 29:2-3; 6, 10-12). Copyright 1920.

The writers were not inspired or guided by the Holy Spirit. Generally they do not even claim such. Nevertheless, denominations recognize these writings as authority — rule or law — which the group uses in determining what it should or should not teach and practice. Sometimes members of these groups will affirm that they do not recognize these writings as authority. Nevertheless, the denomination of which they are a member does adhere to them. These human standards are clearly in addition to the Bible. Men wrote them and men can change them.

The Eternal Consequences Of Your Choice

Since creeds and the doctrines of men are opposed to the Almighty, their existence is time limited and will be tried by God. Jesus gives a dramatically clear example in the fifteenth chapter of Matthew:

Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man." Then His disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Matt. 15:7-14).

The hypocrisy of the Pharisees was manifested in vain worship as associated with their own doctrines and commandments, rather than God's Word. Whatever proceeded from their creed maker's heart was an absolute defilement to God! Jesus would validate this truth and when the disciples learned that the Pharisees were offended at any notion of being hypocrites—Jesus then issued a warning: "...*Every plant which My*

heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”

Their journeys drew them close to God, but never close enough to glorify Him. In their efforts to lead others, they substituted God’s Word for their defiled creeds and doctrines. As a consequence, Jesus stated that their presumed inheritance from God would be “*uprooted*” and “*ditched*.” To depart from the Superior Scriptures to the cancer of creeds will cost you!

The consequences of choosing the inferior doctrines of men over God’s authoritative Word are eternal. It is a matter of life or death.

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

Man’s ways are not God’s ways. His ways are higher than ours as Heaven is higher than earth. Men by his own wisdom are not able to know what pleases God (Isa. 55:8-9).

Question: Are you willing to risk your soul’s salvation for the doctrines and creeds of inferior creed-makers? Please honestly and carefully study the words of the Holy Spirit and the chart below before rendering your answer:

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But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9).

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds (2 John 1:9-11).

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Gal. 6:7-9).

Are You Obeying Christ Or Creeds???

The Problem	(Matt. 7:21a) Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;	Their Religion
The Prescription	(Matt. 7:21b) But he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.	Their Remedy
The Presumption	(Matt. 7:22) Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?	Their Rituals
The Punishment	(Matt. 7:23) And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.	Their Removal

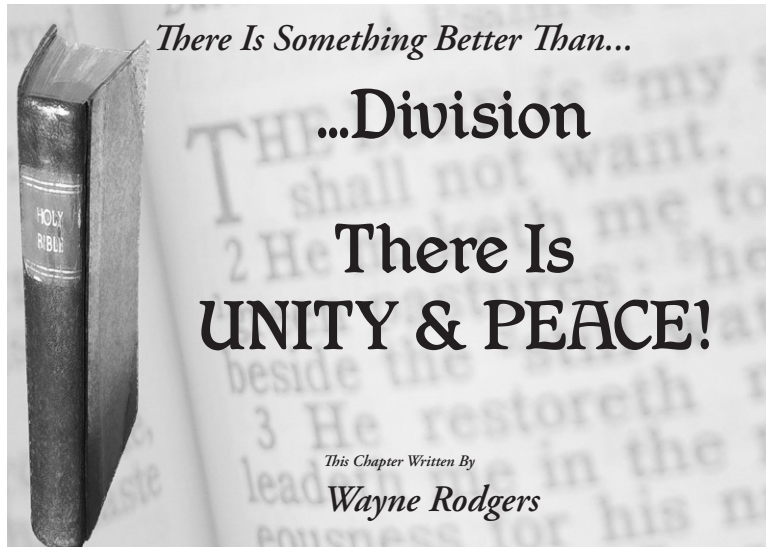
The story is told of two travelers, who fancied they were abundantly able to take care of themselves, entered a railway coach when the train was being made up. They found comfortable seats and had dropped into conversation when a porter looked in and told them to go forward. *“What is the matter with this coach?”* they asked. *“Nothing,”* he grinned, *“only this one isn’t coupled on to anything that will take you anywhere.”*

We must be coupled to God’s authority if our lives are to move forward. That’s the trouble with authority apart from Jehovah—they may seem appropriate (rituals), but they do not take you anywhere except removal and eternal dead-end! It will cost you eternally.

Dear reader and friend, you can be a simple Christian. You can be a member of the one true church, without being members of any denomination. How? Just like the people in the first century: by rejecting all man-made teachings and following only the pure teachings of the New Testament! Believe the gospel concerning Jesus Christ as Lord and Master (John 8:24). Repent of your sins (Luke 13:3). Confess the name of Jesus as the Son of the Living and Eternal God (Rom. 10:9-10). Submit to baptism in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Live a faithful life by subscribing to God's One and Only Creed—Book—the Bible (Matt. 4:4; 1 Cor. 15:58).

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While so much division is found in the world today, it is no wonder that it finds its way into the religious scene, as well. This group is on *“the right.”* This one is on *“the left.”* It is very confusing and disheartening to the one who is seeking the truth and finds this to be the case. There must be something better!

One group is calling for *“interfaith”* events so that unity can be sought and works can be accomplished. On one hand this sounds like the thing to do to try and bring everyone together. This is not the first attempt at what turns into *“unity in diversity.”* In other words, *“we’ll agree to disagree. You have your beliefs and we have ours, but we’ll open doors of fellowship together under the umbrella of unity.”* But each group still has their very core doctrines that contradict the teachings of the groups of which they are in *“supposed fellowship.”* There must be something better!

In the Lord's church today, there is much division. Most of which comes from personality conflicts, folks who have to have it "*their*" way, hard hearts that will not repent and ask forgiveness, and those who will not teach and hold to the truth (Phil. 2:16). Those truth seekers again must be discouraged when hearing a portion of truth, but then see so much division occur. There must be something better!

Certainly our God had something better in mind: a place of unity, a place of peace, something better than the division that plagues our world. Through His Son and the Church, unity and peace would be found in the world!

Unity And Peace Through His Son

The prophet Isaiah would foretell of the Christ:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7, KJV unless otherwise noted).

God's plan of peace for mankind would come about through the Christ. The "*Prince of Peace*" would be the one who would cause such as read earlier in Isaiah 2:2-4:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

The Christ, the Son of God, would bring about peace to the nation of Israel. This would be a prophetic picture of hope for Judah and Jerusalem. This would be something better than the division and fighting that they have known and seen around them and within their own nation.

The psalmist would continue to give a picture of God granting His people with peace:

The LORD will give strength unto his people;
the LORD will bless his people with **peace**
(Psm. 29:11).

I will hear what God the LORD will speak:
for he will speak **peace** unto his people, and
to his saints: but let them not turn again to
folly (Psm. 85:8).

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Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them (Psm. 119:165).

As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel (Psm. 125:5).

Great hope was given to the children of Israel and to the world in prophecy, but when we come to Matthew's account of the Gospel, the One to bring peace and unity to the world was here (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 2:8-16)!

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought

forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS (Matt. 1:18-25).

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth **peace, good will toward men.** And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger (Luke 2:8-16, emph. WR).

Zacharias, father of John the Baptizer, would prophesy about the work of his son including guiding their *“feet in the way of peace”* (Luke 1:79). This is a reference to the way of the Christ (v. 76). His way would bring about peace for all mankind and John would prepare the way.

His work of Peace is so closely related to the idea of Unity. It is hard to separate the two. Jesus

would come near the entrance to Jerusalem on one occasion and make this observation about the children of Israel: *“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd”* (Matt. 9:36). Jesus often used sheep as a way to teach others who were seeking the truth. Sheep with no shepherd are often scattered, as He saw the children of Israel. His work as the *“Good Shepherd”* would bring them together in harmony and unity with one another (John 10:11, 14).

The apostle Paul spoke of the work of Christ as the one who would bring about peace with God: *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God”* (Rom. 5:1-2).

In preparing His disciples for His death and departure, Jesus would speak of sending the Comforter, the Holy Spirit to teach, give remembrance, and guide them into all truth (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:33). In this same context, Jesus says, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”* (John 14:27). Not only would the Comforter give the apostles peace, but also a message of peace to take to the world. Just prior to His ascension, Jesus meeting with His apostles calmed them after coming into the room with them and assured them that it was truly He standing before

them, Jesus said to them: *“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you...Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained”* (John 20:21, 23). Jesus explained my Father sent me, now I am sending you with a message of peace.

Paul spoke of the message of peace, the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the **gospel of peace**, and bring glad tidings of good things (Rom. 10:13-15, emph. WR)!

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost (Rom. 15:13).

Peace and Unity only comes through Jesus Christ.

Unity And Peace Through His Church

The work that Christ wrought in unity and peace is best seen in His church. The book of Ephesians

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shows the work of unity and peace between two groups of people that could not be farther apart. In fact, there was much dispute, dissension, and discord between the Jews and the Gentiles. This great need of unity and peace between these two groups of people was seen in God's plan before the foundation of the world. Paul stated:

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:6-11).

Paul mentions in verse six about the "*promise in Christ by the Gospel*" and is no doubt a reference to the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:1-3. God told Abraham "*in thee all nations shall be blessed.*" This promise fulfilled in Christ would be that which would bring about unity and peace for all mankind, both Jew and Gentile.

In writing to this mostly Gentile congregation, the apostle makes clear that the church is the “*body of Christ*” (Eph. 1:22-23) and then reminds them of the division between them and the Jews:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our **peace**, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making **peace**; And that he might **reconcile** both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: (Eph. 2:11-16).

And came and **preached peace** to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. 2:17-18).

This great hostility stood between them, but Christ gave them what nothing or no one else in the world could even begin to offer: Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity. Notice that the reconciliation came about in the body of Christ, the church (v. 16). In so doing, the message of peace was preached by the

THERE IS UNITY AND PEACE!

apostles seeing again the work of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual habitation of God's people, Jew and Gentile, is framed by God and not man, allowing for true peace and unity (Eph. 2:21-22).

In Ephesians four, the discussion turns from peace and reconciliation to unity, which seems to be the ultimate result or at least one of the perks of peace in one's life. Notice verses one through three:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of **peace** (Eph. 4:1-3).

The apostle calls for these Gentile Christians to "*walk worthy.*" This is not going to come about without some work and effort on the part of every Christian. Paul says, "*Endeavouring to keep...*" (v. 1). As Strong's defines the word, one must be diligent, labour, be prompt or earnest, make an effort, and use speed "*to keep the unity of the Spirit.*" This same word is used in 2 Timothy 2:15: "*study / be diligent to shew thyself approved unto God.*" Great effort must be exerted on the part of the Christian who desires God's plan for unity.

There are conditions which must be present in order for peace to flourish and unity to be enjoyed: "*lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*" (v. 2). If brethren, today, had a humble heart, patient and forbearing with one another, so much could be

accomplished to unify the Lord's body that has been split and splintered by brethren who have no heart of compassion for their brothers and sisters in Christ. On the far other extreme are those who have a heart of compassion, but have not continued to read as Paul wrote in the next few verses concerning a basis for this peace and unity. Because of such, they fellowship anyone and everyone. This is not founded out of a confidence (Eph. 3:12) from the Gospel of Christ, the message of the Holy Spirit, recorded for mankind, but rather a false hope of unity in diversity to grow churches.

Some have outlined verses four through six as the "*planks or platform of unity*" which function as the basis or foundation for bringing all of mankind together in harmony, religiously speaking. Brother Wendell Winkler outlined and gave the following chart called "*The Platform For Unity*" as following: (Winkler 25)

- **One Body** — Unity of Organization (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:16; Col. 3:15).
- **One Spirit** — Unity of Guidance (1 Cor. 12:4, 8-9, 11, 13).
- **One Hope** — Unity of Aspiration (Col. 1:5, 23, 27; Eph. 1:18; Titus 3:7).
- **One Lord** — Unity of Authority (1 Cor. 8:6; 12:5; Matt. 28:18-20).
- **One Faith** — Unity of Message (Gal. 1:23, 6-9; Jude 3; Acts 24:24).
- **One Baptism** — Unity of Practice (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

- **One God** — Unity of Worship (1 Cor. 8:6; cf. Deut. 6:4; 1 Sam. 2:2; Isa. 45:22; John 4:24).

Conclusion

Jesus Christ promised to build one body, the church (Matt. 16:18-19). Jesus Christ prayed for the unity of the one body, the church (John 17:20-21). Jesus Christ died to purchase the one body, the church (Acts 20:28). Jesus Christ reconciled Christians in one body, the church (Eph. 2:16).

Most would realize very quickly that there is something better than division. Many are seeking something better, but choose a path that “*seems right*” (Prov. 14:12), but is not. Many will go to great lengths to achieve what some call unity in diversity, which is no unity at all and does not make for peace. There is truly something better than division...Unity and Peace that can only be achieved through Jesus Christ and His Church. May we endeavour to be that church which God planned to save mankind and grant peace through Christ Jesus.

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When God created man before the creation of woman, it is written, *“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him”* (Gen. 2:18). Paul wrote in the book of Romans,

For none of us liveth unto himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s (Rom. 14:7-8).

There has always been something about the attributes of both God and man that call for family and fellowship. God is not solitary in His existence as the Godhead is made up of three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Adam was not made to dwell alone even with the entire animal kingdom about him in the garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 2:18-20). God

designed that there be something better than being alone. That better state is to be in a family with the appropriate fellowship that comes within it.

The Need For Family And Fellowship

There is something intrinsically needed by all human beings as social creatures. There is the basic need to be loved and to love. While there were times when even Jesus spent time alone (cf. John 6:15), He did not live the life of a hermit—isolated from the inhabitants of the world. He came to show the love of God to man and to show man how to love God in return. After all, the two great commands of the Bible are:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Matt. 22:37-39).

Man's love for God, however, is not solely based upon a command. John wrote, "*We love him, because he first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). The motivation, therefore, to love God and love one's neighbor as himself is centered in the proper understanding of the love of God toward man. That love is found in its greatest form in the fellowship with God and the church, the household of God.

Men and women, especially the people of God, are to have a close bond with others. God did not just make a woman for the man to have someone around. She was designed to be "*a help*" (Gen. 2:18,

20). There are several passages in the Bible that address the value of companionship, whether of a married state or just friendship between individuals. Solomon wrote:

There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labor; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labor and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail (Eccl. 4:8).

He then proceeds to give basic needs relating to being a fellow helper to another and receiving the benefits from such.

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken (Eccl. 4:9-12).

A solitary life has its great challenges. It is always better to face life's challenges with the help of others. Life is more productive and happy where relationships exist. The closest human bond like unto Christ and the church is that enjoyed in marriage between the husband and the wife. The closest spiritual ties on earth are that between God and His children. Man needs the relationship with God more than anything.

THERE IS FAMILY/FELLOWSHIP!

This is especially seen in Paul's statement toward the close of his life on earth.

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion (2 Tim. 4:16-17).

The Nature Of Family And Fellowship

While there are times when being alone has its place, there are greater blessings when sharing with others. Such blessings are seen in both the physical family and in the spiritual household of God, the church.

The Lord God did not design mankind to be born into the world to face its difficulties alone. Family is the relationship term of the first social connection that is discovered when brought into the world. It is written in the psalms,

Sing unto God, sing praises to him name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound in chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land (Psm. 68:4-6).

Children find fulfillment of basic physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual qualities beginning at home.

God did not design civil government or the church to handle every need of man. Each part of God's divine economy has its place with the home being the start of it all.

Physical needs start in the home. Paul wrote to the heads of households,

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5:8).

Further in this same chapter, Paul writes concerning a model home focused around the wife and mother,

I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully (1 Tim. 5:14).

The picture of such instruction for godly women of this sort is found in the closing chapter of Proverbs. It is written, "*She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness*" (Prov. 31:27). A physical home is the place where one is sheltered and cared for with the greatest of love.

Emotional needs are founded in the home. The family needs more than just the physical things of life. Solomon wrote,

Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith (Prov. 15:16-17).

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Loneliness is a disposition that fosters many emotional problems. The fellowship of a genuine family develops the psychological side of the human being.

Mental development is guided by the home. The process of educational development is charged to the home. Paul wrote to fathers, *“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”* (Eph. 6:4). It is the responsibility of parents, especially the head of the family, to see that the whole education of the child is present. Solomon greatly illustrated this in the beginning parts of the book of Proverbs.

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou sleekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding (Prov. 2:1-6).

Spiritual training is to be first introduced in the home. The primary focus of all training in a family is to lead the immature and inexperienced from that state to a proper understanding of where they came from, why they are here and where they are going. There are multiple examples in the Bible of great spiritual training found in the home. It is said of Abraham,

I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him (Gen. 18:19).

It is said by Joshua,

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15).

It is said of Timothy's grandmother and mother,

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also (2 Tim. 1:5).

Furthermore, Paul would write,

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15).

The close fellowship of family provides the needed items to live in the world and live on in the world to come.

The Lord God equally did not design the babe in Christ to face the difficulties of spiritual development alone. The Lord immediately adds the new convert to the church (cf. Acts 2:47). There are multiple

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times where the church is identified as the house or household of God. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;*” (Eph. 2:19). Again, he wrote, “*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,*” (Eph. 3:14-15). Paul wrote to Timothy,

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

The family feature of God’s people is extremely important in view of the fact that heaven will be filled with just that kind of relationship. There will be no marriage in heaven (cf. Matt. 22:30), but there will be children of God with the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and heavenly host in that glorious realm called heaven.

The Nurturing Of Family And Fellowship

Having addressed the need for family and fellowship along with the nature of such social interaction, there is the aspect of nurturing that should be considered. When children are born into the world, each one has the need for nurturing. Paul wrote concerning the work of parenting, “*bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Eph. 6:4).

The Lord did not simply put the new convert into the household of God after his conversion at the point of being baptized and then tell him that he is on his own to get the most out of his spiritual life. The new convert is identified in the process of spiritual growth in the figure of a babe. There are various nurturing items for the babe found in God's family. Peter wrote, "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:*" (1 Peter 2:2). Paul wrote, "*But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*" (Eph. 4:15).

There are many nurturing aspects of the fellowship in the family of God that are addressed in the New Testament. It is written concerning the assembly,

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

One of the purposes of the assembly is to stir up one another to the love needed and the good works that should follow. David of old understood the blessings of such efforts, when he said, "*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord*" (Psm. 122:1). Many are the times when the saints meet for worship that the cares of the world are left outside to enjoy a taste of heaven inside. Those who do not take advantage of such encouragement do themselves an injustice.

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It is written of the church in the figure of the body,

That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:25-26).

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep (Rom. 12:15).

Such fellowship, both in times of sorrow and happiness, is much better than facing the good and bad times alone.

The nurturing of good works is found to be greater in the cooperation of brethren working to a common end. Paul commented about the poor brethren (cf. 2 Cor. 8:2) of Macedonia,

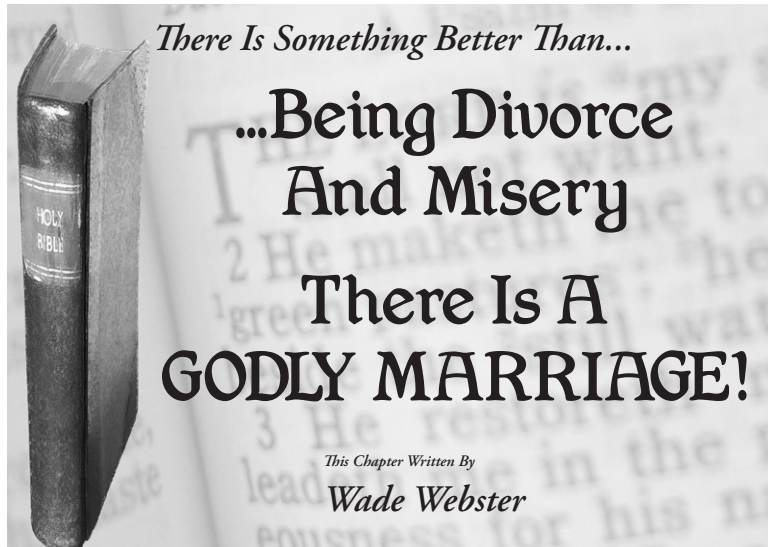
Praying us with much entreaty that we should receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God (2 Cor. 8:4-5).

The Christians in Antioch showed the greatness of fellowship in the contribution sent to Jerusalem for those in Judea (cf. Acts 11:29). All of the great blessings of the nurturing of the fellowship is summed up in the words of the Lord mentioned by Paul, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35).

A person can be alone and be perfectly content.

A person can be in a crowd and be lonely. However, there is no substitute for the greatness of being among God and God's people in the family and fellowship qualities found where the church exists. One may live by himself/herself and know that they are not alone. The world does not provide that; only God and His ways do.

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The comparative words “*better than*” are used throughout the Bible. However, they are found more in the wisdom literature than in any other section of the Bible. When you stop and think about it, this makes perfect sense. After all, wisdom is about being able to discern between things to determine what is best (Prov. 1:1-6). Solomon used the words “*better than*” repeatedly in the books that he penned. In the book of Proverbs he spoke of wisdom as being better than gold, silver, and rubies (Prov. 3:14; 8:11; 8:19; 16:16); in the book of Ecclesiastes he spoke of a good name as being better than precious ointment (Eccl. 7:1); and, in the Song of Songs (1:1) he spoke of his wife’s love as being better than wine (Song of Solomon 4:10; cf. 1:2). Since my assignment concerns marriage, we will give special attention to the Song of Solomon.

Before we begin our study of the Song of

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Solomon, let's go back to where marriage began. In the second chapter of Genesis, we read,

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:18-25).

In these verses, we see a divine assessment, a divine answer, and a divine arrangement. The divine assessment was that it wasn't good for man to be alone, the divine answer was to create an helpmeet for man, and the divine arrangement was for man to leave father and mother and cleave to his wife. Clearly, God did not want man to be miserable. He wanted man to be happy. Marriage was created to

that end. God wanted the husband and the wife to be *“heirs together of the grace of life”* (1 Peter 3:7). Truly, the man and the woman who find a faithful Christian mate find a good thing and obtain the favor of the Lord (Prov. 18:22). Adam certainly felt that he had obtained God’s grace when he found Eve. He instantly laid claim to her exclaiming, *“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man”* (Gen. 2:23). She pleased him well (Judg. 14:2-3).

Sadly, with the passing of time, man thought that divorce was better than marriage. The Old Testament drew to a close with these sad words:

The LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously (Mal. 2:14-16).

Men in Malachi’s day thought that there was a better way than staying true to their marriage vows. They thought that they could find happiness by putting away the wives that they had chosen in their youth. However, God knew better. The pernicious practice of putting away one’s mate persisted until the time

of Christ. Jesus addressed the hard-hearted practice and explained that “*from the beginning, it was not so*” (Matt. 19:4-8). Jesus knew that from the beginning there had been a better way than divorce and misery. Jesus was trying to direct them back to that better way—godly marriage. We need to continually direct men back to this today. As you know, there are some today who continue to prefer divorce to marriage.

In addition to divorce, there were those who thought that fornication was better than marriage. The practice was especially prevalent among the Gentiles (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Rom. 1:29). As you know, some of the saints at Corinth had been guilty of the practice before their conversion (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Likely, the temptation to return to this prior practice was continuous at Corinth. No doubt, this is the reason why Paul felt the need to write to them to instruct them to “*flee fornication*” (1 Cor. 6:18). To “*avoid fornication,*” Paul instructed every man to “*have his own wife*” and every woman to “*have her own husband*” (1 Cor. 7:2). Paul knew that there was a better way than fornication. As you know, many in our world continue to need this message.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul even spoke of some who would arise and argue that celibacy was better than marriage. We read,

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding

to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

Those who are familiar with church history know that Catholicism came along and argued for the supremacy of celibacy. Being single was seen as being more honorable than being married. However, the Bible speaks of marriage as being "*honorable in all*" (Heb. 13:4).

Having established that loneliness, divorce, fornication, and celibacy are not better than godly marriage, let's now turn our attention to having the kind of marriage that God wants us to have. We want to move from surviving to thriving and from getting by to flying high. As noted in the introduction, we want to focus our attention on the Song of Solomon. The Song of Solomon is an inspired marriage manual. In this Song, we see the better way of godly marriage.

One of the most beautiful pictures of marriage found anywhere in the Bible is found in the second chapter of the Song of Solomon. I believe that it pictures the delight that God desires to dwell within our marriages. We read,

For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.
O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock,

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in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely (Song of Solomon 2:11-14).

Truly, the world is a very different place when two people are in love. The barrenness of winter gives birth to the blossoms of spring. The rain stops and the sun shines. The flowers bloom and the birds sing. Sweet fragrances fill the air. Certainly, this is a far cry from divorce and misery. This is marriage as God intends for it to be. This is marriage as God can make it.

Have you ever stopped to think about what your life would be without your mate? Imagine winter returning. Imagine a daily downpour. Imagine the flowers fading and the singing stopping. Sadly, some have experienced this because of death or divorce. I encourage you to go and spend some time with a recent widow/widower or divorcee. It will do both of you some good. It will help you to appreciate what you have before it is gone. Let's examine the love that Solomon and the Shulamite shared.

Their Love Was Spoken

Throughout the Song, Solomon and the Shulamite expressed their love for one another. They did not just assume that the other one knew how they felt. They declared it. In the second chapter, we read, "*My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away*" (Song of Solomon 2:10). Notice the language in the passage—"*my beloved,*"

“my love,” “my fair one.” The expression, *“my beloved”* appears 25 times in the book (1:14, 16; 2:3, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17; 5:2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 16; 6:2, 3; 7:9, 10, 11, 13; 8:14), with *“wellbeloved”* appearing 1 time (1:13). The expression *“my love”* appears 12 times (1:9, 15; 2:2, 7, 10, 13; 3:5; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4; 8:4) with *“whom my soul loveth”* appearing another 5 times (1:7; 3:1, 2, 3, 4). The expression *“my fair one”* appears 2 times (2:10, 13) with *“fair”* and *“fairest”* being used another dozen times (1:8, 15, 16; 2:10, 13; 4:1, 7, 10; 5:9; 6:1, 10; 7:6). This means that at least 57 times in the Song, Solomon and the Shulamite expressed their love for one another in the way that they referred to each other. Of course, this does not include all the other names and descriptive language that they used for one another (Song of Solomon 2:14; 5:2; 6:9).

Not only was their love spoken, it was specific. They didn't just make generic statements of love to one another. They spelled out what they loved about each other. Solomon declared,

Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead. Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks. Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.

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Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies (Song of Solomon 4:1-5; cf. 6:4-7; 7:1-5).

Please note that Solomon referenced her eyes, her hair, her teeth, her lips, her temples, her neck, and her breasts. He didn't just say she was fair, he spelled it out. He said that she was "*the work of the hands of a cunning workman*" (Song of Solomon 7:1).

Throughout the book, the Shulamite humbly downplayed her beauty. In the first chapter, she spoke of how the sun had blackened her skin as she kept the vineyards of her brothers (Song of Solomon 1:5-6). She had the skin of a common laborer, rather than that of a court lady. She confessed that she had cared for other vineyards, but not for her own (Song of Solomon 1:6). In other words, she had dressed the vineyard, but not herself. She told the king not to look on her (Song of Solomon 1:6). Her hair and her clothes were a mess. She was sweaty and dirty from work. However, Solomon didn't see any of that. He saw her grace and her beauty, not the blackness of her skin or the grime on her clothes. He called her the "*fairest among women*" (Song of Solomon 1:8; cf. 6:1, 9) and compared her to a thoroughbred horse (Song of Solomon 1:9-11). It bears noting that Solomon was an expert horseman (1 Kings 10:25ff). He knew the difference between a plough horse and a show horse. The Shulamite was definitely a show horse. In the second chapter, the Shulamite humbly described herself as a common flower of the field (2:1). However, Solomon didn't see her that way at all. As

far as he was concerned, there was nothing common about her. He saw her as a “*lily among thorns*.” In his eyes, she stood out among the daughters of men. He claimed her (put his banner over her—2:4), comforted her (with flagons and with apples—2:5), and cuddled her (with embraces 2:6). Solomon wasn’t just slapping paint on a house. He was painting a masterpiece.

In like manner, the Shulamite spelled out what she loved about Solomon. When the daughters of Jerusalem asked what elevated her beloved above another beloved, she declared,

My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem (Song of Solomon 5:10-16).

Please note that the Shulamite referenced Solomon’s skin, head, locks, eyes, cheeks, lips, hands, belly, legs, and face. The daughters of Jerusalem got a detailed list of what made Solomon the most eligible bachelor in Israel. He was an “*apple tree among the*

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trees of the wood" (2:3). Amazingly, the Shulamite even complimented his ride. It was powered by three score horses (valiant men—3:6-8) and had lots of wood trim and chrome (cedar, silver, and gold—3:9-10). To top it all off, the interior was purple (3:9-10). It was a ride fit for a king.

Like Solomon and his bride, couples today need to express their love for one another; and, they need to be specific in doing so. They need to paint pictures that clearly convey how they feel. They need to give honor to one another. Peter wrote,

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

In this passage we see five ingredients of a successful marriage: habitation—*"dwell with them,"* education—*"according to knowledge,"* appreciation—*"giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel,"* cooperation—*"as being heirs together of the grace of life,"* and supplication—*"that your prayers be not hindered."* Of course, in this part of our study, we are focused on the honor or appreciation that mates are to show to one another.

Their Love Was Shown

Not only did Solomon and the Shulamite declare their love, they demonstrated it. They showed affection to one another. In the second verse of the first chapter,

the Shulamite declares, “*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*” (Song of Solomon 1:2). Solomon’s bride saw these kisses as confirmation of his love. It should be noted that these were private kisses. Public displays of affection were frowned upon in that society (cf. 8:1).

In the second chapter, the Shulamite declared, “*He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love*” (Song of Solomon 2:4; cf. 1:4). Solomon displayed his love for his bride by bringing her to the banqueting house. In modern terms, he took her out to eat; and, I might add, he took her somewhere nice. Furthermore, the text says that he put his banner over her. In modern terms, he put his arm around her. Notice the text, “*His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me*” (Song of Solomon 2:6; cf. 8:3). I might add that they sat right next to each other on those purple seats on their way to the restaurant. They weren’t hugging the doors on opposite sides of the chariot. Again, consider the text: “*Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?*” (Song of Solomon 8:5). I assure you that I am not making this stuff up. She felt Solomon’s favor (Song of Solomon 8:10).

Solomon and the Shulamite sought out one another’s company. The relationship was not one-sided. He sought her company (2:8-9, 14; 4:8; 5:1-2; 6:13; 7:7-8) and she sought his (1:4; 3:1-3; 4:16; 5:6; 6:1; 7:11-13; 8:2, 14). A common complaint among couples today is that their relationship, whether in the realm of talking or touching, is one-sided. Clearly, this wasn’t the case with Solomon and his bride. They

pursued one another.

Like Solomon and his bride, couples today need to show their love for one another. They need to kiss, put their arms around one another, and go out to eat. Furthermore, they both need to be pursuers. It is unfair for one person to always have to be the pursuer. Everyone likes to be pursued.

Their Love Was Saved

The Shulamite listed herself among the virgins and the upright in the first chapter (SOS 1:3-4). Solomon later confirmed that she belonged in this category. In the fourth chapter, he declared, "*Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee*" (Song of Solomon 4:7). Although it is possible that this passage merely has reference to an unblemished complexion, it seems to me that it has reference to moral purity also. Later in the fourth chapter, her moral purity is clearly under consideration (4:12). Furthermore, I know that this is the case in the fifth chapter. Solomon declared, "*Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled*" (Song of Solomon 5:2). Please note that he said, "*My undefiled.*" She had kept herself pure for him.

Three times within the book, the Shulamite encouraged the daughters of Jerusalem not stir up or awake her love before her husband pleased (Song of Solomon 2:5; 3:5; 8:4). Commentators are generally in agreement that this has reference to maintaining her purity (virginity) until marriage. Those who are not married need to be careful not to awaken passions

that are to remain asleep until marriage (Heb. 13:4). Those who are not married must “*flee fornication*” (1 Cor. 6:18). They must mortify their members against fornication and uncleanness (Col. 3:5). The Shulamite was careful not to awaken her passion until her wedding night.

Like Solomon and his bride, we must keep ourselves pure for marriage (1 Tim. 5:22). We must not awaken passions that cannot be quenched outside of marriage. We must avoid places, settings and situations that would stir up these feelings—suggestive movies, private venues, dancing, etc. Those who commit fornication are robbing themselves and their future mates of an undefiled relationship.

Their Love Was Safe-Guarded

Marriage was to be “*a garden inclosed,*” “*a spring shut up,*” and “*a fountain sealed*” (Song of Solomon 4:12; cf. 8:6). Please notice the words “*inclosed,*” “*shut up,*” and “*sealed.*” These words suggest that couples must carefully guard themselves against sexual sin. They must not let down their guard for a moment. They must guard their hearts and their eyes (Prov. 4:23; Job 31:1; Matt. 5:29). In the fifth chapter of Proverbs, Solomon declared,

Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and
running waters out of thine own well. Let thy
fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of
waters in the streets. Let them be only thine
own, and not strangers with thee. Let thy
fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife

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of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? (Prov. 5:15-20).

Those who are married have their own cistern and well from which to draw. They must be ravished with one another's love (Song of Solomon 4:9).

Big things like adultery are not the only things that can wreck a marriage. Little things can also do so. In the second chapter, we read, "*Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes*" (Song of Solomon 2:15). As the keeper of the vineyards, Solomon's bride knew firsthand the damage that the little foxes could do (Song of Solomon 1:6). She knew that they didn't just threaten the fruit, but the vines themselves. By destroying the roots of the vines, the little foxes threatened the harvest for years to come.

Sadly, couples often overlook the little things that can mar their marriage. They buffer against the big things, but are totally unprotected against the little things. Yet, in the long run, the little things can be every bit as destructive as the big things. For example, unresolved anger and lingering bitterness can poison the marriage fountain. No doubt, this is the reason why Paul instructed the saints at Ephesus not to let the sun go down upon their wrath (Eph. 4:26-27). He knew that the devil would use unresolved anger to drive the couple apart or to tempt them in other

ways. He knew that over time the root of bitterness could spring up and trouble them (Heb. 12:15; cf. Eph. 4:31). Wise couples pay attention to the little foxes that can spoil the vines.

Their Love Was Selfless

Solomon's bride declared, "*My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies*" (Song of Solomon 2:16; cf. 6:3). Solomon and the Shulamite belonged to one another. They sought the best for each other. Their love wasn't "*puffed up*" (1 Cor. 13:4). It didn't seek its own (1 Cor. 13:5).

For sure, the phrase, "*My beloved is mine, and I am his*" contemplates the physical relationship that God declares honorable and undefiled in marriage (Heb. 13:4). Once married, Solomon's body belonged to his bride and her body belonged to him (1 Cor. 7:4). Each was to give mutual benevolence to the other (1 Cor. 7:3). The book clearly records that they did so (Song of Solomon 4:16; 5:1; 7:7-9). In the seventh chapter, the Shulamite declares,

I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved (Song Of Solomon 7:10-13).

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Solomon and his bride demonstrated selfless love by meeting one another's needs in this area.

For sure, physical intimacy was not the only place where Solomon and his bride showed selfless love. They showed their selfless love in countless acts of service.

The Shulamite spoke of the shade (protection) and the fruit (provision) that Solomon provided her (Song of Solomon 2:3). Furthermore, she spoke of her desire to learn from her mother how to serve him better (Song of Solomon 8:2).

Husbands and wives today need to manifest this same selfless spirit. Of course, the New Testament gives us an example even greater than that of Solomon and his bride. The New Testament gives us the example of Christ. To the saints at Ephesus, Paul wrote,

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth

it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-32).

In this passage, we see that marital love is supposed to be submissive (Eph. 5:21-24), sacrificial (Eph. 5:25), spotless (Eph. 5:26-27), steadfast (Eph. 5:28), sensible (Eph. 5:28), sensitive (Eph. 5:29), and singular (Eph. 5:30-33). In this part of our study, we are focused primarily on the submissive, sacrificial, and sensitive aspects of marital love. As you know, this is the spirit that Christ manifested in humbling Himself and in giving Himself for us (Phil. 2:5-8). If our Lord could take up the towel to serve those He loved, surely we can do the same (John 13).

Their Love Was Strong

Two times in the Song, we find the expression, “*Until the day break, and the shadows flee away*” (Song of Solomon 2:17; 4:6). Solomon and the Shulamite promised to be faithful unto each other until death parted them. Their love was as strong as death. Flood waters couldn’t drown it and money couldn’t buy it. In the eighth chapter, we read,

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

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Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned (Song of Solomon 8:6-7).

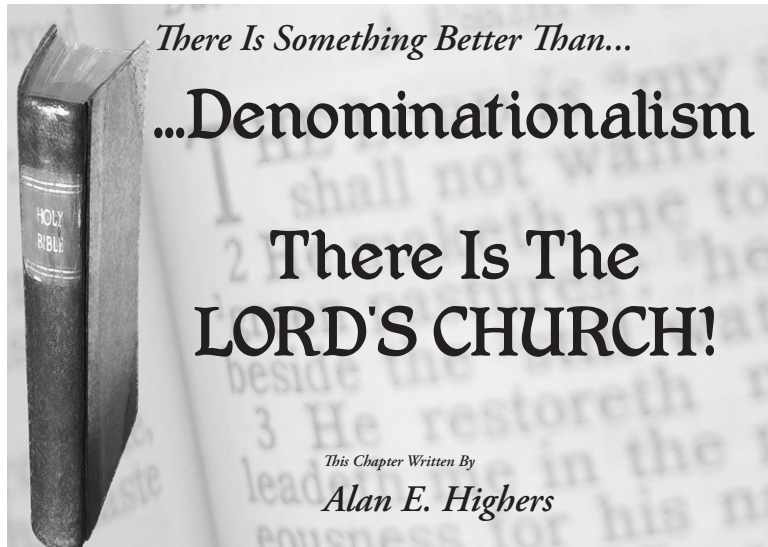
In this discussion, we see the seal of their love (upon the heart and arm), the strength of their love (as strong as death), the singularity of their love (fiery jealousy), and the steadfastness of their love (many waters could not quench it). Of course, our focus is on the strength and steadfastness of their love. The wedding ring is the seal today. It reminds us of our promise to be faithful until death.

The love of Solomon and the Shulamite was strong because it was built according to the pattern. The winds, rains, and floods of life couldn't shake it because it was founded upon the rock (Matt. 7:24-27; cf. Eph. 6:10).

Sadly, many today do not enter into marriage with the same commitment that characterized Solomon and his bride. They enter into marriage with thoughts of it as a temporary arrangement. However, marriage is for life (Rom. 7:1-3).

Conclusion

In this study, we have seen that godly marriage is better than divorce, misery, and a host of other things. We have examined the song that God wants us to sing with our spouses. Even if you are not a great singer, the song will be beautiful, if you will follow God's direction.



I. The Development of Apostasy

Most religious people in the world have no idea that the denominations of which they are members are less than five hundred years old. The Protestant Reformation began when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. The majority of denominations came into existence after that date. No denomination reaches back to the time of Christ and the apostles. In other words, there was no Baptist Church, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, or any other denomination in existence in New Testament times. How did all of this develop and come to pass?

First, there was an apostasy from the New Testament order. This was prophesied in the first century (1 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 Thes. 2:1-8). This falling away from the truth resulted in the Catholic hierarchy,

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the development of a pope, and a change in the doctrine and practice of the church. Sprinkling was substituted for immersion, infant membership took the place of believer's baptism, and corruptions occurred in the organization, worship, and practice of the early church. Over a period of time, images were introduced, prayers were offered to Mary, holy water and incense became part of the worship, and instrumental music, the sign of the cross, and the crucifix all found their way into the practice of the apostate church. If the early Christians could have walked into a public service a thousand years after the establishment of the church, they would have been astonished and utterly distressed by what they witnessed. It would have borne little resemblance to the simplicity of the New Testament church where they gathered, sang hymns, prayed to God, and proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

Second, the power of the papacy grew and enlarged with the passing of time, and the departures from the New Testament order multiplied. There was the development of a "*monarchial episcopacy*," as historians describe it, in which bishops assumed more and more power. Even today, there is a need for elders or bishops to take heed unto themselves (Acts 20:28-31), knowing that the apostasy arose from among "*your own selves*." There eventually came to be five powerful centers for religious influence—Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem. This number was eventually reduced to the two most powerful, Rome and Constantinople, with Rome

ultimately becoming pre-eminent. The Bishop of Rome proclaimed himself the “*Universal Bishop*,” and the office of the pope was thereby established. Even though the Catholic Church designates the apostle Peter as the first pope, there is no New Testament evidence that Peter was a pope or that such an office existed in the first century. Neither is there proof that there would ever be “*successors*” to the apostles of Christ. In 588 A.D., John the Faster of Constantinople claimed the title of world bishop, but this move was opposed by Gregory I, known as Gregory the Great, in Rome. In 606 A.D., Boniface III took the title of Universal Bishop in Rome and thus became the first pope in fact.

Third, the papacy became a powerful political force in the world. Innocent III, who ruled as pope from 1198 to 1216, believed the pope was supreme over all kings and princes and that they derived their authority from him. “*Innocent III told the princes of Europe that the papacy was like the sun, while kings were like the moon. As the moon received its light from the sun, so kings derived their powers from the pope*” (Shelley, 185).

Fourth, with prominence and power at hand, the papacy also manifested signs of greed and immorality. John XII, who was pope from 955 to 964, gratified “*his unbridled pleasures, and the Lateran Palace became a real bordello, with the pope surrounded by beautiful women and handsome boys in a depraved lifestyle completely at variance with his ecclesiastical duties*” (Rendina, 226).

Fifth, the Catholic Church promoted the sale of indulgences as a means to raise money. Leo X, who was pope from 1513 to 1521, authorized the sale of indulgences in order to secure funds for the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. He commissioned a priest named John Tetzel to travel throughout Germany in a fund-raising campaign. Tetzel reportedly told the people: *"As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."* Indulgences were based on the idea that the pope had access to a storehouse of good deeds accumulated from the lives of saints who had a superabundance of merits. From this treasury of good deeds, the pope could sell indulgences to those who needed them, apparently to make up for the lack of good works in their own lives. These indulgences allegedly freed one from the temporal consequences of sin and even extended to souls in purgatory.

II. The Origin of Denominationalism

It was the sale of indulgences that stirred the spirit of a monk in Wittenberg, Germany, named Martin Luther (1483-1546). Luther had planned a career in law, but he turned his studies toward religion. He became a professor of theology at the university in Wittenberg. On October 31, 1517, Luther posted his 95 Theses (or propositions for debate) on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. The time was right for reform. There was widespread dissatisfaction with the corruption in the Catholic Church, and Luther's criticisms spread like a wildfire. He was challenged

by John Eck, one of the foremost defenders of the Catholic faith, and in 1519 they met in debate for 18 days at Leipzig. Eck relied on the decrees of the councils and the popes, but Luther said, *“Neither the church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture.”* When he was asked to recant, Luther said, *“My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I will not recant anything, for to go against my conscience is neither honest nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.”*

The movement launched by Martin Luther is called the Protestant Reformation—Protestant, meaning *“to protest,”* and Reformation, meaning *“to reform.”* He protested the corruptions that had evolved in the Catholic Church, and he sought to reform these departures from the truth. The work done by Martin Luther was great indeed, along with the work of those who preceded him such as John Wycliffe and John Hus. There was, however, a fatal flaw in the work of the reformers. They abandoned one humanly devised religious system and diverged into a multiplicity of others. We should ponder the words of Luther: *“What is Luther? After all, the teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone. St. Paul would not permit Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I—poor, stinking sack of maggots that I am—be entitled to have people call the children of Christ by my wretched name?”* We can only reflect upon Luther’s words with regret that his plea was not heeded. Thus, today we have Lutherans and Lutheranism.

On October 29, 2007, almost 490 years to the day after Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church, my wife and I sat in the audience at the City Church in Wittenberg, Germany, where Luther preached, and observed a Lutheran “*pastor*” from California stand where Luther stood and speak from the church where Luther preached, calling himself a Lutheran, which Luther beseeched not to happen.

III. The Swiss Reformation

The Swiss Reformation is chiefly connected to the names of two prominent leaders—Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) and John Calvin (1509-1564). In 1523, Zwingli persuaded the civil authorities in Zurich to accept the Reformation. Zwingli became a powerful preacher who regarded the Bible as the supreme authority in all matters of faith. He and Luther pursued many of the same goals, yet they did not see all things alike. *“Luther, with a deep reverence for the past and deeply rooted in the Catholic faith, used the Bible as a corrective, retaining those rites and ceremonies of the Medieval Church which were not positively anti-scriptural. Hence, he retained images, altars, ornaments of the churches, organs, church bells, and the like. Zwingli used the Bible as a code of laws, rejecting everything not expressly enjoined in Scripture”* (Qualben, 255). *“The Wittenberger [Luther] would allow whatever the Bible did not prohibit, Zwingli rejected whatever the Bible did not prescribe”* (Shelley, 250).

Zwingli opposed the primacy of the pope, the worship of saints, celibacy of the clergy, indulgences, and purgatory, calling them human inventions. His presentation was so strong that it engendered fierce opposition, and hostilities broke out between the Catholics and Protestants. Zwingli was killed at the Battle of Kappel in 1531. His teaching and work, however, continued to influence the Reformation.

John Calvin was born in France, but his major field of work was Geneva. He was a pious Catholic who was converted to Protestantism in 1533. Although Calvin had studied law, he devoted himself to his religious pursuits. He was a voluminous writer, publishing the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536. There was no separation of church and state in the days of Calvin, such as we might suppose in modern times. Servetus (1511-1553) denied the trinity and was burned at the stake. The civil rulers, under Calvin's influence, enforced faith and morals in the community. Offenses included absence from worship, drinking, gambling, and adultery.

Calvin's doctrine, often called Reformed Theology, has been summarized by the acrostic TULIP, which included the following: Total depravity, which meant that all men were corrupted by sin and could do nothing for their own salvation, Unconditional election, based on the sovereign will of God in which some are predestined to eternal life and others to eternal condemnation; Limited atonement, the view that Christ did not die for all, but only for the elect;

Irresistible grace, meaning that the elect are irresistibly drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit; and Perseverance, the doctrine that the elect who are irresistibly saved by the work of the Holy Spirit can never be lost.

John Calvin and John Knox of Scotland (1513-1572) are generally recognized as the founders of Presbyterianism, but Calvinism has also influenced Baptists, Dutch Reformed, and other denominations who subscribe to some or all of his theology.

IV. The English Reformation

Henry VIII, who reigned from 1509 to 1547, was one of the most fascinating kings of England, to say the very least of it. He had six wives, several mistresses, and at least one illegitimate son. In order, his six wives were: Catherine of Aragon (annulled), Anne Boleyn (beheaded), Jane Seymour (died), Anne of Cleves (annulled), Catherine Howard (beheaded), and Catherine Parr, who survived him. His marriages have been described as "*divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived,*" or, stated another way, "*two beheaded, one died, two divorced, one survived.*" The verses are not entirely accurate, however, since Henry VIII was never divorced, but two of his marriages were annulled. The first two marriages are of particular interest in church history.

Catherine of Aragon was first married to Arthur, the brother of Henry VIII. After his death, a special dispensation from Pope Julius II was granted allowing Henry to marry his brother's widow. More than anything else, Henry wanted a male heir to the throne;

but Catherine of Aragon had only one child who survived, a daughter who became Mary I. Henry VIII not only wanted a male heir, but he had developed a romantic interest in Anne Boleyn. Henry was a devout Catholic, and he sought an annulment of his 18-year marriage to Catherine of Aragon so that he might marry Anne Boleyn. Pope Clement VII refused the request because Catherine of Aragon was an aunt to Charles V, King of Spain whom the pope could ill afford to offend.

In January 1533 the king secretly married Anne Boleyn. She also had a daughter with the king who later became Elizabeth I. Thomas Cromwell, the prime minister, proposed that the king should “*renounce papal jurisdiction and proclaim himself supreme head of the Church of England, and then get a decree of divorce from his own courts*” (Qualben, 321). Thomas Crammer, archbishop of Canterbury, annulled the king’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon, and Anne Boleyn became queen of England. The pope excommunicated Henry, and the king responded by having parliament pass the Act of Supremacy in November 1534, by which Henry and his successors were declared the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England. The deed was done, and England now had a national church with the king as its head.

Henry VIII eventually grew tired of Ann Boleyn and, on flimsy evidence, had her beheaded on charges of adultery, incest, and treason. His third wife was Jane Seymour who finally gave the king a male heir, who became Edward VI, but he was frail of health

and ruled for only a few years. During the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553), the Forty-Two Articles (later Thirty-Nine Articles) were adopted which defined the faith of the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church, or in America, the Episcopal Church. Mary I succeeded Edward VI and became queen of England. As a devout Catholic, she tried to turn the country back to Catholicism. *"She sent nearly 300 Protestants, including Archbishop Crammer, to the burning stake"* (Shelley, 269). For her terror upon the nation, she earned the name for which she is best known—*"Bloody Mary."* Elizabeth I, the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, succeeded Mary I in 1558, and she ruled for over 40 years, reversing the deeds of her half-sister Mary I.

Henry VIII died in 1547 at the age of only 55. He grew excessively overweight in his latter days, with a waist measurement of 54 inches. He had to be helped in moving from place to place. He was buried at St. George's Chapel in Windsor Castle, and I have stood at his tomb. I have also visited the Tower of London where two of his wives—Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard—were beheaded.

V. Other Beginnings

John Wesley (1703-1791) was a priest in the Church of England who began to organize *"societies"* for prayer, piety, worship, and spiritual development. It was his intention to found a movement, not a church; but as the societies became more numerous, the movement gave birth to the Methodist Church.

The Methodists rejected Calvin's emphasis on predestination and emphasized free will and the belief that Christ died for all, not merely for the elect. Modern Methodists have varying beliefs and seldom proclaim distinctive doctrines, focusing instead on the practical aspects of daily life.

Baptist Churches were founded in the early 1600s. Baptist historian Henry C. Vedder, in his *Short History of the Baptists*, states: "*The history of Baptist churches cannot be carried, by the scientific method, farther back than the year 1611, when the first Anabaptist church consisting wholly of Englishmen was founded in Amsterdam by John Smyth, the Se-Baptist.*" The largest group among the Baptists is the Southern Baptist Convention which was established in 1845 in Augusta, Georgia. Some Baptists are known as Primitive Baptists because they claim to follow the primitive faith. They sometimes are called Hardshell Baptists, due to the fact that they do not believe in missionary work. As strict Calvinists, they teach that all men are either elect or the non-elect. Other Baptists are known as Missionary Baptists because they believe Christ died for all men and that all men may believe; therefore, they engage in missionary work.

Pentecostal Churches began around 1901 as an outgrowth of meetings at Topeka Bible College in Kansas and the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles. These individuals believed they experienced the New Testament gift of speaking in tongues. About 1914 they had a split over the nature of the Godhead and the proper formula for baptism. One group

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claimed a revelation that Jesus is the only member of the Godhead and that baptism must be performed in the name of Jesus only. The "*Jesus only*" group became known as the United Pentecostal Church, and the ones who believed in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit developed primarily into the Assembly of God church, although there are many smaller Pentecostal organizations in addition to these.

C. H. Mason visited the Azuza Street Mission and thereafter founded the Church of God in Christ which is the largest African-American Pentecostal organization in the United States. I attended Bishop Mason's funeral at Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee.

There are more than four hundred different religious denominations in the United States. Some authorities have estimated that the number worldwide is much higher. It has been said that the Reformation gave birth to four basic groups: Lutheran, Anabaptist, Reformed, and Anglican. The Anabaptists were known as Re-Baptizers because they held to believers' baptism. Lutheran came from the work and teaching of Martin Luther. The Reformed are heirs of the theology of John Calvin. Anglican emanated from the time of Henry VIII in England. From these groups, however, all Protestant denominations have emerged. All of them date from the 1500s and after, no more than 500 years ago. None of these bodies can be traced to the time of Christ or the apostles. Consequently, not one of them can be found in the New Testament.

VI. The Restoration Principle

As one studies and learns about the origin of denominationalism, it becomes easier and simpler to comprehend the plea to go all the way back to the New Testament and to restore first-century teaching and practice.

Think about it. There was an apostasy from God's original plan, resulting in changes in the organization, work, and worship of the New Testament church. As time passed, these departures from the truth became more and more obvious. One man eventually claimed dominance over all of the church—calling himself the *“universal bishop.”* As corruptions multiplied, various individuals in diverse locations began to recognize the need to reform their practice and to halt the abuses. Finally, Martin Luther composed and posted 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany in the year 1517. The spirit of reformation began to spread throughout Europe.

Instead of reforming the Catholic Church, however, dissident groups began to break away and to form churches of their own: Luther in Germany, Calvin in Switzerland, Henry VIII in England, and on and on. They, in essence, committed the same mistakes that they were opposing. The fleshly appetites of Henry VIII were no better than some of the worldly popes in the Catholic Church. Calvin exercised temporal power and utilized civil authorities to punish those who disagreed with him, even putting some to death.

There is a difference in reformation and

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restoration. Churches of Christ have never been a part of the Protestant Reformation. We are not seeking merely to reform an existing, apostate church. We have seen the mistakes made by the popes, cardinals, and bishops, who corrupted New Testament organization and practice. Likewise, we have seen the errors of the reformers who began their work not to start a new church, but to reform the church of which they were members. In the end, they succeeded only in starting a multiplicity of new churches and perpetuating division in the religious world. The endless stream of denominational bodies seems a far cry from the simple New Testament principle: "*There is one body*" (Eph. 4:4-6).

The plea for restoration is unique. What was the church before it fell away? What was God's original plan? Should we be striving to "*reform*" a body that is filled with corruption and apostasy from the truth? Why not simply go back to the beginning, to the original church, to God's ideal plan, and restore (not reform) New Testament teaching and practice? How can good, sincere religious people be comfortable to join a denomination that has been in existence less than 500 years? What makes them think they are affiliated with something that God planned and designed? How many people have ever given serious thought to these important and sobering questions?

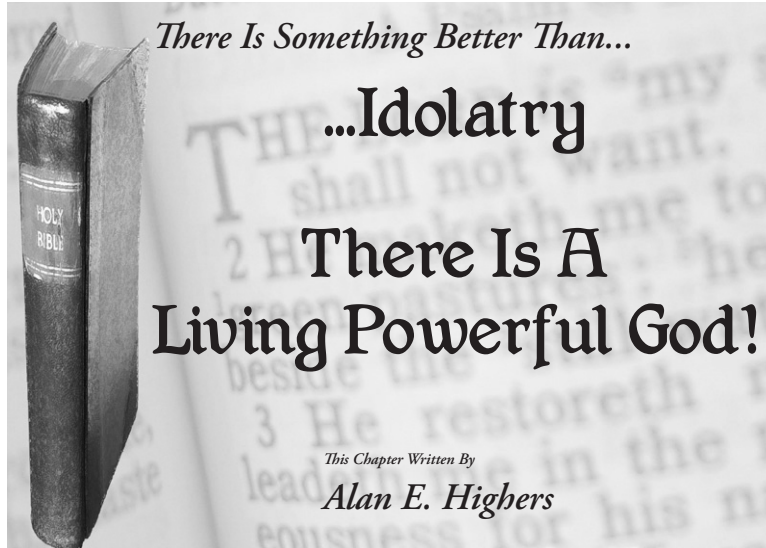
We should strive to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent. Let us reach back past Constantinople and beyond Rome all the way to Jerusalem and to the church

for which Jesus died (Acts 20:28). Our plea is not that one denomination is better than another, but that all denominations are of men. We want to be New Testament Christians—not members of humanly devised ecclesiastical organizations, wearing human names, and subscribing to human creeds. A study of church history, especially with regard to the emergence of denominations, should persuade every sincere student of the scriptures that the Lord established his church, purchased it with his blood, and that we need not be members of anything else.

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People are not as God-conscious as they should be. *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”* (Gen. 1:1). *“For in him we live, and move, and have our being”* (Acts 17:28). When I was a boy, we often sang

All along on the road to the soul’s true abode,
There’s an eye watching you.
Every step that you take, this great eye is awake
There’s an eye watching you.

God has always been. He is without beginning, without ending. *“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God”* (Psm. 90:2). God is *“from everlasting”* and *“to everlasting.”*

I. God Is Above Man

Man has accomplished many things. I marvel when I think about the creative genius of man. The automobile replaced the horse and buggy. Airplanes soar through the sky, flying from Memphis to Amsterdam or New York to Paris. Alexander Graham Bell devised the telephone, and now people carry a cell phone with them wherever they go. Medical advances astonish the world as physicians are able to transplant a kidney or a heart. Computers have made typewriters almost extinct, and email has severely crippled the business of the United States Post Office. Instead of writing a letter, addressing an envelope, affixing a stamp, and dropping in a mail slot, then waiting two or three days for delivery, and at least an equal amount of time for a reply, we now receive an email instantly and reply within minutes. It is truly amazing what mankind has been able to discover and do.

Yet, for all of his skills, man cannot compare to God. God created the heaven and earth. He placed the stars in their orbit; he made man in His own image. David exclaimed: *“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well”* (Psm. 139:14). In 1 Corinthians 1:25, Paul stated, *“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; the weakness of God is stronger than men.”* The thought here is that even what men consider the weakness or foolishness of God, God is still wiser and stronger than men. God is *“above all”* (Eph. 4:6).

Isaiah the prophet makes the superiority of God over man particularly apparent when he says, speaking for God,

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

Man sometimes seeks to reason about God. He says, “*I would not have done this or that.*” As an old preacher once said, “*Do not measure God’s corn in your half bushel.*” In other words, we cannot judge God’s way by the application of human wisdom. When Naaman the leper sought to be cleansed, he was disappointed that he was told to dip seven times in the River Jordan. He said, “*Behold, I thought*” (2 Kings 5:11), but it was only when he did what God directed that he was cleansed of his leprosy.

We need to acknowledge the wisdom and power of God. When God speaks, we must listen. When God sends, we must go. When God commands, we must obey. God is higher than man and his thoughts are above our thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth.

II. God Is Above Idols

When Israel entered the land of promise, they ceased to be a nomadic, wandering people and settled to till the soil. Some of them were inclined to worship an idol known as Baal, considered as the god of the

farmer. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a great test upon Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:19-20). When the children of Israel were all gathered together, Elijah inquired, *“How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him”* (1 Kings 18:21).

At the conclusion of the magnificent test upon that day, in which God sent down fire from above, the people fell on their faces and cried out, *“The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God”* (1 Kings 18:39). The prophets of Baal called for their dumb idol to send down fire, but no fire came. Elijah called upon the God of heaven, and *“the fire of the Lord fell”* (1 Kings 18:38). Elijah demonstrated that God is far above idols.

In the Old Testament there were idols of wood, stone, brass, and precious metals. People sometimes fell down before them and worshipped them, as Israel did with the golden calf (Exod. 32:4-6). It is possible, however, to be guilty of idolatry without a material object. In Colossians 3:5, the apostle Paul described covetousness as idolatry. Covetousness is an inordinate desire for worldly possessions. *“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints”* (Eph. 5:3). Covetousness is a dangerous sin, and one that can slip up on a child of God almost before he is aware of it. An idol might be described as anything that comes between us and God, or that we desire or value above God. Paul is stating that Christians can become so desirous

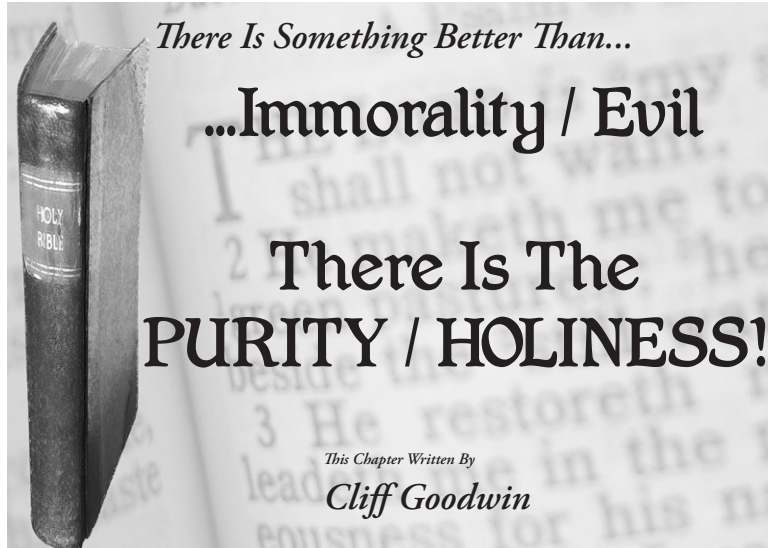
of material possessions that our inordinate desire for material goods consumes us and comes between us and God. When this occurs, it is idolatry.

God is above every idol, whether it is the man-made kind out of wood or stone, or whether it is something that we place above God in our devotion and affection. Some can make an idol out of recreation, or pleasure, or business, but for the Christian God is to be revered over and above every other influence in the world.

Conclusion

What place does God have in your heart and life? Is God an after-thought or an evasive concept that is reserved for a Sunday sermon? Let us be careful that we do not allow idolatry to creep into our lives. We must ever be on guard that our desire for worldly possessions, our urgent drive to make money, our fixation upon success, and our societal emphasis upon selfishness do not consume us and hearts so that we do not have time for God. Do not forget that the good seed, the word of God, can be choked out of our lives by the thorns such as the *“cares and riches and pleasures of this life,”* so that we *“bring no fruit to perfection”* (Luke 8:14). Above all, remember that it was Jesus our Lord who said: *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [material needs] shall be added unto you”* (Matt. 6:33).

THERE IS A LIVING POWERFUL GOD!



Morality pertains to matters and principles of what is right and what is wrong. In order for such matters to be determined and discerned, man must turn to One infinitely higher and more knowledgeable than himself. Jeremiah penned, “*O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*” (Jer. 10:23). God alone is the absolute standard of morality. He is light, in Whom is no darkness whatsoever (1 John 1:5). He has created all things (Heb. 3:4), and He Himself knows all things (cf. Rom. 11:33). When man seeks moral authority and guidance, he must turn to God’s revealed word. The scriptures are replete with warnings against the dangers of man’s looking inwardly to himself or outwardly to any other than Deity.

Looking Inwardly To Self

In this modern age, it is especially common for many to elevate themselves to the level of being their own moral compasses. Atheistic and humanistic thought portrays man as his own (and only) moral standard. Increasing numbers subscribe to the thought that man must only seek his own pleasure—morality supposedly conforms to this prime consideration. Hence, the needle on one's moral compass turns so as to accommodate that which is pleasurable and self-gratifying. Such a philosophy is selfish, carnal and worldly, indeed.

The human tendency is for one to justify himself. Whenever a statement or deed is called into question, the immediate response all too often is for one to become defensive. Arguments are rallied and a defense is made. This is seen in the reaction of the lawyer, recorded in Luke 10:25ff.

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?

Jesus had permitted the man to answer his own question, and then the Lord even commended the

man's answer. Nonetheless, this was not good enough for the lawyer. He knew in his own heart that his life did not conform to the commandments he had uttered. Instead of humbly yielding, however, and determining to make the necessary changes in his life, the lawyer stubbornly hoped for a definition of "neighbor" that would accommodate his practice and salve his conscience.

Simply put, man cannot be trusted as his own standard of right and wrong. This truth is stated more than once in the book of Proverbs. "*All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits*" (16:2). "*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts*" (21:2). Man's desire to justify himself at times can be too strong, and his vantage point is too limited. God is above the earth, seeing all and knowing all. When a person makes a statement or commits an act, God not only hears and sees the overt act, but He also sees the heart of the individual, discerning the very motives behind the act (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7). In every way and from every angle, God knows and understands all the pertinent information (cf. Isa. 55:8-9). Instead of being his own standard of morality, man must look into the word of Him Who knows all things. In this way man is able to see himself as he really is.

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not

hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:21-25).

One of the darkest chapters in the history of ancient Israel is recorded in the Bible book of Judges. Over and over again, the reader finds a cycle of apostasy, chastening (oppression), penitence and deliverance. How tragic that the lessons learned by Israel were so short-lived! The inspired historian brings the book to a fitting close with a statement that is very revealing: *“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes”* (Judg. 21:25). This statement is actually repeated from 17:6. The apostasy, immorality and overall chaos that plagued Israel in those days was due in large part (if not entirely) to man becoming his own moral standard.

Again, man is simply not equipped for such a place and role. His is not a work of determining morality, for that has already been accomplished by God. Man's is a work of discerning God's morality, as revealed in the scriptures. For this task, man is well-suited and well-equipped. Paul affirms such at least twice in his letter to the Ephesians, *“(as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand*

my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)” (3:3b-4). Also, “*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is*” (5:17).

When man rejects (or even neglects) the revelation of God’s word, he is set adrift on a hopeless sea of human speculation and “*intuition.*” Such is totally unreliable when it comes to matters of the soul! The wise man issued a warning that is suited for the ages, “*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*” (Prov. 14:12; cf. 16:25). How careless so many are with the eternal welfare of their own souls! Puffed up with pride and self-sufficiency, they insist on “*charting their own course.*” The scriptures are ignored, or even scoffed. The pleas of God’s children fall on deaf ears. Many are determined to be their own moral standard and are convinced that they can acceptably do so. From the pages of holy writ, however, inspiration cries, “*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*” (Prov. 14:12)!

A final proverb will suffice as the “*closing argument*” against man’s looking inwardly for the standard of morality. Solomon wrote, “*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise*” (Prov. 12:15). Again, the human tendency for self-justification is exposed, and those who insist on such are grouped among fools. In this proverb, however, the wise man goes on to urge the heeding of counsel, or advice. Everyone has probably been acquainted with a number of “*know-it-alls*” who simply would not listen to the advice, suggestions

and input of others. Such a disposition is contrary to scripture. It is deemed “*wise*” for one not only to seek out counsel, but also to hearken thereunto. But when should a person heed counsel, and from whom? These questions point to the next portion of this study.

Looking Outwardly To Others

Can one trust a fellow human being as a reliable moral standard? Many seem to do this very thing. When the scriptures point out the wisdom of heeding counsel, however, this is not a directive to set up others as the standard of morality. Counsel that is truly godly is not based solely on another person’s intuition or even experience. The kind of counsel God would have one heed is that which is grounded in His word and in harmony therewith. One sees this truth in the inspired directives given by the apostle Paul. “*Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample*” (Phil. 3:17). Did this mean that Paul and others like him were to be the standard of the Philippians’ morality? Certainly not! This statement is properly understood in light of another Pauline directive, “*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Cor. 11:1). Both the Corinthians and Philippians could only follow Paul to the extent that Paul followed Christ—Christ was and is the Standard! Similarly, seeking counsel from others does not (or, at least, ought not) alter the actual standard man follows. Counsel accepted from others ought only to point

one in the direction of God's word; it ought to aid in discerning the standard, not determining it.

Much needs to be stated here regarding preachers and other religious leaders. There is seemingly an epidemic in the denominational world of members' elevating such men to the position of becoming the standard of right and wrong. In other words, "*If my pastor says it, it must be right!*" It is both astounding and frightening how often one can encounter such a mentality. Is this where men are to look for the standard of morality? Are preachers, "*pastors*" and other religious leaders capable of such a task? The simple answer is a resounding "*No!*" Preachers and leaders of every ilk are still human beings themselves. It is neither safe nor acceptable for these men to be the standard for others, any more than it is for them to be the standard for themselves. As human beings, they are prone to the same fallacies and susceptible to the same weaknesses of humanity in general. Consider this inspired record:

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land. Thus saith the LORD of hosts,

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Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD (Jer. 23:14-16).

Jeremiah provides vivid details regarding the tragedy that exists when preachers depart from the word of the Lord. It is disastrous alone for the preacher to condemn his own soul (cf. Matt. 16:26). However, this calamity is only compounded by the loss of those additional souls who are deceived and deluded by the preacher's error (cf. 2 Peter 2:1-3). False teachers learn quickly the advantages of "*tickling ears*" (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3-4), and they are known for adapting their message to the spiritual palates of their hearers. This is one of many reasons why preachers must not be put in the place of a moral standard. An unscrupulous man will condone the cherished vices of his financial supporters. The result will be the same as Jeremiah stated above, "*they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness.*"

Paul knew that some would condone immoral practices, or at least not condemn them, and that their hearers might be deceived into thinking such evil deeds were actually all right. He deals with such circumstances in the following:

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor

unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. **Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.** Be not ye therefore partakers with them (Eph. 5:3-7; emp. mine, CG).

If a man turns to the word of God for an assessment of certain deeds or activities, the answer he receives will always be right (cf. Psm. 12:6). On the other hand, if he turns to a preacher or any other man for said assessment, he is subject to the answer being tainted by the other person's agenda, bias, or even ignorance. In God's wisdom it was never the preacher's role to determine the standard of morality. Instead, faithful preachers direct men to the infallible standard, which can only come from God Himself. John the Baptizer stands as a distinguished example of so directing his hearers:

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! **And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus** (John 1:35-37; emp. mine, CG).

As far as men are concerned, there is only One to Whom the whole world can look for a standard of morality. Paul described Him as "*the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Tim. 2:5), but He is also the Son of God (cf. 1 John 5:20). He lived a sinlessly perfect life (1 Peter 2:22) and is completely "*separate*

from sinners” (Heb. 7:26). Neither His character nor perspective is marred by any flaw or deficiency. He Himself is “*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” (John 14:6). The following excerpt from Colossians will adequately demonstrate the all-sufficiency of Christ and the responsibility of preachers to point men to Him.

In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words...Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power (Col. 2:3-4, 8-10).

Thus, the only Man to Whom men can look for a standard of morality is much more than just a man. Instead of looking outwardly to a mere man, when men seek Jesus, they are looking upwardly to Deity.

Looking Upwardly To Deity

It simply stands to reason that man is accountable to his Creator. By right of creation, there obtains an irreversible relationship between God and man. The psalmist struck at the very heart of this concept with these words,

Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we

are his people, and the sheep of his pasture
(Psm. 100:3).

Both reason and revelation dictate that, when it comes to the standard of right and wrong, man must look upwardly to Deity.

The Godhead is the sole, impeccable source of all authority—especially moral authority. This is because both God’s personal character and His revelation to man are completely righteous and flawless. The psalmist combines both facets of God’s perfection in the statement, “*For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth*” (Psm. 33:4). Men understandably resent the critique of their morals by those who have glaring, blatant indiscretions with regard to their own. This is never a problem with man’s accountability before God. There is no hypocrisy or inconsistency on the part of God and His administration of moral standards. In the end, His judgment will be right and righteous.

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and

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impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself
wrath against the day of wrath and revelation
of the righteous judgment of God; Who will
render to every man according to his deeds
(Rom. 2:1-6).

In the long ago, Moses extolled the personal
righteousness of God, saying, *“He is the Rock, his
work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God
of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he”*
(Deut. 32:4).

Only from such a Being could the absolute moral
standard be given to man. Thankfully, God’s revelation
to man reflects the same standards of flawlessness
that are true of God Himself. Such is not surprising.
A *“flawless”* Being incapable of providing a flawless
revelation would prove not to be flawless after all.
Regarding God and His word, the psalmist declared,
“thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name” (Psm.
138:2). To exhibit disdain for the word of God is to
reject God Himself. In reality, the word of God is as
right and true as the God of the word. *“Therefore I
esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;
and I hate every false way”* (Psm. 119:128).

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the
soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making
wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are
right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment
of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for
ever: the judgments of the LORD are true
and righteous altogether. More to be desired
are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold:

sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward (Psm. 19:7-11).

God's inspired word is indeed man's all-sufficient moral standard. It reflects the very righteousness of God and has the power to instruct and thereby instill righteousness in man (cf. Psm. 119:11; Eph. 4:20ff; 1 Thes. 2:13; James 1:21). To God's word man must turn; God's word has the answer in matters pertaining to "*life and godliness*" (2 Peter 1:3). Starvation is killing mankind on an epidemic scale—only it is starvation of the soul. Masses of humanity are famished from ignoring or even rejecting God's word. Jesus taught, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4). When man turns to scripture with a whole heart, he will find the moral guidance he so desperately needs.

God's Way Is Better

In order for man to live a moral life, that is, in order for man to be right, he must submit to God through His word. Man might seek out or even contrive his own "*morality*," but apart from God, all such efforts and actions are vain. What God's word condemns is truly evil; what God's word commends is truly good. God's way is simply and infinitely better!

Purity before God is better both now and in eternity. Jesus came to give man an abundant life

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(John 10:10), and such abundance applies to this life as well as the next (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8). By nature, man is and will be a servant. He is created as a subordinate being. Because of this, man will serve something or someone in this life upon the earth. Paul brings this out in Romans 6:16,

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

When man chooses a path of immorality and evil, he becomes a slave—a slave to the very sin in which he engages (cf. John 8:34). The prodigal son illustrates this truth in such a clear and unmistakable way. His leaving the father promised freedom and pleasure, but ultimately resulted in bondage and degradation (Luke 15:11-16). This is ALWAYS the case with sin—one hundred percent of the time!

When man chooses a path of purity and holiness in the eyes of God, he is still a servant—only he changes taskmasters! He is relieved from the oppression of Satan and sin, and is released into the fruitful service of the Almighty God (cf. Rom. 6:17-23). His status changes from lost to saved (cf. Eph. 2:5). His conscience changes from guilty to clean (cf. 1 Peter 3:21; Heb. 10:22). His prayers change from an abomination to the delight of the Lord (cf. Prov. 15:8). In short, yielding to God's word and following His standard of morality will result in a life that is infinitely BETTER! It will be a life founded upon an everlasting rock, able to withstand whatever the

adversary hurls against it in this present world, and fitted for eternal glory in the world to come (cf. Matt. 7:24-27; Mark 10:30).

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God never created nor intended man to be a robot. Endowed with volition and the power to choose, man is certainly a “*free moral agent*.” In this way he is able to love his Creator because he chooses to do so—just as the heavenly Father desires (cf. Josh. 24:14-15). Earthly parents can definitely relate to this desire. As fathers and mothers beget and conceive children, bringing them into this world by the grace of God, they want their children to grow up loving them as their parents. Parents, however, do not wish for this to be a forced love. They would have the children to love them freely, even as father and mother had first loved the children freely and unconditionally. Note the striking parallel between these earthly sentiments and those heavenly ideals expressed by the inspired John, “*We love him, because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19).

The difficulty sometimes comes in the form of a question. *“How does an earthly, physical man love a heavenly, spiritual God?”* In other words, how does man love a God whom he can neither see nor touch? Throughout the ages of time, man’s love for his Creator has always been expressed in man’s obedience to the Creator’s directives. Abel stands forth as one of the earliest examples. His love for God was manifested and demonstrated in the fact that he sought communion with God in accordance with God’s instructions (Gen. 4:3-5). Those instructions, as they were revealed to both Cain and Abel, have not been explicitly preserved for man today. Nonetheless, the modern Bible student is able to discern that Abel must have followed such directions, whereas Cain did not. Abel is said to have worshipped God *“by faith”* (Heb. 11:4). This means so much more than simply *“Abel believed in what he was doing.”* Scripturally speaking, the phraseology *“by faith”* means that Abel worshipped God in accordance with God’s revealed will (i.e. revealed to Cain and Abel in that day, though not recorded for man today). The apostle Paul confirms this understanding of the phrase *“by faith”* in writing, *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom. 10:17). The word of God is the basis of what God defines as *“faith.”* Therefore, to worship God *“by faith”* is to worship God in accordance with His revealed word. This Abel did, thereby demonstrating his love for God; and he was accepted before his Creator.

Further examples could be cited at length, both

from the Old and New Testaments. The common thread, however, that can be traced through the lives of all those who loved God, is the fact that they obeyed God's commands. This principle is brought out explicitly in the New Testament. Jesus plainly taught, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments*" (John 14:15). A little later, Jesus elaborated.

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me (John 14:21-24).

John, the apostle who recorded the foregoing words of Christ, went on to write inspired words of his own to this effect. Consider the following:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked (1 John 2:3-6).

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Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith (1 John 5:1-4).

It is evident from these passages and others that man has a most important choice to make. Will he love God, or will he reject Him? Choosing to love God is not as simple as one's mentally assenting that God is good and therefore worthy of man's love. No, this prime determination and choice inheres many, many other choices. From day to day thereafter man must choose God's path over the path of the world. His love for God proves to be genuine and effectual by the practical ramifications it bears out in his life. A person who truly loves God is a person who truly lives for God. PERIOD.

The balance of this present study will concern itself with three sets of specific choices presented to man in this life. Invariably, man's love for God will be demonstrated in his making the choice God commands. The Divine will consistently points man to the better of the options. Though God commands the path of righteousness to be taken, man may choose whether to obey in submission or disobey in rebellion. In the final analysis, man's heart is revealed

by man's life (cf. Mark 7:20-23). The profession of love toward God is either validated or nullified by the practice of one's life.

Pride Vs. Humility

Will man harden his heart to the truth, exalting himself before God? Or, will he submit himself to God's will and God's care? Such is the choice that exists between pride and humility. Often the human tendency is for man to feel self-sufficient, as though he had "*pulled himself up by his own bootstraps.*" The apostle John probably touches upon such a mentality, when he mentions the "*pride of life*" (1 John 2:16). The American Standard Version, however, better conveys the irony of such an attitude. It renders "*the vain glory of life.*" Any and all "*glory*" that man experiences and enjoys in life is only because God allows him to do so. It is ironic, indeed, that man can be so full of God's blessings that he becomes puffed up with pride and self-sufficiency. If God were to withdraw the Divine blessings in which man basks, man would instantaneously be destroyed!

Pride is insidiously deceitful in this way. It blinds men's hearts to their greatest needs. The proud believe themselves to be in a place of safety, when in actuality, they are in unimaginable peril. Obadiah's prophecy condemned the pride of Edom, saying,

The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee,
thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock,
whose habitation is high; that saith in his
heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?

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Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and
though thou set thy nest among the stars,
thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD
(Obad. 3-4).

Simply put, there is no future in one's being proud. The self-deception inherent therein makes one unresponsive to the danger that inevitably approaches. On more than one occasion Solomon warned of the downfall coming to the proud. "*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall*" (Prov. 16:18; cf. 18:12; 29:23).

Both the ugliness and foolishness of pride can be seen in what it does to a person's relationships with God and fellow-man. Before God, the proud are insolent and rebellious. They actually believe (at least in practice) that they do not need God. "*The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts*" (Psm. 10:4; cf. ASV). Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of ancient Babylon, learned the folly of pride the hard way. Daniel provides this inspired summary:

O thou king, the most high God gave
Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and
majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the
majesty that he gave him, all people, nations,
and languages, trembled and feared before
him: whom he would he slew; and whom he
would he kept alive; and whom he would he
set up; and whom he would he put down. **But
when his heart was lifted up, and his mind
hardened in pride, he was deposed from his
kingly throne, and they took his glory from**

him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will (Dan. 5:18-21; emp. mine, CG).

Tragically, masses of proud people will not realize that they too, like Nebuchadnezzar, are totally dependent on God until it is eternally too late.

Further, many a human relationship has been undermined by the folly of pride. Pride causes one to think of himself more highly than he ought—especially in comparison to other people (cf. Rom. 12:3). This attitude not only undermines existing relationships, but it also prevents prospective relationships that might have been—if only the other person had not been “*turned off*” by pride and arrogance. Pride often manifests itself in the reluctance of one to admit when he is wrong. Again, this strains everyday relationships—even in the home and in the church. Pride makes for neither peace nor unity. Paul warned, “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves*” (Phil. 2:3). Yea, God hates the proud look revealing a heart that is not right with God or fellow-man (cf. Prov. 6:16-19).

Humility, on the other hand, is totally different. The word itself is attached to the concept of littleness—not rising far from the ground. An humble person realizes his own frailties and shortcomings.

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This acknowledgement, if it is brought to its end, impresses on one the fact of his dependence on God. The unnamed publican stands out as a beautiful example of such humility.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:9-14).

God is ready and able to restore the penitent, humble soul. For this purpose Jesus Christ came into the world (Matt. 9:12-13; cf. Luke 19:10). However, “*no one is as blind as he who will not see!*” The proud are blinded to their need and, thus, refuse the offer of God through Christ. James provides a most helpful passage along these lines.

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to

you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up (James 4:6-10).

Without humility, man's relationship with God will never be what it needs to be. Humility keeps God on His Sovereign throne; it keeps man in God's caring hand.

Similarly, human relationships grow and flourish when humility is maintained and practiced. Hypercriticism and fault-finding are conspicuously missing in the humble heart. Such a one realizes all too well his own weaknesses, and thus examines the weaknesses of others from that lowly perspective. Also, forgiveness and forbearance thrive in the soil of humility. In this way brothers and sisters in the Lord are able to live and work alongside one another in peace and harmony (cf. Col. 3:12-15). In contrast, the inspired wise man pointed out the contention and strife brought about by pride. *"Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom"* (Prov. 13:10). And again, *"He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat"* (Prov. 28:25).

Hatred Vs. Love

Many words come to mind in attempting a description of hatred. Enmity is certainly near the forefront of such words, for hatred views its object as

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an enemy. Malice also comes to the fore, for hatred ultimately seeks the hurt and harm of its object. At the completely opposite end of the spectrum, there is love. Love sees a human being as the creation of God and seeks the highest good for that person. Love puts God's will at the top, ahead of all the lusts and desires of men (cf. 1 Peter 4:2). Man is again confronted with a decision. Will he live a life characterized by love for God and man, or will he choose the dark, sinister alternative?

Hatred toward God is simply inexcusable. Would man hate the benevolent hand that formed him, that sustains him even yet, and that has provided every spiritual need in Christ Jesus? The devil thrills at the prospect of such a foolish and rebellious decision. In fact, he goes so far as to plant seeds of doubt and suspicion in the hearts of men, lying to them concerning their Creator. This he did all the way back in the Garden of Eden. He caused Eve to think suspiciously toward God, as though He were trying to keep something profitable and pleasurable from her and her husband (Gen. 3:1-6). The devil is truly a liar, slanderer and murderer from the beginning (cf. John 8:44). Man must ever be on guard against Satan's ploys and deceptions. Any representation of God that casts any doubt whatsoever on His nature and fidelity is surely a misrepresentation and is surely of the devil! Man proves foolish indeed when he chooses to believe a lie concerning his Creator, instead of accepting the truth that is provided by revelation and understood by simple reason.

Ironically, many who would shudder at the thought of hating God have no problem whatsoever harboring hatred in their hearts toward fellow-man. These understand love as a privilege that must be earned; therefore, anyone who is hateful, mean or spiteful is simply deemed unlovable. This kind of mentality tends to view all such people as enemies and excuses the conscience for one's hating them and excluding them from the benevolent offers that love would provide. Obviously a similar doctrine was taught among the Jews of Jesus' day, which doctrine Jesus refuted.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matt. 5:43-44).

Jesus knew that love is not a privilege to be earned. Love is to be freely bestowed on all of Adam's race—on as many as are made in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; James 3:9). God gave man intrinsic value and worth, when He made him in His own image. Man is endowed with an immortal soul and with the capability of exercising volition within that soul. Within every human being lies the potential for good, inasmuch as man will seek his Creator and seek His will (cf. Acts 17:26-28). For these reasons Jesus taught the pretentious lawyer that every human being is a "*neighbor*" (Luke 10:25-37).

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Though one must strive to love fellow-man in general, the scriptures enjoin a special love between the children of God. Peter brings this out by a distinction made in what are known as the "*Christian graces.*"

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness **brotherly kindness**; and to **brotherly kindness** charity (2 Peter 1:5-7; emp. mine, CG).

Charity, or love, is to be extended to all men, but among Christians there is a further bond, a special relationship. The New Testament is replete with this doctrine.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another (Rom. 12:10).

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another (Gal. 5:13).

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more (1 Thes. 4:9-10).

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Peter 1:22).

The above list could go on and on. As God's love has redeemed His children, bringing them into His own family (cf. Eph. 3:15), so He desires and demands that His children love one another. There is simply no excuse for Christians to do otherwise. In fact, John states simply and plainly that one cannot love God without loving God's children.

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him (1 John 4:20—5:1).

Greed Vs. Generosity

This final pairing has been reserved until last because the author sees a progression through this series of choices. One is not going to be generous and giving, unless and until he loves as he ought. One is not going to love as he ought, unless and until he humbles himself before his Creator and chooses His ways over the world's. A person must be willing to conform his will to that of God's.

God definitely wants man to be beneficent and

giving. He teaches this by both example and precept. God is the One Who freely gives His children all things necessary to their salvation (cf. Rom. 8:32). James writes that *“every good gift and every perfect gift is from above”* (James 1:17). Paul adds that God *“giveth us richly all things to enjoy”* (1 Tim. 6:17). God even gives to His enemies. In teaching the multitudes to love their enemies, Jesus said, *“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust”* (Matt. 5:45). There is no question—God is indeed a giving God! He even gave the unspeakable gift of His only begotten Son (John 3:16; cf. 2 Cor. 9:15).

Jesus, in turn, freely gave Himself. Yes, He was sent by the Father, but at the same time, He voluntarily laid down His life for all men (John 10:17-18). In giving His own life, He exemplified the principle expressed by Paul, *“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others”* (Phil. 2:4). Christ’s death was certainly not for His own benefit! He was giving His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). Man cannot look to Deity without seeing the supreme example of giving and generosity. Man would be nothing and have nothing (especially hope!) without all that God and Christ have given to him.

The Godhead desires that man learn to give. This virtue is inculcated throughout the scriptures. *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). Giving is one practice in which man so closely

imitates the practice of God Himself. Put another way, in giving, man becomes more like God! God is pleased to see His children imitating His ways and cultivating His nature in their hearts (Eph. 5:1; cf. Heb. 13:16). Thus, the Bible teaches repeatedly concerning the blessings and benefits of giving.

He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour (Psm. 112:9).

The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself (Prov. 11:25).

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work (2 Cor. 9:6-8).

For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:16-19).

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However, man learns both positively and negatively. For this reason, the Bible teaches not only the blessedness associated with giving, but also the curses associated with greed. Solomon offers the following by inspiration.

There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty (Prov. 11:24).

He goes on to write that, *“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity”* (Eccl. 5:10). Money is really no more than a tool. It is intended to be used to effect desirable and beneficial ends. When this is kept in perspective, man is able to possess his possessions and profit thereby—both physically and spiritually. However, if man fails to view money as merely a tool, he is susceptible to being possessed by his own possessions! Such a one trusts in his riches, as though wealth ensures that everything will be alright. Jesus and His apostles taught against this attitude (cf. Mark 10:24; 1 Tim. 6:17).

Wrong attitudes toward money (especially greed) will cause people to do some terrible things. Paul wrote,

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and

pierced themselves through with many sorrows
(1 Tim. 6:9-10).

Greed will cause one to wrong others, even stealing from them if necessary (cf. James 5:1-6). It will cause one to neglect and even abuse the physical body in unrelenting efforts at wealth and prosperity. Marriages are ended and families broken up because couples greedily pursue careers to the neglect of a “*home life*.” The list goes on and on. Greed takes countless people down a road that proves to be truly miserable.

Many tend to think of greed as merely a character flaw—a little vice that can be expected in people. The scriptures, however, present greed in a different light. Greed will keep a person out of heaven. Paul wrote by inspiration,

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience (Eph. 5:5-6).

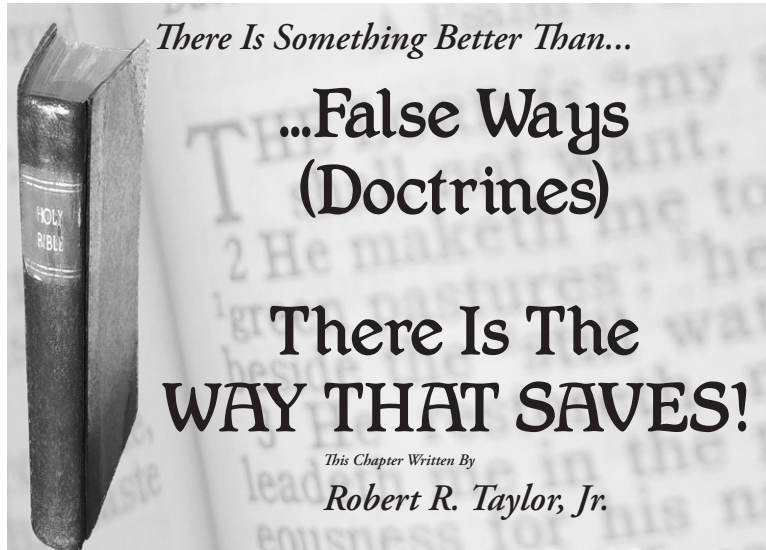
Man is better served by far to learn the grace of giving, than to perish eternally on account of greed.

Conclusion

Which will it be? One has the ability to choose between God’s ways and the ways of the world. One may initially make this decision in broad, general terms, but such a decision will have to manifest

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itself in specific, everyday decisions. Will it be pride or humility? Will it be hatred or love? Greed or generosity? As one chooses, the soul hangs in the balance.



Introduction

Counting this current one I have had the distinct pleasure of speaking on twenty of these twenty-two lectureships. Each one has been a delight and honor. This one is surely no exception. Many thanks to the elders, Paul, Robert and all precious people of East Hill for the appreciated invitation to speak on this one and pen a chapter for the book. The lectureship volumes here at East Hill are a valued part of my library. They offer great research material on topics many.

Error has been here since Genesis 3. It has never disappeared but has expanded with every passing generation. It is my studied judgment that we face more error, religious and secular, than any generation of the past. All of it can be laid at the feet of Satan and his willing imps on earth. He, as a wolf, walks about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

He won the battle with Adam and Eve but lost decisively with the Conquering Christ in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. We battle him daily. He never takes a vacation from seeking to destroy us with hell as future destinations for him and for us if we follow him.

The Way Of Faith Is Better Than Unbelief

The family of unbelief is inclusive of atheism, agnosticism and infidelity. Twice in Psalm 14:1 and 53:1, we are told that he is a fool who denies the existence of Jehovah God. Fool here derives from the Hebrew word **nabal** which means empty person—empty of head, heart and hand. Why should any of our young people in a college classroom allow and empty-headed, empty-hearted and empty-handed professor to destroy a lifetime of faith in God, Christ, the Bible, the truth, the church and even heaven itself. Yet they have and usually in less than one semester. Sometimes they do it in less than one week! This is amazingly amazing that such could happen and does happen in countless cases.

Unbelief causes people to depart from God (Heb. 3:12). It is the *“sin which doth so easily beset us”* (Heb. 12:1). Hell, at last, is the price one pays for dying an unbeliever (Rev. 21:8). Unless we believe in Christ, heaven’s door will never stand ajar for any of us (John 8:21, 24).

The better way is that of salvation. Obedience is heaven’s prescribed way for its ardent attainment

(Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9; 1 Peter 1:22; James 1:25; Rev. 22:14). Why choose Satan over the Savior, gold over God, gadgets over the gospel and trivia over truth? Why choose error and damnation over saving truth and heavenly salvation in yonder's world?

The Way Of Salvation Over Modernism

Cain was a modernist in the early morning of time (Gen. 4; 1 John 3:12; Jude 11). So were Noah's peers in Genesis 6. So were the sexually perverted in Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. So were the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus-Deuteronomy). So were the defiant ones God's faithful Seers sought to save from Samuel's time to Malachi's era. So were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Judaizers and Gnostics in the New Testament. Some of them might have given lip service to the reality of miracles and inspired Scripture but they denied such in language and life, in motive and mission and in precept and practice. Like those in Matthew 23, *"they say, and do not"* (verse 3).

Modernism denies miracles (John 20:30-31). It denies inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). It denies the exclusive nature of binding, narrow truth (John 8:32).

Salvation is by far superior to the tenets of modernism. Modernism has no time or respect for the gospel plan of salvation—hearing, faith, repentance, confession and baptism (Rom. 10:17; Acts 16:31; 17:30; 8:37; 2:38; 22:16). It has no

respect for God's second law of pardon (Acts 8:22; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9). It has no time or respect for worship, work, watching and waiting—four great W's inculcated within Sacred Scripture.

Modernism has been tried and been found wanting among all its adherents. Modernists sail a sinking ship. It will be their Titanic! They espouse a cause that leads straight to Gehenna or eternal hell. There is not one iota of good or worth in the whole realm of lethal modernism.

The Way Of Salvation Over Postmodernism

This is the new kid on the block. It is the popular fad of the unthinking and illogical masses of our day. Reason is waived aside in its eager acceptance. Men have gone mad over it. What folly!

Postmodernism is a total rejection of absolute truth. Such is minus profit or pleasure. To them everything is relevant. No standards of right or wrong exist except in their warped ways of thinking. Each person decides for himself. Each person crafts his own religion and lifestyle. No outside source, God and the Bible, has any say in this crafting process. Postmodernists are tolerant of everyone except those who are intolerant of damnable error. To contend that truth can be known is a gigantic NO NO to them. They refuse to have any part of such.

Postmodernism is an enemy of every fundamental fact of truth. Truth is attainable (Prov. 23:23). Truth

is knowable. Jesus declared, *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32). The late and lamented Franklin Camp used to say with force and finality. *“We can know, that we know, that we know the truth.”* The book of 1 John attests to this in all of its five chapters. How could truth be rightly divided or handled aright unless it can be known (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV and ASV)? Jesus said in John 17:17, *“Sanctify them through the truth: thy word is truth.”* In Pilate’s presence Jesus declared Himself to be the very essence of truth (John 18:38). He came to bear witness of truth. John says that *“grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”* (John 1:17).

The way of salvation is readily attainable, knowable and absolute truth—not fickle and every changing as is postmodernism.

The Way Of Salvation Versus Islam

The complete and perfect Bible was here by A.D. 96. It would be centuries before Mohammed was born, his Quran was written or the first breath of the Islamic religion occurred. Allah is not Jehovah, the God of the Bible; the Quran is boring, has NO divine credentials and is not worth the paper on which it is written. Salvation **cannot** be found in the Quran! Mohammed and the Messiah are poles apart in character, conduct and content of messages each gave to the world. The former system was human through and through; the latter was/is divine through and through. Christianity has a Risen Redeemer now reigning at Jehovah’s right hand in glory. Islam has a dead leader who knew

no resurrection and reigns at no one's right hand.

The way of salvation and the power to get to heaven at last are biblically-based—not Islamic produced.

The Way Of Salvation Versus Mormanism

Mormanism is a man-made religion that began in the nineteenth century—not the first as did Christianity. Joseph Smith was its founder—not Jesus Christ—not Jehovah God. Jesus Christ is the founder of Christianity and it is an exclusive religion allowing no rivals. Joseph Smith and Jesus Christ are poles apart in character, conduct and content of messages each one gave to the world. The Book of Mormon and the Bible are poles apart. Yet, a young Mormon missionary, claiming to be an “*elder*,” once sat in my home and told me face-to-face, “*The Book of Mormon is the most perfect book the world has ever known.*” When I chided him for making such a reckless statement and reminded him of what his statement did to the Bible, he did not retract as much as a fractional inch. In that same afternoon of study he defended Smith for saying in Alma 7:10 that Jesus was born in Jerusalem—not Bethlehem. He said the two towns were close together and the matter was of no consequence. I told him I knew exactly how far they were apart and had traveled the distance between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. When I asked if they thought Smith and Brigham Young were right in having a multitude of mates, neither one thought they were wrong in their polygamy. I found this to

be amazingly amazing in view of the emphasis they give on the home.

Mormonism teaches another so-called gospel and falls under the heavy condemnation of Galatians 1:6-9. Likewise, the Book of Mormon falls under the strong words of John in Revelation 22:18-19 as well as Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32 and Proverbs 30:6 by Old Testament penmen.

Salvation is found in Christ and the gospel—not in the Book of Mormon or the Pearl of Great Price.

The Way Of Salvation Versus Faith-Only

James spells out in definitive fashion what is so lethal about the faith-only ism (James 2:14-26). Paul does more of the same in Hebrews 11. Faith-only will not fit Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16 or Luke 24:47. Every Scriptural reference to gospel obedience is a signal refutation of faith-only. Martin Luther was wrong in accepting and promoting it with force. Article Nine of the Methodist Confessional of Faith is wrong in affirming that faith-only is a most wholesome doctrine and filled with comfort. It bats out in both of these departments. Faith-only cannot be better than gospel obedience. The former is fatal; the latter is fundamental.

Every New Testament passage inculcating obedience is a standing refutation to deadly faith-only (cf. Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46; Rom. 6:17-18; Heb. 5:8-9; Rev. 22:14).

The Way Of Salvation Versus Grace-Only

Change Agents among us have had a field day in stressing, “*We are saved by grace-only plus nothing.*” Sometimes they will say, “*We are saved by grace-only plus faith-only.*” These are exclusive and contradictory of each other. Neither one allows the other. If by grace-only, faith is excluded; if by faith-only, grace is excluded. Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris took the view in their book, *The Second Incarnation*, that “*We do not contribute one whit to our salvation*” (p. 207). When I finished the 245 pages of that book on August 21, 1992, I wrote on the back page, “*A dangerous, disappointing and devious document. There is error on almost every page and surely in the eleven chapters.*” This is where grace-only took these two men in their plunge into apostasy.

We are saved by grace and faith as per Paul in Ephesians 2:8. Works are surely included as Paul made manifest in Ephesians 2:10 which is the very context of Ephesians 2:8. The third verse that Paul wrote for the New Testament linked work and faith and labor and love (1 Thes. 1:3).

Grace-only demands Universalism. Paul affirms in Titus 2:11-12 that God’s grace has appeared to all. If God saves one person by grace-only, He obligates Himself to save all by grace-only since He is no respecter of persons as per Acts 10:34-35, Romans 2:11 and 1 Peter 1:17.

Grace-only lulls people into inactivity and thus is a damnable doctrine of egregious proportions.

We are saved by grace but not by grace-only (Rom. 3:24). We are saved by faith but not by faith-only (Rom. 5:1). James 2:14-26 tells us why it cannot be by faith-only. Every passage stressing obedience tells why it cannot be by grace-only.

The Way Of Salvation Versus Human Traditions

In The New Testament we read about divine traditions and human traditions. In regard to the former Paul complimented the Corinthians because they were keeping *“the ordinances, as I delivered them to you”* (1 Cor. 11:1). For *“ordinances”* in the KJV the ASV has *“traditions”* which is a good rendering. To the Thessalonians he wrote in two verses,

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle...Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves, from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6).

These traditions were the same as the Word of God, the gospel, the truth or the law of Christ (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:16-17; John 8:32; Rom. 8:1-2).

Human traditions are portrayed to us in Mark 7:3, 5, 9 and 13. Parallel passages occur in Matthew 15. Uniformly, all of these in both chapters refer to the traditions of the elders. Pharisees were far more interested in keeping hand-me-down traditions from

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ancestors than they were in honoring and obeying divine traditions of Moses and the prophets. In a duet of these verses Jesus stated,

Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition...Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye (Mark 7:9, 13).

Jesus gave a concrete example of how they evaded parental care and keeping by simply pronouncing “*Corban*” on a piece of property which might have been used to help parents in need. They said the property was dedicated to God and thus could not be used to help parents in need. They were heartless and hypocritical to the very core.

Modern religions today are divorced from divine traditions or God’s word. They are wedded to human traditions. Such is damnable; the other is salvational. It is very vital to distinguish which is which!

The Mourner’s Bench And The Sinner’s Prayer Versus God’s Plan To Save

It is my judgment that the old mourner’s bench system begat the new kid on the block—the popular sinner’s prayer. In times past people needing salvation were encouraged to come down to the mourner’s bench and pray through or until pardoning power had come down from on high. Brother Joe Blue, great preacher of northeast Arkansas, once visited such a service in which a number were at the mourner’s bench pleading

for power to come down from heaven and save them. It was obvious to all present that none of them were being successful. In desperation the preacher asked if any person in the audience could help these suppliants get through. This was all that brother Blue needed. He went from one to another whispering in each one's ear words to the effect, "*Go back to your seat and read in your Bible Mark 16:16 or Acts 2:38 or 1 Peter 3:21.*" Each one left the mourner's bench returning to his/her seat to read the assigned passage. When the pleading preacher caught on he quickly dismissed the assembly saying, "*The devil is here.*" Imagine calling the godly, courageous and helpful Joe Blue the devil simply because he encouraged people to turn to the Bible for what they needed. He was just doing what he was asked to do!

Years ago the question was asked, "*What is the difference between the mourner's bench and Acts 2:38?*" The response was a very accurate one, "*One is from the saw mill and the other is from heaven.*" Confessing one to be a sinner and asking the Lord to save find **no** trace of Biblical authority at all.

The gospel plan of salvation inculcates hearing, faith, repentance, confession and baptism (Rom. 10:17; John 8:21-24; Luke 13:3, 5; Rom. 10:9-10; Mark 16:16).

The latter not only is better but it is the **only** way to attain pardon. The former two are doctrines of Satan and damnable to the very core.

The Direct Operation Of The Holy Spirit And God's Plan Of Salvation

The former calls for the Holy Spirit to come down directly upon man in both conversation and sanctification. This was a basic difference between Campbell and Rice in their 1843 debate in Lexington, Kentucky. Also it was a major difference between Hardeman and Bogard in their historic debate in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1938. Campbell and Hardeman upheld truth; Rice and Bogard affirmed damnable error.

The Holy Spirit operates in every case of conversion and sanctification. This I have believed and preached all my life as a gospel preacher. The Holy Spirit does it through a medium—the Word of God. This is why the gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16-17; James 1:18, 21; John 8:32; 17:17). Affirm that the Holy Spirit operates directly on the human heart and one takes away from the all-sufficiency of the Bible. Why did the Godhead even give us the Bible if the Holy Spirit would operate directly in all cases of conversion and sanctification? Such an injurious doctrine reduces the book of Acts to a non-necessity! If the Holy Spirit operates directly on human hearts in sanctification, it also renders as worthless the twenty-one epistles from Romans through Jude. It is an undeniable fact that when people accept the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, they depend less and less on God's Word. They feel and say, "*We have something fresh and up-to-date. Why should we depend on a document, the Bible, that is 2,000 years old?*"

A simple illustration will help in this matter. Allow the open hand with palm extended to represent the human heart. Allow the other hand to represent the Holy Spirit. Cause the latter to pat directly the palm on the other hand. This is direct operation with nothing between the Holy Spirit and the human heart. This is popular denominational doctrine and is accepted by the masses. Precisely, this is what Rice and Bogard affirmed as true in 1843 and 1938. Both of these giants of denominational error applied their contention to conversion and sanctification. Rice said such might be by the Word but not exclusively so. Both Campbell and Hardeman knew, and knew well, that such constituted error of a damnable nature. Now consider the second part of the illustration. This time put the Bible on the palm representing the human heart. Allow the other hand representing the Holy Spirit to pat gently the Bible. The Holy Spirit is operating but not directly. The Spirit is operating through the medium of God's Word both in conversion and sanctification.

This latter matter is not just better than the former. It is the truth and exclusively so.

The old mourner's bench system **never** saved a soul one! Hence, we have zero. The sinner's prayer has not added a single one to that zero! Zero additions to the realm of redemption do not add anyone to the church of the Lord!

Universalism Versus Restricted Redemption

As might be expected from the term used, universalism means salvation for all. As per this ism hell will not receive any human transgressor—not that first one. People of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim will populate heaven according to this teaching. Obstinate Pharaoh of Moses' time will be saved. So will Korah, Abiram and Dathan, enemies who hated Moses and his law, will be on Christ's right hand come judgment day. So will Ahab, Jezebel and Athaliah be placed on the right hand come judgment day. So will Saul, the wicked king of Israel be among the heavenly citizens. Saved also will be the Herodian family, Nero, Domitian, Diocletian and slaughtering rulers like Hitler, Tojo, Mussolini, Stalin, Mao and all the warlords among the Muslims. As per this ism atheists and agnostics such as Hume, Voltaire, Ingersoll, Teller, Dewey, Sagan and every signer of the Humanist Manifesto will one day bask in the glorious realm of the home of the soul. Universalists, for a surety, do not believe such plain passages as Revelation 21:8 and Revelation 22:15. They do not believe Jesus for He used the Greek term for hell, Gehenna, eleven of the twelve times it occurs in the Greek New Testament.

Universalism is one of the most damnable isms ever taught among mankind. Redemption, on the other hand, is restricted to the saved or those who have obeyed God's glorious gospel. Unbelievers are not heaven bound (John 8:21, 24). Impenitent people

are not bound for the heavenly realm (Luke 13:3, 5). Those who refuse to confess Jesus in the here and now will not hear Him confess them in the there and then (Matt. 10:32-33). The unimmersed are not treading the restricted way to Canaan's happy and heavenly land. Those who refuse to worship, work, watch and wait will never wear glory's crown in yonder world (John 4:24; 1 Cor. 15:58; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:35-36).

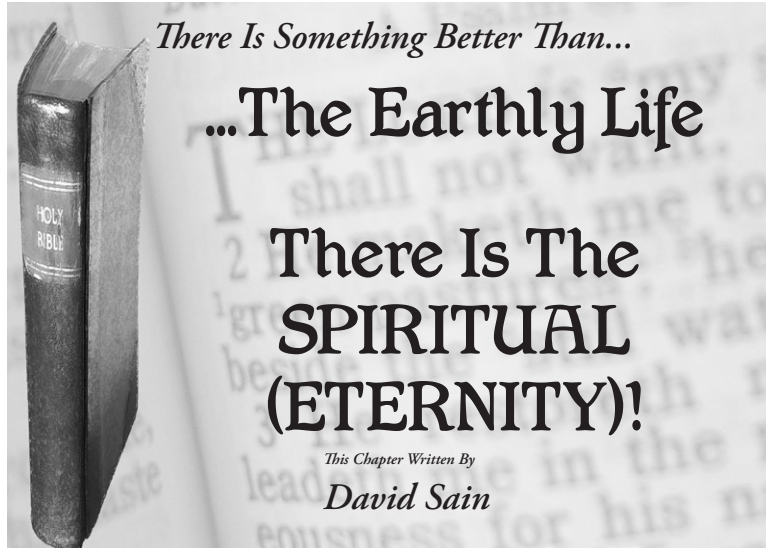
Heaven will be home for **all** babies and little children who died prior to reaching accountability. It will be home for those who feared God and walked the highway of holiness to the law under which they lived and to what they were amenable.

The latter is not just better but it is the **exclusive** way leading to heaven at last.

Conclusion

The way of salvation is marked with such simplicity. It is strikingly strange why seekers for salvation will choose the wrong over the right, error over truth and damnation over salvation. However, the masses do this. Such is sad, inexpressibly so!

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But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city (Heb 11:16).

Heaven! — What a wonderful word! What a wonderful thought to every faithful child of God.

As a little boy, I had many questions about heaven: What is it like? What will it be like to see God? What will we do in heaven? Who will be there? Will we recognize and know one another in heaven? What will the resurrected bodies look like? Now, as a man, I more fully understand what the Bible teaches about that celestial place, but I still find myself wondering and imagining about that home of the redeemed.

As we get older, and as members of our families die, and as close friends die, most of us find that

our own mortality becomes more real to us and our perspective of death changes. It is also common, as we get older, that our interest in heaven intensifies. As the faithful Christian gets older, the more he finds himself looking forward to that day when he shall enter that magnificent home of the redeemed, and join the saints of all ages before the throne of our heavenly Father, the Lord God Almighty!

The Promise

The text for this study is the promise of our Lord Jesus, spoken to His apostles just before His betrayal and crucifixion.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:1-6).

That promise has comforted the hearts of countless disciples through the ages. It gives strength and inspiration to all who choose to serve and obey the Lord Jesus, assuring us that, at the end of our earthly pilgrimage, awaiting the faithful is "...*an*

inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you...” (1 Peter 1:4). What a wonderful occasion it will be when, as faithful children of God, we receive “*the end*” of our faith, even the salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1:9).

No wonder the Bible speaks about the child of God “...*looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God...*” (2 Peter 3:12). The coming of the Lord will be a horrible moment to the unrighteous, bringing eternal condemnation to them. But, to the saved, that moment will be wonderful! The much-loved hymn, “*There’s A Great Day Coming,*” usually used as an “*invitation song,*” proclaims that the “*great day*” that is coming will be a “*bright day*” for some, but a “*sad day*” for others. If we are ready for that “*great day*” to come, we would welcome it to happen today because it is the time that we shall be ushered into everlasting life.

The scriptures fill our hearts with hope and great expectation as we contemplate the coming of the Lord. Jesus said:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29).

The apostle Paul wrote about those things which shall happen when the Lord shall come, saying,

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put

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on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

Oh, what a celebration there will be when the victory over sin and death is realized at the coming of our Lord!

Continuing that thought, consider the words that Paul wrote to the saints in Thessalonica:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thes. 4:13-17).

Often, through the years, preachers have comforted bereaved families with this text. It is, indeed, a reassuring text, telling us that those who are

in Christ at the coming of the Lord shall meet the Lord in the air and forever be with Him—whether we are dead or alive at His coming. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, chapter fifteen, the dead will be raised incorruptible and the living shall be changed into an incorruptible state so that we will be fit for eternal life in heaven!

In the closing of the divine revelation to John, the Lord Jesus said, *“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen.”* And John’s inspired response was, *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus”* (Rev. 22:20), indicating that he welcomed the coming of the Lord. Well, John’s response is a response that every true and faithful disciple of Jesus can give because, to him or her, the coming of the Lord means eternal life in heaven! And if children of God cannot pray, *“Even so, come Lord Jesus,”* something is not as it should be.

How Beautiful Heaven Must Be

As Christians, we should want to know all that we can about heaven, for it is there we plan to go. And the more we know about it the more motivated we shall be to live in such a way that God, in His mercy, shall grant us entrance into that grand city of the saved.

There is so much revealed to us in the Bible regarding heaven, and yet there is so much we are not told about it. What we do know about it has primarily been revealed in various figures of speech. In other words, we are told about heaven by comparing it to

things with which we have familiarity or knowledge in our present world. The following is a brief discussion of four Biblical pictures of heaven.

1. Heaven Is Depicted As A City.

¹⁰ And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; ¹² And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: ¹³ On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. ¹⁵ And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. ¹⁶ And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. ¹⁷ And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. ¹⁸ And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. ¹⁹ And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the

fourth, an emerald; ²⁰ The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. ²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass (Rev. 21:10-21).

John described it to be like one of those ancient cities that were protected by great walls, some of which were a kingdom within themselves. Heaven is described as a city that lieth foursquare, made of pure gold, with great and high walls made of jasper, and with twelve gates made of pearl. The New Jerusalem is described as having everything that would be in the greatest and grandest city of our imagination.

As Christians, we need to remember that our time on earth is spent as a traveler in a foreign land, and that “...*here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come*” (Heb. 13:14).

2. Heaven Is Also Described As A Country.

The Bible tells us that the great fathers of the Old Testament days were looking for a country. Abraham left his home in Ur of the Chaldees, and did not go back because he looked for a new country, a new habitation (Heb. 11:8-16). Like him, we desire a new country, a “*better country, that is, an heavenly*” country (v. 16).

The words of the apostle Paul to the Philippians teach us an important fact regarding heaven. He told them that our “*conversation*” (meaning, “*citizenship*”)

is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). As noted in the previous point, Christians need to remember that, while on earth, we are “*strangers and pilgrims*” (1 Peter 2:11), just traveling through this world. Therefore, we sing,

This world is not my home, I'm just passing
through...and I can't feel at home in this world
anymore.

Also, in another one of our beloved hymns, we sing about Zion, the “*habitation built by the living God,*” and in the chorus, like a homesick traveler, we sing longingly, “*When shall I dwell in thee?*”

3. Furthermore, Heaven Is Portrayed As A Rest.

¹ Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. ² For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. ³ For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. ⁵ And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. ⁶ Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: ⁷ Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in

David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. ⁸ For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. ⁹ There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. ¹⁰ For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (Heb. 4:1-11).

To the weary traveler, the tired laborer, or the aged person whose body is “*worn out*,” nothing could be of more comfort or of more meaning than to hear the promise of “*rest*,” not just for the body, but also the rest which is for the soul (Rev. 14:13).

In his epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul promised “*rest*” to those who were troubled (i.e., those who suffered persecution as a Christian). Everyone who has suffered as a Christian (1 Peter 4:11), by being falsely accused, by suffering loss (of friend, money, etc.), by being abused verbally or physically, or by making any sacrifice to be a true Christian, can rejoice in this divine promise (2 Thes. 1:7).

We sometimes sing, “*O’ land of rest, for thee, I sigh. When will that moment come.*” Oh, how sweet and motivating those words are to every soldier of the Lord who has served faithfully and loyally through every battle and temptation that Satan has mounted against us.

4. Then, There Is The Figurative Picture Of Heaven As A Home.

The apostle Paul wrote,

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this [i.e., referring to the physical body, DS], we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1-8).

Paul believed that being absent from the physical body meant to go home to be with God. So, the concept of heaven as a home is not one of man's imaginations. It is one written by divine inspiration. He said that if the physical "*house*" is dissolved, we have one "*eternal in the heavens*"—"a house not made with hands." And, in that "*house*" we shall be at home with God.

When we think of a home, we naturally think of a place of residence. It may be a spacious, expensive

place or it may be a small, economical place. It does not matter what kind of residence it is. If it is “*home*,” to us, it is a beautiful and treasured place.

Of course, it takes a lot more than a residence to really make a home. As Edgar A. Guest wrote, “*It takes a heap of living in a house to make it a home.*” When the place where we reside is a place that we find love, understanding, acceptance, and security, it is a wonderful place to be, and when we have the privilege of choosing where to be, home is the place we would choose above all others.

Now, transfer that thought from the physical realm to the spiritual realm and rejoice in the promise that Jesus has made to take us to heaven —the home of the soul.

Does Heaven Really Exist?

When we speak of heaven in figurative language, we should not think that heaven is fictional, and not real. Using figurative language to describe heaven is the way that God has chosen to describe it to us. He has compared it to things with which we are familiar. Rest assured, heaven is a real place.

Regarding the reality of heaven, consider the following data from the March 24, 1997 issue of *Time* magazine. It was reported that 81% of Americans believe in the existence of heaven, where people live forever with God. Curiously, in the same poll, only 63% said they believe in hell, where people are punished forever.

It is interesting to consider what philosophical

or psychological reasoning would cause a person to believe in heaven but not in hell, but I do know that the same Word of the Lord that reveals the reality of eternal life in heaven also declares the reality of eternal punishment in hell. Both heaven and hell are actual places!

I have been to New York City. I **know** it exists because I have **evidence** that it exists. I have experienced it with the various physical senses (touch, sight, etc.). Now, obviously, I have not been to heaven or hell, but I am just as certain that they exist, as I am that New York City exists. I have **evidence** that heaven and hell exist through faith. *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb. 11:1).

Won't It Be Wonderful There

When with the Savior we enter the gloryland,
won't it be wonderful there? Ended the troubles
and cares of the storyland, won't it be wonderful
there?

So says the first stanza of the beloved old hymn *“Won't It Be Wonderful There”* by James Rowe.

Heaven is a wonderful place because of many reasons. Here are a few of them...

(1) *There will be no evil there.*

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27).

(2) *There will be no pain, no death, and no grief.*

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:4).

(3) *We will be in the presence of the Lord.*

...the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads (Rev. 22:3-4).

(4) *We will enjoy sweet fellowship.* Not only shall we be in the presence of the Lord; we shall also enjoy companionship with the redeemed of all ages. People will be there from every tribe, every nation, every tongue and every color.

And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 8:11-12).

It is obvious from this text that we will all be living identities, i.e., the same individuals, in heaven, as we are on earth. Oh, what an exciting thought that, in heaven, we will live in the presence of the Lord, and with all the righteous people who have ever lived on earth!

(5) *There will be wonderful singing.* I love to sing and I have had the thrilling experience of singing with thousands of Christians in various circumstances

here on earth, but that thrill cannot compare with what I expect to experience in heaven. How beautiful will be the singing in the city of God!

In Revelation, chapter fourteen, John said he heard one hundred and forty-four thousand singing as with one voice. He said it was as the voice of a great thunder, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of harpers harping with their harps. If I comprehend the meaning of this figurative language, it probably means that the volume was so tremendous that the only thing comparable was the rolling of great thunder. The harmony could be compared to the sound of harpers playing a beautiful melody on harps. And the sound was like the rhythmic flowing of a great stream of rushing water.

Then, in chapter fifteen, John described another moment of singing praise unto the Lord.

Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgment are made manifest (Rev. 15:3-4).

As the old hymn says,

What a song of delight in that city so bright
will be wafted 'neath heaven's fair dome. How
the ransomed will raise happy songs in His
praise, when all of God's singers get home.

Now, tell me! Who would not want to go to heaven, just to be a part of that!

Degrees Of Reward?

Through the years, we have engaged in many discussions of whether or not there will be degrees of reward in heaven and degrees of punishment in hell. Like many, I believe the Bible teaches degrees of reward and punishment (e.g., Luke 12:41-48). In the context of this study, however, it is not my purpose to present a lengthy discussion regarding degrees of reward and punishment. Instead, I want to make two points relative to the matter.

(1) When we remember that to go to heaven means to be with God, and to fail to go to heaven means eternal torment in hell, we will certainly not be overly concerned with degrees. The important thing is to reach heaven!

I remember a story that I heard H.A. Dixon tell when he was President of Freed-Hardeman College. He told of a man, who would conclude every one of his prayers by asking for a home in heaven, and he always added, "*and it will be enough.*" Brother Dixon said he had opportunity to ask the man about why he regularly included those words, "*and it will be enough,*" in his prayers. The man explained that, one day, it dawned upon him that if he did not get to heaven, it meant that he would go to hell, and he decided that if God would just grant him the privilege of being in heaven so that he might escape hell, "*that would be enough.*" In keeping with that sentiment,

this writer can truthfully say that it will not matter to what degree I inherit heaven, *“it will be enough if God, by his amazing grace, grants me entrance into that eternal home.”*

Years ago (circa 1970), while attending the Freed-Hardeman lectureship I heard Gus Nichols speak about heaven, and he said, *“If I had to crawl on broken glass to get to heaven, and the Lord gave me only a nail keg to sit on, I’d just say, ‘thank you, Lord!’ just to be in His presence.”*

(2) Yet, there is another point that needs to be made about degrees in heaven. Jesus referred to the place which He is preparing for us as a *“mansion,”* (John 14:2). It is inconceivable that we could read that and think only of the bare necessities being provided. That word, *“mansion,”* carries with it the concept of abundance, and, according to what the Bible teaches about heaven, we are right to conclude that our blessings in heaven will, indeed, be abundant.

Of course, all of us realize that we will not deserve heaven, and it is out of humility that we speak of being thankful if we can *“just barely make it in.”* But, it is not wrong to rejoice in the prospect of a *“mansion”* in that city of gold!

The Promise Is Sure

Heaven is a promise from the Lord—a promise upon which we can rely. Our God is a God of promises and He faithfully keeps His promises.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) (Heb. 10:23).

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful (Rev. 21:5).

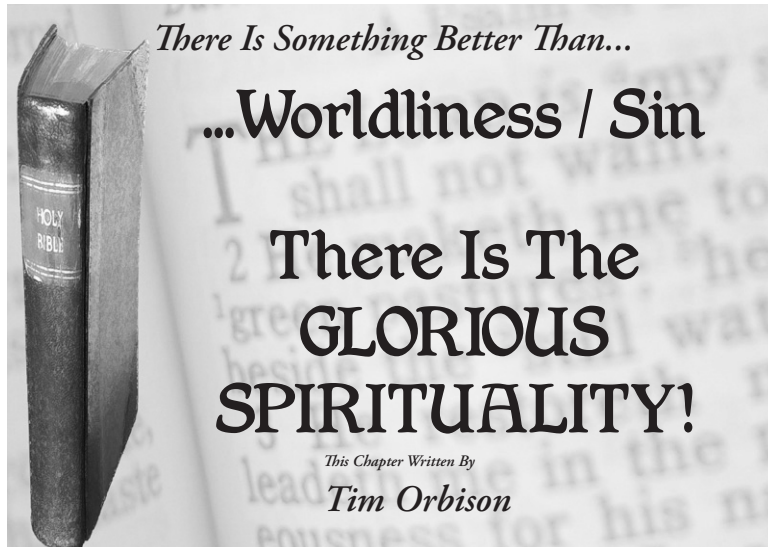
Jesus said, “...*I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*” (John 14:1-3). You may be sure that He will keep His word. The question is, will you be ready when He comes? “*Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh*” (Matt. 24:44).

As he neared the end of his life, the apostle Paul wrote with assurance,

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Dear reader, do you have the assurance that Paul expressed? Is there a crown awaiting you? If you do not have that confidence, do something about it!

THERE IS THE SPIRITUAL/ETERNITY!



Everyone has a philosophy for living even if they have not clearly articulated it. For some, it may simply be to live each day, seeking moment by moment what appears to bring the most pleasure or least pain. Others may follow a strongly held philosophy developed from various beliefs. Our discussion will conclude that the most desirable philosophy for living is based on our revealed God, His revealed covenant through Jesus Christ, and a course of living that lays claim to life that extends beyond the realm of this world and the flesh.

We will develop this discussion by first defining some key terms and noting their occurrence in scripture, second, by making observations based on various scriptures and finally come to a summary position.

Key Terms

Assuming that the terms under discussion are reasonably well-known, and perhaps have been defined by preceding authors in this series, we will here describe general summaries that will be useful for the purposes of our discussion.

The word “*better*” involves a comparison between two or more items or states of being. Though there are many specific English uses, the general use of the term denotes something which is superior in quantity, quality, or outcome to something else. The English word “*better*” is found some 122 times in the NKJV* of which only 35 occurrences are in the New Testament. The use of the term in both Old and New Testaments are consistent. It is used to describe Laban’s comparison of giving his daughter to Jacob rather than someone else (Gen. 29:19). When Israel was faced by the Egyptian army in hot pursuit, they voiced the preference of having remained slaves rather than dying in the wilderness (Exod. 14:12). The Lord used the term when denoting the superiority of people to birds (Matt. 6:26), and to sheep (Matt. 12:12). Noting the serious consequences of one’s actions toward children, the Lord said, “*But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea*” (Matt. 18:6*).

The term “*world*,” occurring 256 times, is variously used. In the Old Testament it almost

always describes the physical earth (Psm. 33:8). In the New, it predominately describes the earth (Matt. 25:34) but also the combined population of humanity (John 1:29 & 3:16). However, as the ministry of Jesus advances, especially in the record of John, “*the world*” comes to identify those who differ from the Lord’s disciples (John 15:18-19) and are opposed to that which Jesus represents.

In the epistles, the “*world*” is usually the earth (Rom. 1:20), and at times also includes the people (Rom. 3:19), but clearly is also used at times with a distinctly negative intent, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*” (Rom. 12:2). Where godly sorrow produces repentance for salvation, the sorrow of the world brings only death (2 Cor. 7:10). Far stronger negative usage is found in the words of James 1:27 where “*pure and undefiled religion*” means “*keeping oneself unspotted from the world.*” The “*world*” is here used as the antithesis to godliness. And so he continues in James 4:4,

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

And is further echoed and amplified by 1 John 2:15-17,

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Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

For our purposes, we will apply the term “*worldly*” as having to do with this material world, as opposed to that which is religious, godly, heavenly or spiritual. The term itself only occurs once in scripture, but far from a neutral term, Paul uses it as virtually a synonym of ungodliness.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age... (Titus 2:11-12).

The word “*sin,*” for our purposes, will be defined as the breaking of the religious or moral laws of God, without concern as to whether by intention or ignorance. Sin is lawlessness (I John 3:4). Sin is knowing what one should do and failing to do it (James 4:17). Sin is the consequence of our own desires (James 1:14-15). Sin proceeds from the heart to defile us (Matt. 15:18-20).

“*Spiritual*” is the choice of the ways of God over the ways of the world. It is seeking. It is setting. It is dying. It is appearing in GLORY! (Col. 3:1-4).

Observations

First, there are two competing philosophies that we will observe in scripture. One philosophy is “*I am going to do what I want to do*” and the other philosophy is, “*I am going to do what God wants me to do.*” Even in the Old Testament, we can label the first philosophy worldly, and the second spiritual. We see this as a continuous struggle throughout scripture. Spirituality is a choice.

Adam and Eve chose worldliness. Clearly they knew what God expected of them. But they turned from God to themselves,

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate (Gen. 3:6).

Noah’s world is next. Most of that world had given themselves to continuous wickedness (Gen. 6:5). But Noah chose a better way. Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

We see the struggle in Joseph’s surroundings. His brothers are filled with hatred, deception and jealousy. But even as a slave Joseph walks with God (Gen. 39:2-3). When wrongly imprisoned, Joseph still behaved honorably and was soon in charge of the prison trustees. Later, all of Egypt bowed before him. And when he could have taken worldly revenge on those who harmed him, instead he showed godly compassion (Gen. 50:19-20). Joseph chose a better

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way. (Compare David's final request, 1 Kings 2:5-9).

Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin (Heb. 11:24-25).

Joshua had to choose between the worldly path of idolatry and spiritual path of faithful service to God. You know how he chose.

...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Josh. 24:15).

Samson, Saul, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, and many others all faced the world and made their choices. They did not always choose what was better.

Observation number two – the pull of worldliness on us is much like the pull of the moon on the tides; it is subtle, constant, and deceptively powerful. It is not uncommon to hear religious people say “*God wants you to be happy, healthy and wealthy.*” They might even quote scriptures. “...*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10). “*Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers*” (3 John 2). (Contrast

those thoughts with these passages: Matt. 19:21-24, Luke 12:15-21, 1 Tim. 6:6-11, 17-19). Spirituality is resistance against the pull of the world.

Observation number three – If Christians live like the world, dress like the world, and talk like the world, then how is the world going to tell the difference? The Lord knew the struggles that His disciples were going to have, but note part of the Lord's prayer (John 17:11-17). There is a big difference in being in and of the world. Peter expected the Lord's disciples to live so differently from the world that the worldly would notice (1 Peter 4:1-4). Spirituality is being different from the world.

Observation number four – In order for the evil to win, Christians don't have to be destroyed by worldliness, they only have to be made where they don't reproduce. Battery acid is a powerful chemical. It is an active ingredient that works with various metals to produce electricity. But a bit of baking soda can make a battery worthless, by neutralizing the acid, so that the chemical reaction no longer occurs. Jesus knew that the word of God sown into all the world would change it. In the parable of the sower, or soils, of Matthew 13, Jesus described three groups that were all unproductive. One group never believed. One group was converted but fell away in persecution. But though the third group remained "*converted*" to the end, they had the same results as the unbelievers and the quitters – they

THERE IS GLORIOUS SPIRITUALITY!

produced nothing. What terrible disaster caused this third category to be unproductive? “

Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful (Matt. 13:22).

That is the description of worldliness. Spirituality is remaining an effective force to accomplish the will of God.

Observation number five – there are actions and attitudes that are both worldly and sinful (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 6:7-8). Spirituality is avoiding sinful/worldly acts.

Final Thoughts

There is a better way – glorious spirituality. What does it mean to be spiritual? Those who are of God hear the words of God (John 8:47). James compares God’s spiritual wisdom with evil thinking.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable,

gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (James 3:13-17).

Those who are spiritual seek the wellbeing of brethren (Gal. 6:1). Those who are spiritual avoid the works of the flesh and demonstrate the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:19-25). Those who are spiritual can lay claim to all of the blessings that are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Finally, those who are spiritual, understand the process of spirituality shown (Eph. 2:1-10).

There is something better for the people of God. We worship in truth. We serve Jehovah God. We live by the word. We find unity and peace. We have fellowship and family. We find the promise of the best marriages. We enter the Lord's church. We know a living, powerful God. We embrace light. We hold to purity and holiness. We find the mind of Christ. We honor love, humility and generosity. We proclaim the way that saves. We long for the eternal. We glory in that which is spiritual. In all things, God's way is a better way.

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