

**Sermons**  
**Volume Two**  
**Acts – Revelation**



# Contents

	Page
<b>Sermons Volume Two</b>	
Acts 1:12-26. The Calling of Matthias .....	9
Acts 2:37-40. The Gospel .....	23
Acts 3. A Lame Man Healed .....	37
Acts 5:12-42. The Unstoppable Gospel .....	51
Acts 8:1-25. Simon the Sorcerer .....	65
Acts 9:1-31. The Conversion of Paul .....	79
Acts 17:16-34. Paul in Athens .....	93
Acts 26. Paul before Festus and Agrippa .....	107
Romans 8:31-39. More than Conquerors .....	121
Romans 14. Receiving the Weak in the Faith .....	135
2 Corinthians 11. Glorifying in Our Infirmities .....	149

Philippians 2:5-11. Of No Reputation .....	161
Philippians 4:6,7. Be Careful [ <i>Anxious</i> ] For Nothing .....	173
Colossians 3:1-17. Risen With Christ .....	185
1 Thessalonians 1. A Model Church .....	199
Titus 2:11-14. Salvation .....	213
1 Peter 4:1-11. The Cost, The Judgment, The Life .....	225
1 John 1. The Message .....	239
Jude 1-4. The Faith Once Delivered to the Saints .....	253
Jude 5-19. False Teachers .....	267
Jude 20-25. The Most Holy Faith .....	283
Revelation 2:8-11. The Church in Smyrna .....	297
Revelation 2:18-29. The Church In Thyatira .....	311
Revelation 13. The Mark of the Beast (Youth Meeting) .....	325
Revelation 22 Behold, I Come Quickly .....	341

Scripture Index ..... 357



**Sermons**  
**Volume Two**  
**Acts – Revelation**



## Acts 1:12-26. The Calling of Matthias

*Read Psalm 109:1-20*

In Acts 1:1-11, the eleven remaining disciples, now without Judas, were with the risen Lord on the Mount of Olives. He gave them some final instructions, then ascended to heaven in a cloud. And, although He'd given them a promise that one day He'd come back again in a similar way, that's the last they ever saw of Him in their lifetimes.

After His death on the cross they had been sad. Even though He'd told them several times before He died that He would be raised again, they still didn't believe, and thought everything was all finished. But that sadness only lasted 3 days. Christ had said:

John 16:22

*And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.*

Forty days later, this ascension was different. Knowing they'd never see Him again on earth, we'd think they'd be even sadder. But, unlike after His death, this time they had an underlying joy and hope in their hearts. Because during those forty days, they'd seen Him, they'd spoken with Him in His resurrection body, and now knew for sure He was the prophesied Messiah. So certain were they of this, they'd be prepared to die for that truth. Even though Christ was no longer physically present, they knew they had a Saviour nobody could take away from them, no matter what the world did to them. And so have we. So, what was their response? The same as ours should be. They obeyed Christ:

Acts 1:4

*And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father...*

They were told to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. They weren't told how long they were to wait for. "*Not many days hence.*" It turned out to be ten days, but they didn't know that. The Christian life isn't all busy, busy. Quite often we're simply called on to wait. Can we do that? Waiting teaches us the very important grace of patience:

James 5:7

*Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.*

***[12] Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.***

So they returned to Jerusalem. And we're told here it was a Sabbath day's journey. This is the only verse in the Bible where we find this phrase. It was the maximum distance Jews were allowed to travel on the Sabbath. This wasn't a Sabbath, it was forty days after Passover, so probably Thursday. There's nothing in the Mosaic law about a "*Sabbath day's journey*." Later Jewish leaders had invented it. The law says:

Exodus 20:8

*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

"*Sabbath*" simply means "rest." And it's in the Ten Commandments, so everybody is called to rest one day a week, just as everybody is called not to murder. To the Jews, that was the seventh day of the week, the day God rested after creating the world. But notice it says, "*Remember the sabbath day*," not "Remember the seventh day". There's nothing sacred about Saturday. Christians began to meet on the first day of the week instead, the day of resurrection, that's now become our "*Sabbath*." We're not to buy, sell or work on the Sabbath day, except in cases of necessity or mercy. That's easier said than done if we live in a country where Sunday is an ordinary working day – as indeed it was for the disciples. We worship the Lord on that day as we are able, but it's still important to have one day in seven to rest from our ordinary work. We're created for that. We need that. Otherwise we'd just burn ourselves out.

We're called to rest on the Sabbath, but Moses gave no instructions how far to travel. Men, like the Jewish leaders here, often want to control other people, so they invent extra rules, but we should never feel pressurised. If it's not in the Bible, we are free to ignore it.

Matthew 15:9

*But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

***[13] And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James....***

The eleven disciples go to an upper room, and we're told they "***abode***" there, they were staying there. They were all from Galilee, so didn't have a permanent address in Jerusalem. They'd found this room, which was a secure, safe meeting place to base themselves. So that's where they waited. Waiting doesn't mean just doing nothing:

***[14] These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication,....***

Prayer is the fundamental life of the Christian. We're called to pray continually:

Ephesians 6:18

*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit....*

1 Thessalonians 5:17

*Pray without ceasing.*

Prayer is our communion with the Lord. We've got a real, ongoing relationship with the God who created us. That's quite amazing to think about. We never used to have that. The world knows nothing about this. The world worries about many things, because they don't know the God who's in control of everything. But we do. And that He cares for us:

Philippians 4:6,7

*Be careful [anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

The eleven apostles aren't the only ones meeting there. Others visit this upper room:

***....with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.***

***"The women."*** We don't read much about these, but a group of them were at the cross:

Luke 23:49

*And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.*

We read plenty about the male disciples who followed Christ, but there was also a group of women too. And they stood with Him to the very end, which is more than the men did. Apart from John, we don't read of any male disciples at the cross. After Gethsemane:

Matthew 26:56

*Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.*

***"and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."*** This is quite remarkable. Mary and Joseph were godly people. We know after Christ was born by the Holy Spirit, they had at least six other children together, maybe more. Four brothers and more than one sister:

Matthew 13:55,56

*Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?*

But we're also told that during His lifetime, Christ's brothers didn't believe in Him:

John 7:5

*For neither did his brethren believe in him.*

Mary married a godly husband. Their first child would've been a delight. He was a good little boy. He never got into trouble, or threw a tantrum. Scripture says He was sinless:

Hebrews 7:26

*For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners....*

But then Mary and Joseph started having children of their own. That must have been such a shock for them. Just like the rest of us, they'd have been naughty children, born with a sinful nature. They grew up to adulthood with all the problems of youth. They didn't believe who their elder brother truly was, even though they'd grown up with Him. Jesus would have been the best possible witness to them. But they just couldn't see it.

We might think our life is difficult because our family are unbelievers and don't understand us. But Christ was also from a split family. We're told in Scripture this is how it will be:

Matthew 10:35,36

*For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*

It's just going to be like this. The Christian's real family now are the people of God.

We read nothing of Joseph after Christ started His ministry. I suggest he had died by that time. Matthew's genealogy shows that if the monarchy had continued (which it didn't), Joseph would have been the king of Judah. I think his death was the signal for Christ to start His ministry, because now, He had become the king. Mary lost both Joseph to death, and her eldest Son to start His public ministry, and she was left on her own in a house full of unbelievers. What a joy it must have been when, after the resurrection, her children finally believed, and identified themselves with the believers in this upper room.

***[15] And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)***

Altogether, there were 120 believers in this fellowship, so this upper room must've been quite large to hold them all. 1 Corinthians 15:6 tells us that Christ once appeared to more than 500 people at once. What happened to them? We don't know. Maybe there were other congregations outside Jerusalem, we don't know. Then Peter had something to say:

***[16] Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. [17] For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.***

Peter had been reading the Scriptures. Maybe they had one copy between them in the fellowship. He saw in the Scriptures that there was a prophecy regards replacing Judas. Before we look at that, there's a couple of verses about Judas, so let's look at those first:

***[18] Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. [19] And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.***

We're told Judas purchased a field with **"the reward of iniquity,"** which presumably was the thirty pieces of silver he was paid to betray Christ. Then he fell headlong and burst open. The only other account of what happened to Judas is in Matthew, and it's different:

Matthew 27:3-10

*Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And*

*they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.*

Here in Acts it seems to suggest Judas had the cash and purchased the land himself. But actually Matthew tells us Judas threw the cash back at the priests, and they purchased the field. Matthew also tells us Judas hanged himself there. An extra detail, which could explain where he fell headlong from. If we've got two accounts in Scripture, they never contradict one another. The Bible is the Word of God and it's completely trustworthy. There are no "mistakes" in it. Any apparent contradictions can always be reconciled.

The Lord often gives us more than one account in Scripture for us to think through it for ourselves. We should think prayerfully, guided of the Holy Spirit, and He'll always lead us into the truth. We never blindly accept whatever we're told, or what we first think of.

Did Judas truly repent? He threw the money back. He said, "*I have sinned*" "*I have betrayed the innocent blood.*" And He was so distraught. Compare that with king Saul:

1 Samuel 15:24

*And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord.*

That wasn't real repentance. He asked Samuel to forgive him, not the Lord, and it's so light. There's no heartfelt brokenness about it. He thought just saying a few words would do. But Judas was heartbroken. He couldn't forgive himself. So much so he ended up hanging himself. But we're not to go to ourselves for forgiveness. We must go to the Lord:

Psalms 130:4

*But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

Mark 2:7

*Who can forgive sins but God only?*

All men everywhere are called to repent of their sin. And Judas did:

Matthew 4:17

*Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

But we're also called to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to save us from that sin:

Acts 16:31

*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

Judas should've known better. He'd been with Christ for three years. He ought to have known where to find forgiveness. God is a merciful God, and He sent a Saviour into the world to save people from their sins. But Judas never brought himself to truly call on Him for mercy. Even if we think our situation is hopeless, there is always hope in Jesus Christ.

No matter what we've done, there's always a way back. Christ can save the worst of sinners. He saved king Manasseh, the most wicked king Judah ever had. He saved the apostle Paul, who had Christians killed, threw them in jail, compelled them to blaspheme. If He can save such sinners as these, He can save us. But we must put our trust in Him.

*"The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives."*

We should never take sin lightly, like Saul. God wants us to take our sin deadly seriously, like Judas. But, rather than driving us to despair, as it did Judas, it should drive us to Christ for forgiveness, and His salvation.

Now back to Peter. He'd been reading the Scriptures, specifically a Psalm:

***[20] For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.***

It could be argued that these quotes are from two Psalms:

Psalm 69:25

*Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents.*

Psalm 109:8

*Let his days be few; and let another take his office.*

I don't think Peter would have been reading from two Psalms at the same time. There is a verse in Psalm 109 similar to, but not identical to the one in Psalm 69:

Psalm 109:13

*Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out.*

I think Peter was just reading from Psalm 109. The reason I say that is, first of all, Psalm 69 speaks in the plural, “*Let **their** habitation be desolate...*” It would be difficult to refer that to an individual, Judas. On the other hand, Psalm 109 starts in the plural, but vv.6-20 suddenly switches to the singular, before switching back to plural again. That's unusual. And the Holy Spirit showed Peter this was a prophecy indicating Judas must be replaced.

Now, the rest of this chapter gives us instructions as to how Christians should make decisions. Every decision we make, as churches or individuals, must be guided by the Lord. We're finished living for ourselves. But how do we know what the Lord's will is?

Most churches get this wrong. The way most churches make decisions is that they get everybody together, have a really good discussion on the subject, then they vote, and the majority gets it. That's not the Biblical way. What's wrong with it?

If we make all our decisions by majority vote, think of the problems. The most powerful, persuasive people get their way all the time. Minorities will begin to feel marginalised. Maybe they'd get annoyed. Maybe some of them would eventually leave. Churches would split. Majority vote is a terrible way of running a church. Where is the Lord in any of that?

In making decisions, we need to make sure we know the Lord's will, and never man's. This here is our guide as to how we should make decisions. And it involves four stages, four principles. We've already seen the first – *Scripture*. We must behave biblically.

Peter's situation was different from our use of Scripture today. Peter saw in Scripture a direct prophecy about Judas. We don't have direct prophecies like that. Also, we should never have a "promise box" mentality – just pick a verse at random and think it's speaking to us. In our decision-making, we simply must make sure we're being Scriptural:

2 Timothy 3:16,17

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*

For example, if we've got two ways to choose from, one breaks one of the Ten Commandments and the other doesn't, we've got an answer. We don't need to go to the other three stages.

So, Peter finds out from Scripture that they need to replace Judas, but he's not told exactly who the replacement should be. So he needs to go on to the second stage:

*[21] Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, [22] Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.*

The function of an apostle was to be a "*witness of His resurrection.*" God has provided two witnesses to His truth. The apostles and prophets (Scripture) and the Holy Ghost:

Acts 5:32

*And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.*

To be a suitable witness, it was important for Judas' replacement to have been with the other apostles all along, from John's baptism all the way through to the ascension.

When we think of Christ choosing His disciples, we think of Him on the beach saying, "*Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.*" We assume He'd never met them before, and they just dropped everything to follow a total stranger. But that wasn't the case. They had all met Him before – at John's baptism. John chapter 1 speaks about some of them. On that beach, the fishermen were already His disciples and were expecting Him when He called them. We also find out here, that there were others at the ascension.

So, they practically made a shortlist of suitable candidates. This is the second principle. ***Providence.*** Who in the Lord's providence is suitable. If we're choosing elders for example, make a shortlist of suitable candidates using the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3. If we're making a decision about our future, make a shortlist of suitable possibilities.

The shortlist shouldn't be biased in any way, only choosing who or what we want. And notice, they're not looking for natural talents. "He'd be a good one for this job," or "He can speak well, let's choose him." No. They were simply finding witnesses, those who fulfilled the qualifications.

***[23] And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.***

If there'd been nobody, they couldn't go any further. If they'd only found one witness, the Lord's providence would end the search here. There'd be no need to go any further. But they found two. There was absolutely nothing to separate them as suitable candidates.

***"Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias."***

Why did Joseph have three names? It wasn't unusual for people to have more than one name. But why are we told in Scripture of a man with three names, who didn't get chosen and who we never hear of again, and a man with only one name who did get chosen? I think there must be more to it than that.

Both were believers. Both had exactly the same qualifications. But I suggest “**Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus**” had some status in the society round about. He’d acquired three names. But Matthias was just plain old Matthias. He’d got just as much right to be on the shortlist, but from a worldly perspective, he was a nobody.

Then we come to the third stage. **Prayer**. This should be overarching all our decision-making anyway. All we do should be accompanied by real, earnest, heartfelt prayer:

***[24] And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, [25] That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.***

The important thing here is that they weren’t to trust themselves for the decision. Earnest prayer in most cases would sort this out. But here, it didn’t. So they needed to go to the fourth stage, probably the most controversial, but it’s here in Scripture.  **Casting lots**:

***[26] And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.***

Proverbs 16:33

*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.*

What this means is that there’s no such thing as random chance. The Lord is in control of everything. There is never anything outside of His control. We talk about there being a fifty-fifty chance of either result, but God always determines the outcome, not chance.

So, does this mean that if we want to know the Lord’s will, we cast lots? No. It’s a last resort. We always use the other three means first: Scripture, providence and prayer. Most of the time, the Lord’s will is usually made clear through these, without resorting to the lot.

We only cast lots if God in prayer has led us to it. We’d normally now say, let’s just have a vote on it. But they don’t want to do that. They’d

rather cast lots than vote. And there's an obvious reason. Casting lots is an end of all dispute. With the lot, there's no marginalised minority, and no human influence on the outcome, such as one had more friends than the other. The decision's made and nobody can complain. The lot was in use in the Old Testament. The high priest made use of the Urim and Thummim to determine God's will.

I've heard the idea that, because we don't hear about Matthias again in Scripture, he was man's choice, and it was a mistake. God later chose Paul as the twelfth apostle instead. But that's not true. Matthias was God's choice. There was nothing of man in the decision. In Acts 6:2 they're called "*the twelve,*" long before Paul came on the scene. So Matthias was fully accepted by God as an apostle. Paul was also chosen by God as an extra thirteenth apostle, an apostle particularly to the Gentiles. And there is a precedent for this:

In the book of Revelation, we've got the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven:

Revelation 21:12,14

*....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.... And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

We've got twelve apostles and twelve tribes of Israel here. But were there twelve tribes of Israel? No. God split Joseph in two, Ephraim and Manasseh. With both the tribes and the apostles, God chose one extra. Why? He just did. But we can't say Matthias wasn't God's choice, because the will of man was totally excluded in the decision-making process.

Matthias was chosen. Plain old Matthias. If they'd have voted, the one with more status in society would probably have got the job. But he wouldn't have been the Lord's choice. And God often calls the weaker. Jacob not Esau. Moses not Aaron, David not his seven elder brothers. Judah, not Israel. Nazareth, not the bright lights of Jerusalem.

It's so important that we should find out the Lord's will in any decision, and not our own. There's a very important principle at stake here. The Lord's ways are not our ways:

1 Corinthians 1:25

*the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

It's so easy for us to choose the strong, the one who seems to be somebody, the more charismatic. All decisions made by natural means. And we miss out the Lord's choice.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

That's why the Lord chooses who He does. "That no flesh should glory in his presence." So, if we choose somebody for a job, don't necessarily choose the popular one, or the one who seems to have many natural talents. If we make a decision about our future, don't necessarily choose the way that seems to have more worldly prospects. Let's make sure our decisions are the Lord's, so we don't glory in anything, apart from Him:

Galatians 6:14

*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*

## Acts 2:37-40. The Gospel

Jesus Christ told us:

Mark 16:15

*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

And we're told that this gospel will be preached to the whole world before Christ returns:

Matthew 24:14

*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

But what is the gospel? The word “*gospel*” means “good news.” And Christians have very good news to give to the world. But there's a lot of confusion today about what this good news actually is. Many people are very keen to spread the gospel, and that's good. But, whether they realise it or not, the message they preach isn't actually the gospel Jesus Christ gave to us. And I just want to mention several modern-day examples:

– Jesus Christ can give you a sense of self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence. That's not the gospel. That's humanist psychology in Christian clothing. The only difference being that humanists say we can produce these things in ourselves, whereas the Christianised version says we receive them through Christ. In fact the whole thing is the exact opposite of Christianity. Christianity teaches self-abasement. And what the humanist calls self-esteem, the Bible has another word for it – “*pride*.” And the Bible says:

Proverbs 16:18

*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*

James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5

*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

– Jesus Christ has dealt with sin, so don't let it bother you any more. Just think positive thoughts about yourself. That's not the gospel either, that's Positive Thinking. There was a popular book in the 1950s called

“The Power of Positive Thinking,” and it was written by a supposed Christian minister. But “positive thinking” is not facing reality. It’s like if you fall down a well. Positive thinking says, “It’s not dark and I’m not down here.” You can say that as much as you like, but it *is* dark and you *are* down there.

– God’s got a wonderful purpose for your life. All you have to do is find out what it is and do it. Well, that’s “The Purpose Driven Life,” and that’s another very popular book. But that’s not the gospel either. There’s nothing whatsoever in it about sin, forgiveness, repentance, Christ dying on the cross. Nothing.

– Jesus Christ can give you health, wealth and prosperity in this world. That’s not the gospel either. But it’s all over the so-called “Christian” television channels. Have you noticed that everybody who teaches this will tell you that, before you can get anything, you’ve got to, as they say, “sow a seed” first. In other words, give them money first, then wait for the blessing. Of course, the blessing never comes. The only ones who become prosperous are the ones that get your cash. What do we call that? A scam. Jesus said:

Matthew 6:24

*Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

John 12:25

*He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.*

– Jesus loves you. All you need to do is realise that and be happy about it. But if Jesus loves us the way we are, there’s no incentive to change in any way. People walk out of the service in exactly the same condition as they went in. They might be a bit happier, now knowing Jesus loves them, but they go out to live their lives in exactly the same worldly, self-centred way they did before. In fact, this message encourages us to carry on with the life we’re living, in case, if we do change, He might stop loving us.

– Say sorry for your sins, then make a decision to follow Christ. That’s not the gospel either. It’s far more than merely making a mental decision. If the gospel is simply to get people to make a decision for

Christ, there's always the possibility that at sometime in the future they might decide not to follow Christ any more, and follow somebody else.

The gospel isn't any of these. But I've heard all these from modern-day preachers. So what I want to do is to go through the book of Acts to see how the apostles preached the gospel. What message did they have? What good news did they have for the world? That's the good news we should have as well. That's the message we should be preaching. And we shouldn't be sidetracked or deceived into preaching anything else.

### *Acts 2:37-40*

*[37] Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

What had the people heard that troubled them so much? We find that out in verse 36:

Acts 2:36

*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

The people Peter was talking to, had agreed with putting Christ to death. They may not have actually performed the deed itself. Maybe they'd been in the crowd crying, "*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*" But now, Peter tells them that they'd put to death the One who was both Lord and Christ, the Saviour that had been prophesied throughout their Old Testament scriptures. And as they listened to Peter, they suddenly realised what they'd done, and were mortified and cried out, "***Men and brethren, what shall we do?***"

But we say, surely that doesn't apply to us. We weren't there in Christ's day, so we're not responsible for His death. But in a sense, it does apply to us. If we had been there, we would probably have done exactly the same. We're very good at following a crowd. The crowd was calling for Christ's death. If we'd have been there, we'd have gone along with them. And, anyway, Jesus is not the sort of leader we naturally want. To

us, He's weak and powerless. If we're going to follow somebody, we'd rather have a strong leader. A powerful, forceful man. So we'd say:

Luke 19:14

*We will not have this man to reign over us.*

So, naturally, we don't really think much of Him at all. What use is He to anybody today? He's just an irrelevant figure from many years ago. So, really, we're no different from the men Peter was speaking to. But He's the Lord of glory. He's God in human flesh:

John 1:14

*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*

John 7:46

*Never man spake like this man .*

So we ought to be troubled in our hearts, just like the people here, for what we've thought about Jesus Christ in the past. All He used to be to us was a swear word. How badly we've treated Him! Aren't we now ashamed in any way for that? We should be desperately asking the same question as these people: ***“What shall we do?”*** Well, the good news, the *“gospel,”* is that we can do something. God hasn't left us alone. He could've done if He'd wanted to, and we couldn't complain about any punishment He would want to inflict on us. But He's a merciful God. So what is it that we can do?

***[38] Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost....***

This is the gospel in a nutshell. A lot of people call John 3:16 “the gospel in a nutshell,” but I'm not so sure it is. It's a good verse to know, but I don't think it deserves that title:

John 3:16

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

The call here is to believe in Christ, which is good as far as it goes, but there's no mention whatsoever of repentance. So really it's only half a gospel at best. Acts 2:38, here, is the true "gospel in a nutshell." This is the one we should be using as our template.

And the first thing we must do is *repent*. That's far more than simply being sorry for something we've done. It also involves a firm resolve to change our ways. It's quite common for people to be sorry for something and they might even say they won't do it again, especially if there's a possible punishment involved. But there's no real commitment about it. Given the same circumstances, they probably would do it again.

Judas was sorry for what he did, but he ended up seeing no hope and hanging himself:

Matthew 27:3-5

*Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

And we're told about Esau:

Hebrews 12:17

*For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

Both Judas and Esau wanted to repent, but in their hearts, they also didn't really want to change. True repentance can only be found if we truly, seriously want to leave our sin. If we still love it in our hearts, even just a little, we'll never be able to truly repent before God. We really need to hate ourselves for what we've done in the past. And, more than that, hate ourselves for what we're like by nature, because we're always doing it. That's the beginning of true repentance. And we all need to come to that point.

So we're told to repent. And then we're told we must be baptised. Now when we normally think of baptism, we think of an outward ceremony

using water. But we have to be careful here. It can't be true that an outward ceremony performed by men is the only gateway into heaven. Otherwise men make the final decision who gets in and who doesn't. That's what the Roman Catholic church actually believes. So if a baby is dying, they have to quickly get the priest to baptise it with water before it dies. But that's not right. Men don't have the keys to heaven like that. The thief on the cross was never baptised in water, yet he got to heaven. What we're talking about here is a spiritual baptism. A baptism of the Holy Spirit. Christ told the disciples about this as He ascended to heaven:

Acts 1:5

*For John truly baptised with water; but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*

If we become a Christian, we should get baptised with water. But it's only ever an outward sign. It doesn't do anything in itself. It's simply a witness to the world of an inner spiritual baptism that has already happened to us. True baptism is invisible, a baptism of the Holy Spirit. We can't see it. But we can experience it. And that's what's meant here. Christ once said something very important:

John 3:3

*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

And this is the most fundamental principle of the Christian faith. We must be born again, changed from within by God, otherwise, no matter how much we call ourselves Christian, we've never actually seen the kingdom of God at all.

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

So we must be finished living for ourselves and want to be changed by God. And the good news is that this is possible. We can have a new start. And it's free of charge.

Isaiah 55:1,6,7

*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.... Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

Continuing in v.38, we're to:

***...be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.***

We must come to Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. No other religious leader can forgive sins. They're just men. The pope, Mohammed, Buddha, they're all powerless.

Mark 2:7

*Who can forgive sins but God only?*

Jesus Christ is God. He died on the cross to take the punishment for the sins of all those who would come to Him. That's the very purpose He came into this world. It's Him we must approach for forgiveness of sins, because He's the only one who's paid the price, who gave Himself for us. He's the only one who can offer forgiveness for all our sins.

John 8:36

*If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

And we're told that if we do come to Him, we ***“shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”*** That's the new birth. That's Christ changing our heart, and giving us a new heart. Then the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us, and we become completely new creatures. The Holy Spirit is a Comforter and a guide to us. He's always there, inside us, showing us the way we should live. That's the confidence we can have. Not confidence in ourselves, but confidence in the Lord showing us the way, through the Holy Spirit living within us.

That is the gospel message we have to give the world. The opportunity to be born again, to be changed in our hearts by the Lord, to become new creatures. But to receive this new life, we must first acknowledge we can't change ourselves. Then we can ask God to change us from the heart, by truly repenting of our sins and calling on Him. If we do this, Christ promised:

John 6:37

*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

***[39] For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.***

This gospel, good news, is for everyone. No race or nation is excepted.

Colossians 3:9-11

*Ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*

It's a promise from God, which cannot be broken, and it's free, we don't need to do anything to receive it. Just ask God for it. But very few people do. Why is that? Why should anyone not want to have forgiveness for their sins free of charge? Well, first of all, we can't see God. Forgiveness of sins, a new heart, the Holy Spirit living within us – it's all invisible. So why should we believe any of it? I can understand why people think that way. But even though we can't see these things, it is possible to personally experience them. Millions of lives have been changed for ever by Jesus Christ. Christians aren't anywhere near perfect, but they've been changed from the inside.

Another reason we don't want this free gift, is that it requires us to leave our sin. We find true repentance difficult, because we don't want to change. Don't be like Judas or Esau.

And there's an incentive too why we should do this:

***[40] And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.***

By nature we're sinful creatures. God is perfectly holy. He won't accept anyone into His presence who is not holy, who hasn't truly repented of their sin. That's why there's going to be a judgment coming on the whole world. And all of us need to be saved from it.

That's why the gospel is so important. It's good news to all men because through it, by having our sins freely forgiven, we can escape the judgment to come. We must save ourselves from this untoward generation. Or we perish with them. Let's make sure we're not so attached to our sin, that we can't escape the judgment.

Now, I want to look at a few other occasions in the book of Acts when the gospel is presented, to show that this is the true gospel message that we have.

### ***Acts 3:19***

***[19] Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;***

Here's the call again to repent, and be converted, be changed. Notice the passive tense, "***be converted.***" Only God can do this. We can't change ourselves. It's so important to acknowledge our inability, before asking the Lord to change us. We'd rather reject the gospel message altogether, than acknowledge we can't do something. We're so proud in ourselves! The gospel message is so simple, a child could respond to it. But on the other hand, it's so difficult to respond to, because of the pride of our hearts. We don't have to be clever to understand it. We just have to acknowledge we can't respond to it ourselves, unless God changes us. And that's what we find so difficult.

And again, we see here that if we do respond to Christ's call, our sins will be blotted out, and "*times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*" Exactly the same gospel message as in chapter 2. Our sins

blotted out by Christ's death on the cross, and times of refreshing coming from the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell inside the believer.

***Acts 17:30,31***

***[30] And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: [31] Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.***

God “*winked at*” our ignorance. That doesn't mean He sweeps sin under the carpet, God can never do that. But He does allow us to go on in our ignorance for a very long time, before He reveals His message of salvation to us.

But, what about people who die without hearing the gospel message at all? They're still guilty of sin, because we're all born in sin. So they must still be judged. We might say, that's unfair, but it isn't. If God doesn't send the gospel to some people, it's because He knows they wouldn't respond. God doesn't waste His resources. If He has some of His people in a place where the gospel has never been, He'll make sure the gospel gets there. He'll send a missionary or use some other means. Which is why it's so important for us to go and spread the gospel to every creature. We are the ordinary means God uses to bring people to Himself. And if He calls us to go to a certain place, we can have confidence that our witness there won't be a waste of time.

And again, we see that God now commands all men everywhere to repent, because there's a day of judgment coming when the world will be judged in righteousness by Jesus Christ. The resurrection is the evidence that this is all true.

In the previous two examples, the Holy Spirit was mentioned, but He isn't here. But repentance and judgment are. That doesn't mean this is a different gospel. It's the same gospel. But we've got an important principle here. We aren't hawking Christ. We're not salesmen trying to close a sale. We don't have a sales technique that we have to use. Like going door to door selling toilet brushes. Jehovah's Witnesses do that.

They have their pat sales technique which, given the opportunity, they go through, their sole purpose being to make converts for themselves. We don't do that. We're not salesmen trying to hit a monthly sales target. The gospel should never be treated like that. We care about souls. And that's why Paul has changed the way he presented his message here, to fit in with the particular circumstances in Athens. The message still includes a need to repent, and a need to call on Christ to be saved from the judgment to come. The gospel message will always have those elements in it, but we may have to present it differently depending on circumstances. And here's another example to show this more clearly:

*Acts 24:24,25*

*[24] And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. [25] And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

This is Paul now in front of Felix, the Roman governor. And look what he is talking with him about: faith in Christ, righteousness, temperance and judgment to come. These are all the elements of the gospel message. But notice Paul is reasoning with him. Having a real, genuine two-way conversation. *Reasoning, disputing, persuading, beseeching*, these are the words used in the Bible to describe the way we should bring the gospel to others. Not using a sales technique, with no real concern for the one we're speaking to. And, once we've done all we can, we must leave it with the Lord. We can't convert anybody. Only God can change hearts. Our job is to present the message as best we can, then we must leave the rest with the Lord. It is possible to be too aggressive in our evangelism as though we're trying to change hearts ourselves. No, we don't do that.

In this case, Felix trembled at the message. He wasn't converted but it affected him. And that's what the gospel should do. It leaves the hearer with less excuse for his sins. But salvation is of the Lord. We leave the actual conversion of the sinner in God's hands.

*Acts 26:20*

***[20] But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.***

And finally in this verse we see that the call is to repent and turn to God, and ***“do works meet for repentance.”*** We’re calling people to a permanent change of life. Only God can permanently change hearts. We’re calling people to be willing to be changed by Him. To hate their own lives so much, they don’t want to live that way any more. But instead want to become like Christ in everything they do. We are saved by grace. But we’re saved in order to do good works:

Ephesians 2:10

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

No true Christian would ever think that now they’ve become a Christian, they can sin as much as they like, and still get to heaven. No. If we’ve been truly changed, we now hate sin, and we want to get away from it. We now want to please God and keep His commandments. Anybody can say they believe in Christ, but if it hasn’t resulted in a complete change of nature, then they don’t really believe in Him at all.

This complete change of nature is the only hope for the problems of mankind. No outward political change can ever do this. No religious movement can do it. Only a change of heart in each individual can solve mankind’s fundamental problem – selfishness. And only Jesus Christ can change our hearts. When we’re called to preach the gospel to every creature, we’ve got such an important job to do. We should never be ashamed of the gospel, because:

Romans 1:16

*it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*

By preaching the gospel, we’re the means by which God changes the world one individual at a time. That’s the only way the world can be

changed. Every other way doesn't address the real problem, the human heart:

Jeremiah 17:9

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

The cause of all the problems in the world is the human heart. It needs to change. But we can't do it ourselves. Elsewhere, Jeremiah says:

Jeremiah 13:23

*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.*

We need the Lord to change us. And we have just such a wonderful message to give the world: It is possible to be changed. How can anyone ignore such a message?

Acts 3:19

*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord*

May the Lord help us to truly repent and come to the Saviour of the world.



### Acts 3. A Lame Man Healed

At the end of Mark's gospel, we read this:

Mark 16:17-20

*And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.*

Occasionally we read in the news of someone, somewhere in the world, Bible in hand, jumping into a lion enclosure, or stepping into a tank of poisonous snakes, or something similar, because they read this and think with enough faith they won't be harmed. And they find out the hard way it doesn't work. Mark's prophecy was fulfilled in the apostles.

They spoke with new tongues in Acts 2:4. We'll go on to see them casting out devils. In Acts 28:3-5, Paul gets bitten by a viper in Malta without harm, and here there's a miraculous healing. There's no record of men drinking poison in the Bible, but it doesn't mean it didn't happen. In Hebrews 11:37 we read of men being sawn in two, and that's not recorded either.

After Christ had ascended, the power He had to perform "*signs and wonders*" was given to the apostles and a few others. The whole purpose being to point to Christ. To authenticate their witness of Him. To "*confirm the word.*" "*Signs and wonders*" are completely different from spiritual gifts. Believers still have spiritual gifts given to them today. But "*signs and wonders*" are completely different, and are no longer with us:

Acts 2:43

*And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done **by the apostles.***

And the Bible specifically calls these miracles "*the signs of an apostle*":

2 Corinthians 12:12

*Truly **the signs of an apostle** were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*

So let's look at this first recorded miracle after Christ's ascension:

***[1] Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.***

The ninth hour would be 3pm when the evening sacrifice was made. Peter and John went to the Temple to worship God. And that should be our normal life. Like Anna:

Luke 2:37

*And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*

Regular attendance at the means of grace, the church, not out of duty, but because we love it. There's something wrong if we're forcing ourselves to go to church. Either we're in the wrong frame of mind, or, sadly, that's what some churches do to people. It shouldn't be like that. Church should be a delight, because God is a delight and we love Him.

***[2] And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;***

This man had never walked, and he was carried here daily by family or friends. If we want to beg, one of the best places to go is outside a church. The congregation will have been stirred up to love those "less fortunate" than themselves, so they'd be more likely to give.

***[3] Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.***

I have to say, if somebody came up to me outside church begging, I wouldn't normally give them anything. Is that terrible? Maybe it is. We're told that, as Christians, we should:

Matthew 5:42

*Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*

So should we give to all who ask? Even if by giving to one, we'll draw a crowd thinking we're easy pickings. Even if we're fully aware there are so many professional beggars around, who've got more money than I have. Even if we know most of these beggars have no interest in the things of God. Should we give to them all anyway. Is that right?

This man had been lame from his birth. He couldn't work, so he was in genuine need. And he approaches Peter and John. But they don't quite give him the answer he expected:

***[4] And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. [5] And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. [6] Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.***

Peter and John genuinely didn't have anything to give. So they hadn't become Christians for the money. And neither should we. We're Christians because we love the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts more than anything. Why did Peter say what he said? He must've been prompted by the Holy Spirit. Why didn't he heal anyone else? This is the answer to our giving. We can't heal, but we can be guided by the Holy Spirit who to give to, and who not to.

***[7] And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. [8] And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.***

This proves the man was genuine. He wasn't begging because it was a good way to make money. If so, he'd be disappointed, because his way of making easy money had just disappeared. No. He was so delighted, the first thing he did was go into the Temple with them to thank God. Jesus healed ten lepers, but only one came back to give thanks. The others were unthankful. They only wanted healing to carry on their lives as before.

We see not only that the man was genuine, but that the miracle was genuine too.

***[9] And all the people saw him walking and praising God: [10] And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.***

He'd been begging outside the Temple for so long, he would have been well known. So when the people saw him walking, they knew a real miracle had taken place:

***[11] And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.***

The healed man was holding on to Peter and John, not because he still couldn't walk, but in sheer joy and thankfulness. But the people thought Peter and John had healed this man, not Christ. They would've known about Christ's miracles. He'd been around for three years. But He's gone now, and suddenly here's a miracle done by apostles without Him. Was this something new – free healing and miracles on demand? What's going on? Peter tells them. He's speaking here outside the Temple. Right under the noses of the chief priests. He must've known he'd get into trouble. Which he does in the next chapter. But he had to say something. He had no option. He had to correct the crowd. They were in danger of worshipping them, when the whole point of miracles was to point to Christ:

*[12] And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? [13] The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus....*

This miracle was done by the apostles, in Christ's name, to establish them as Christ's witnesses. To "confirm the word." There's no point the apostles doing any miracle at all if it wasn't going to point to Jesus Christ. Peter now has to correct them. But in order to do that, in order to point them to Christ, he first of all had to tell them an uncomfortable truth:

*...whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. [14] But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; [15] And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.*

They're so excited about this miracle, but it was essential they woke up to what they'd done. They hadn't thought they'd done anything wrong. But they'd gone and put this miracle worker to death, or at least were culpable. They couldn't just get excited about the miracle without understanding what they'd done. They needed to face their sin. That's uncomfortable. We don't like being told we've done wrong. We'd rather be told how good we are, what nice people we are. But underneath everything, we're not. If we're going to have any hope, any favour from God, we first need to face reality.

These people had been in the crowd calling for the release of Barabbas, and shouting for Christ to be crucified. Why had they done that? Why did they get a murderer released, and put an innocent man to death? It doesn't make sense. We're told:

Matthew 27:20

*But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.*

We're so easily persuaded. We really need to understand the power of persuasion. How easily led we can be. What power men can have over others. Adolf Hitler rose to power because people voted for him. Or think of a domestic abuse situation. We hear of people whose partners regularly abuse them, yet they always go back. Why? Or what about persuasive religious leaders. The Jonestown massacre. In 1978, over 900 people died when a religious cult leader told them to drink poison. They knew it was poison, but they drank it anyway. Crazy. But that's what we do. We're so easily prone to persuasion. These here were persuaded by their religious leaders to release Barabbas, and crucify Christ, the one whose miracle they're now getting so excited about. It's irrational. Why do we do such things? Because we're in bondage to sin by nature. And we need to be set free.

***[16] And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.***

We've got to face the truth about ourselves. Peter tells them it was through faith in the name of Jesus Christ that healed this man. And they've just put Him to death. We'll never understand a solution to any problem unless we see and accept there is a problem first.

***[17] And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.***

Peter accepts they were only partly to blame, their rulers did the actual deed. Peter also accepts both they and their rulers were ignorant in their wrongdoing. We think, if we're ignorant about something being wrong, we can't be guilty. But that's not true. The apostle Paul admitted he acted ignorantly before his conversion, but he still needed mercy:

1 Timothy 1:13

*Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*

Ignorance of the law is no excuse. I've heard it explained like this. I don't like this explanation, and I'll tell you why in a minute. Say I'm

driving a car at 100kph in a 50kph limit. When the police pull me over, If I say that I didn't know the speed limit, they'll still give me a ticket. I've still broken the law, whether I realised it or not.

I don't like that example because it's possible I genuinely didn't know the speed limit. Maybe the sign was covered by a branch, or was broken off. I've still broken the law, but I may've genuinely not known. We can't compare that with men being ignorant of God's law, because we all know something of it. Firstly, we've all got a conscience with something of God's law written on it, albeit it may be seared or deformed in some way:

Romans 2:14,15

*For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another....*

Secondly, Creation gives us no excuse to not believe in the existence of God. It shows all men there's an all powerful Creator God with whom we have to do:

Romans 1:20,21

*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Psalms 19:1

*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.*

God's "eternal power and Godhead" is clearly seen, so we've all got no excuse. We might be ignorant of many things about the one true living God, but we do know He's there and we're responsible to Him. Whether we're brought up in a Buddhist home, or an atheist family. We're not responsible to men, a nation, a religion, or even our families, but to God.

But even though these people had participated in the death of Christ, there was still hope. But Peter had to make them admit their sin first, before showing them their real need.

***[18] But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.***

The amazing thing is that Christ's death, which they were responsible for, was in God's plan of redemption all along. Killing Him was still sin, because they didn't know that:

1 Corinthians 2:8

*....had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

So their responsibility for the death of Christ was real, but, it's thanks to this very plan of God in the death of His Son, their sin, and all our sins too, can be forgiven:

***[19] Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;***

***“that your sins may be blotted out.”*** That, whether we think so or not, is the most wonderful message we could ever hear. God alone can forgive sin. Or, put it this way, His forgiveness is the only forgiveness we should be concerned with. Men may still hold grudges against us, and we can't do anything about it, but that's nothing compared to having our sins forgiven by God. And God Himself created a way that this can be done.

These people had crucified the Lord of glory. What a sin! But, if we'd been alive then, we'd have done exactly the same. We'd have followed the crowd. We'd have been so easily persuaded by the religious leaders of the day. So we must ask ourselves: What are we like? What have we done? Who have we been easily persuaded by? Whatever it is, the good news is ***“our sins may be blotted out.”*** How do we receive forgiveness of sins?

**“Repent ...and be converted.”** ESV “*turn back.*” There is a difference. “*turn back*” is active, something we do. **“be converted”** is passive, something we allow God to do in us. That’s a more accurate description. Having said that, we may think it means we just sit back and wait for God to work. It’s true we can’t change ourselves, we need God to change us. But we need to ask Him. It’s like the man with the withered hand. He was told “*stretch forth thine hand,*” but he couldn’t, it was withered. But as he tried to stretch it, he found he could, because the Lord was working in him. We’re called to repent, something we can’t do by nature, but as we try, we find we can do it as God grants us repentance.

**“when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”** What are these times of refreshing? We need to repent, but we also need to come to Jesus Christ:

**[20] And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:**

He is the one who will refresh us. If we call on Him, He’ll change our heart from the inside, so we become new creatures. No longer in bondage to our selfish natures, being so easily persuaded by men and movements, but we’ll be free from that bondage once and for all:

John 8:34-36

*Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

Because of Christ’s death on the cross, if we call on Him to save us, He places our sins on Himself. He takes the punishment we deserve. And His puts His righteousness to our account, so God can declare us righteous, which we don’t deserve, because we’re not:

1 Peter 2:24,25

*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.*

We'll still sin, but now we'll hate it. We'll hate ourselves for it. But the wonderful thing is that we'll know our sins won't condemn us any more, all thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ:

Romans 8:1

*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

But Jesus is no longer around. How can He help us now? He's very much alive in heaven:

***[21] Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things....***

Remember, Christ ascended into heaven and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And two angels promised He'd come back again in a similar way. That's going to be at the end of time, at the **“restitution of all things.”** A **“restitution”** implies things have gone wrong and need restoring. Which indeed is the case. We live in a fallen world. In bondage to death and decay. But the good news is Christ is coming again to restore all things:

2 Peter 3:13

*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

This is the sure hope of the Christian. The apostle Paul could say near the end of his life:

2 Timothy 4:8

*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.*

And God had this plan of restoration all along, even from the creation of the world:

*....which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.*

God's plan was revealed through His holy prophets, who all came, in time, to one people, the Jews. All nations had their own local gods. The one true living God, the only one that's real, chose to reveal Himself to the Jews. The Jews had so many privileges. He sent prophets. He led them out of Egypt into the Promised Land. He gave them the Scriptures:

Romans 3:1,2

*What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*

And above all that, when God came to earth as a man, He came as a Jew, to fulfil the law He'd given them. If we want to know about the one true living God, we must go to the Jewish Scriptures. Moses prophesied that Christ would come in Deuteronomy 18:15-19, part of which is quoted here:

*[22] For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. [23] And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.*

And throughout history, other prophets came to the Jews to speak of Christ's day. All of whose prophecies are in the Scriptures. This is the book we need:

*[24] Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.*

And the people Peter speaks to here, are all Jews. The very ones the prophets came to:

***[25] Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.***

God chose Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob, to be a people, the Jews, to receive His special privileges. But right at the beginning, He made a covenant with Abraham. That was the promise: “*in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.*” So, the Saviour God sent was never just for the Jews, but for all nations.

Jehovah was never just a local “god” like other nations had. He is the real God. The One true living God. All of us are His creatures. God gave the Jews privileges, but that didn’t make them His chosen people. All who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ are:

Romans 3:29,30

*Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.*

But it was right that Christ and the apostles went first to the Jews:

***[26] Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.***

Sadly, most of the Jews rejected their message. They put their own Saviour to death:

John 1:11

*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

Is that the end of the Jews altogether? No. Their rejection opens the door to the Gentiles:

Romans 11:11

*I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.*

Jesus Christ came into the world not just for Jews, but as a universal solution to a universal problem. All of us are born sinful creatures. Self-centred, selfish, only living for ourselves by nature. We all need to be changed from that condition. We need to have our sins forgiven. That's what Jesus Christ came to do. So it's important we make sure we stick to this message of forgiveness of sins and not get side-tracked. It's so easy to do.

Many today think Jesus Christ came to give us success and prosperity, but Peter said ***“Silver and gold have I none.”***

Many today think Jesus Christ came to give us physical healing. If so, why didn't Peter tell the crowd that, and heal others? No. Instead, he put his finger on the real problem, their sin: ***“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”***

And Jesus Christ never came as a political leader. We're not here to change governments. If Christianity was a political movement, Christ would have fought to try to change the Romans. But He didn't. He said to Pilate:

John 18:36

*My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

Christianity is not about any of these things. It's purely and only about forgiveness of sins. Never forget that real message, because that's the only real hope we have:

Acts 26:18

*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*



## Acts 5:12-42. The Unstoppable Gospel

In vv.1-11, Ananias and Sapphira sold land and gave the money to the apostles, but lied about the price. Men think they can lie and deceive, and get away with it, but they can't with God:

Matthew 12:36

*But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.*

They professed Christianity, yet they still thought they could live the way they used to. But Christians are changed people. We're finished with living a deceitful way of life. We don't want to live like that any more. So God struck them dead. And look what happened:

Acts 5:11

*And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.*

***[12] And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.***

We'll look at signs and wonders in v.15. They met in Solomon's Porch, where the lame man in Acts 3 was healed. It seems to have become a convenient place to meet. And ***“they were all with one accord.”*** Christians have all got one thing in common. We love the Lord Jesus Christ, and are so thankful to Him for forgiving us our sins and setting us free from our natural bondage to it. Yet in so many churches a spirit of unity is missing, for many reasons, a personality clash, or disagreement with the church's dealings, or differences in doctrine. But even that shouldn't affect our unity. We're all learning and growing in grace and the knowledge of Christ at different rates, so we're never going to agree with each other on everything. But we all love the Lord. That's our common bond.

***[13] And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.***

There's something about this group that made them so different that no one dare join them. The fear of the Lord. Unbelievers can't understand that. God isn't in their minds:

Psalm 36:1

*....there is no fear of God before his eyes.*

This fear isn't being frightened God might throw us into hell fire. Unbelievers ought to have that kind of fear, but they don't. That's where we all deserve to go, but if we've repented of our sins and put our trust in Christ, we needn't fear God in that way any more, His wrath has been turned away, we're free from the punishment we deserve.

The fear that Christians have is a reverential fear. God loves His people and reveals Himself to them. We now live our lives in the light of the fact He's there. We have a real, living relationship with Him. He is our Heavenly Father. He loves us, we now love Him and want to please Him. But He's not just a mate, a buddy. He's still a consuming fire:

Psalm 130:4

*But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

Proverbs 9:10

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom....*

Psalm 25:14

*The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him....*

Jacob had a dream of a ladder from heaven to earth with angels going up and down on it:

Genesis 28:17

*And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful [fearful] is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*

The people daren't join them, ***“but the people magnified them.”*** They held them in high esteem. That's unusual, isn't it. They're not laughing at them, or dismissing and ignoring them. That's what we get today. They took them seriously, respecting them. We'll only be taken

seriously if we're serious with our faith, and fear the Lord. And look what happened:

***[14] And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)***

This group was growing. For a lot of churches, numbers are everything. So they introduce all sorts of gimmicks to try to attract people. And it works, but it just fills the church with unbelievers. They don't come to hear about Christ, or forgiveness of sins. They're not interested. They come because of the lively music, or the social scene, or the free coffee, or positive thinking message, or something else that attracts them in a worldly way.

But this is different. Despite people not daring to join them, they grew at a tremendous rate. Notice it's believers that are being added, not unbelievers. This is how a church should be. The fear of the Lord being present will fill a church with believers. Worldly things will fill a church with unbelievers. The division between the two is made clearer.

***[12] And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people;... [15] Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.***

Do you think that worked? I think that was just superstition. Like at the pool of Bethesda in John 5:1-9. An angel was supposed to stir the water and the first one to get in was healed. Really? Is that how the Lord works, survival of the fittest? No. The paralytic man who just couldn't get in in time, was the one Christ healed. The others were left to their superstition. Having said that, many real miracles did take place here, but by the hands of the apostles (v.12).

***[16] There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.***

So there were physical healings and also unclean spirits being cast out by the apostles. That couldn't go on for very long without attracting attention:

***[17] Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, [18] And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.***

In chapter 4, they'd already been threatened by the Council:

Acts 4:18

*And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.*

But the Council let them go then, because they feared the reaction of the people. And that was just on account of one man being healed by two apostles. Now, many miracles are taking place, and twelve apostles are performing them. So the situation's got a lot more difficult for the Council. What do they do now? The Pharisees on the Council still seem undecided, because we're told here that these, including the high priest, were all Sadducees, who are now really angry. The Sadducees didn't believe in the miraculous:

Acts 23:8

*For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.*

So, despite a possible public outcry, and not waiting for the Pharisees' opinion, they put them in prison, hoping to convene the Council the next day. However:

***[19] But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, [20] Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.***

***“all the words of this life.”*** The apostles have the words of a completely new life to tell the world about. And so have we.

Christianity isn't just another religion, one of many. It's an altogether new life, which nobody will understand unless they experience it. If anyone puts their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to save them from their sins, He will change them from inside. Everything will become new. They're no longer what they used to be:

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

So, they were obedient to the heavenly vision:

***[21] And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught....***

At the moment, the high priest is unaware of this, because he calls his Council meeting:

***....But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.***

This meeting was of the whole Council, including the Pharisees, and ***“all the senate of the children of Israel.”*** We don't read about these elsewhere, maybe a special council of elders. The high priest gathered a wider body than just the Council, to have more authority and to get more ideas what to do. The apostles were to be brought to appear.

***[22] But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, [23] Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.***

In v.19, the Lord opened the prison doors, but here the prison is ***“shut with all safety”*** and the keepers unaware of any escape. The Lord must've shut the doors afterwards and blinded the guards. Only the next day, when men came to fetch them, did they find it empty. It's

amazing how the Lord works. The Lord can blind people, and open their eyes.

When Lot was in Sodom, two angels came to tell him to flee, but while they were with him the men of the city came to the door to abuse them. But God struck them with blindness:

Genesis 19:11

*And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.*

Elisha had a servant who only saw the enemy, so he prayed to God to open his eyes to see the Lord's army, then he blinded the enemy so they couldn't tell where they were:

2 Kings 6:17-20

*And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.*

***[24] Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.***

So far they've just found an empty cell. But it worries them. ***"they doubted of them whereunto this would grow."*** They realised something odd had happened. Another odd thing happened not so long ago. Christ was dead, buried in a tomb. They put a guard on it. Three days later He's not there. But rather than believe the truth, they made up a story:

Matthew 28:11-15

*Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.*

They bribed the guards and made sure that what they knew was a lie was spread as widely as possible. If enough people believe the lie, it becomes truth to them. And here, something odd has again happened. They recognised that, and were again worried where it'd lead. But before they could think what to do about this, the apostles were found:

***[25] Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.***

They're no longer concerned about how they got out of jail. They just want them stopped.

***[26] Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.***

The captain and his officers brought them to the Council, but they had to be careful. They thought that if they were violent with them they would've been stoned by the crowd. They're really scared of the situation now. They're rapidly losing control over the people.

***[27] And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, [28] Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.***

The Council aren't used to people disobeying their commands. But since Christ came, their authority had been crumbling. The apostles did intend to fill Jerusalem with the teaching that repentance and forgiveness of sins can be had in Jesus Christ. But they weren't deliberately trying to show the Council's guilt. But, it was inevitable truth would come out. Christ's blood was on their hands. They'd incited the people before Pilate:

Matthew 27:25

*Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.*

Notice, **“this name,” “this man.”** They don't even want to mention Christ's name.

***[29] Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.***

This was now a direct threat to their authority. We've had this before in the last chapter:

Acts 4:19,20

*But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

This begs the question, when can we say that? When should we obey God rather than men? We're called to obey all those that are in authority over us, whoever they are:

Romans 13:1,2

*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.*

Before we think this just means secular leaders, Christ applied it to religious leaders too:

Matthew 23:1-3

*Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*

As soon as the apostle Paul found out he'd unwittingly abused the high priest, he immediately apologised:

Acts 23:3-5

*Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.*

So, when do we disobey those over us? The answer is, when they force us to sin. Daniel refused to worship a statue of King Nebuchadnezzar, and he got thrown into a den of lions. And his three friends got thrown into a fiery furnace for not bowing down to one:

Daniel 3:17,18

*....our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*

And here, God had told the apostles to speak all the words of this life. They could not but speak the things they had seen and heard. And it's the same with us. We've been called to preach the gospel to every creature. We should be circumspect, but that's our calling:

Matthew 28:19,20

*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

***[30] The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.***

Yes, that's His name, Jesus, not ***“that man”***:

Matthew 1:21

*....thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

And Jesus, whom they'd killed, had come from God:

***[31] Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.***

Now Jesus has been raised from the dead, He's been exalted to God's right hand to give two things: repentance and forgiveness of sins. That's exactly what every one of us needs to be saved from the judgment to come, and they can only be found in Jesus Christ.

And notice, it's ***“to Israel.”*** Not the nation, because most of them would never believe Him. But the true Israel of God. All those, from whatever nation, who put their trust in Him.

***[32] And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.***

God has provided two witnesses to His truth: the witness of the apostles and prophets in Scripture, and the Holy Spirit. We need both. Many people say they've got the Holy Spirit, but never read their Bibles. Others, like the Pharisees, know their Bibles backwards, but don't have the Holy Spirit, guiding them into the truth. The Sadducees had neither.

***[33] When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.***

The Council had never been spoken to like this before. The apostles had told them they'd crucified their own prophesied Messiah. And they

could not, would not believe that. They were enraged. They still wanted to justify themselves, and had to be in charge. So they tried to get agreement in the Council to kill them. But they didn't have the power to do that. They had to get the Romans' approval, which they had done with Christ. But that was just one man. Now they've got twelve apostles, all healing people, to deal with.

And then one man in the Council stands up and gives them some advice:

***[34] Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;***

Gamaliel was a Pharisee, not a hardline Sadducee. He's a respected lawyer. He's in one other place in Scripture as the tutor of Saul of Tarsus, who later became the apostle Paul:

Acts 22:3

*I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.*

And Gamaliel was ***“had in reputation among all the people.”*** In any group, whether it's a council like this, or a political party, it's going to be full of people loving their own status. But there's always one or two who are genuinely liked by the people, because they're more sensible, they always try to look for reasonable solutions to things. And Gamaliel was one of these. So he puts the apostles outside while he tells the rest of the Council his idea. The apostles must've been wondering what on earth was going to happen to them.

***[35] And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.***

***“Take heed to yourselves.”*** His only concern was the continued existence of the Council. The Romans just wanted peace in their Empire. So they allowed an amount of autonomy in each region. If the

Council asked them for more people to be crucified, it would destabilise the situation. The Council had already lost the people's trust. The Romans could shut them down and impose direct rule at any time. So Gamaliel's brilliant solution was.... do nothing. That would ensure their existence for a bit longer at least. But he doesn't just say "do nothing." The Council wouldn't agree to that directly. So he recalls some recent events:

*[36] For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.*

This man, Theudas, had four hundred followers, not just twelve like we've got now. But he was killed and his movement petered out to nothing. And there's another example:

*[37] After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.*

The same happened to Judas of Galilee. When he died, his movement also petered out.

Notice "*in the days of the taxing.*" This taxing forced Joseph and a heavily pregnant Mary to go to Bethlehem for the birth of Christ, so that the prophecy of Micah would be fulfilled. Now, thirty or so years later, it was still called "*the days of the taxing.*" So it must've been a huge, unique event. It's remarkable Caesar Augustus in Rome decided to hold a one-off taxing just so Mary would be in Bethlehem for the birth. That's the Lord's providence.

*[38] And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: [39] But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.*

That's a very clever argument. It's not right, but it's clever and they all agreed with it.

If something is of God, it's true we can't overthrow it, neither should we want to. But if it's of men, will it really come to nothing? Lots of heresies have been with us for centuries. God allows them to continue for His own purposes. Just because something is of men doesn't mean it's going to peter out any time soon. Islam and Buddhism are still with us.

But the argument was good enough for the Council, and they agreed with it.

***[40] And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.***

So, apart from beating the apostles, they've just done exactly the same as before, they've told them not to speak about Christ then let them go. The apostles are happy with that.

***[41] And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.***

They rejoiced ***“that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.”*** We don't look for suffering, but it's going to be an integral part of the Christian life. We're different from the world. They won't understand us, so we'll inevitably be persecuted:

Philippians 3:10

*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*

So, did they stop preaching and do as they were told, scared of another beating? Did they go undercover, and start meeting away from the Temple, to be less conspicuous?

***[42] And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.***

They started meeting in houses. But they also continued preaching in the Temple, daily. Why? Because they knew for sure Christ was risen, He'd changed them permanently in their hearts, and everything Christ taught was true. If they weren't sure about any of this, they would've stopped preaching at the first sign of suffering. James is killed by Herod in Acts 12:2. Tradition says most of the rest of the apostles were put to death for the cause of Christ. Are we prepared to suffer shame for the name of Christ? maybe die for it? We pray it will never come to that, but may God give us the grace to help in time of need.

## Acts 8:1-25. Simon the Sorcerer

At the end of the last chapter, Stephen was stoned to death. He was the first Christian to die for his faith, and this was the first time the Council had killed somebody of their own accord. They didn't wait for the Romans' permission. They're so angry, they didn't care.

*[2] And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.*

Stephen was well loved by the believers, there was a big, open funeral. That was very brave in the light of impending persecution. A young man who didn't take part in the stoning but just looked after the coats, Saul of Tarsus, became the persecution's leader.

*[1] And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles..... [3] As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*

The persecution scattered the believers throughout Judea and Samaria. But the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. Isn't that strange? Surely they would've been the most persecuted of all, yet they stayed while the others fled. Saul was **“entering into every house,”** so it wasn't easy for them to stay. Yet they seemed to be free to come and go from Jerusalem as they pleased, because in verse 14 they visit Philip in Samaria. So the fact they'd stayed, must've been voluntary, caring for those who remained, who maybe couldn't flee.

*[4] Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*

Just before Christ's ascension, He had told the remaining eleven apostles:

Acts 1:8

*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

So, being scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria was the start of going in to all the world with the gospel. But, up to now they haven't moved from Jerusalem. Were they reluctant? I don't know, but the Lord sent this persecution which forced them to go. Sometimes the Lord has to push us to do what we should've been doing in the first place. This persecution turned into a great opportunity to spread the gospel. As the Christians were scattered, they went everywhere **“preaching the word.”** When something unpleasant happens to us, like being thrown out of our home, or being forced to flee, we shouldn't complain to the Lord about it, but realise He's in control and knows what He's doing, even if we don't at the time. We must preach the word wherever the Lord sends us.

***[5] Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.***

There was an apostle called Philip, but the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, so this must be the other Philip, one of the seven in chapter 6:5, known as Philip the Evangelist later on in chapter 21:6. He went to the city of Samaria and preached Christ there. Up to this point:

John 4:9

*the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.*

There's no record of Christ ever going to the city of Samaria. The region of Samaria was between Galilee and Judah, so He'd have passed through the area often, at least three times a year to the festivals. But He never stayed long there because while He was on earth, His ministry was mainly, though not exclusively, to the Jews first. He said Himself:

Matthew 15:24

*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

On one occasion, on His way to Jerusalem, He came to a Samaritan village. He:

Luke 9:52,53

*....sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.*

In John 4, He met a woman of Samaria at Jacob's well, but that was in the city of Sychar, not the city of Samaria. However, it was the start of a harvest there, because we're told:

John 4:39

*And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.*

It was also there that Christ prophesied:

John 4:35

*Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*

The Lord led Philip to go to the city of Samaria, because that harvest was now come:

***[6] And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.***

They were "**hearing**," and they "**gave heed unto those things which Philip spake**." So they didn't just hear the message with their ears, but they "**gave heed**" to it, they responded. When Philip told them to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls, that's what they did. They didn't just hear and go away indifferently, with no response, which is what we often get. But the harvest was now ready. The Samaritans of that city called on the Lord and He heard their cry. And He'll hear us too if we cry to Him:

Psalm 145:18

*The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.*

At the same time as receiving the message, they also saw **“the miracles which he did.”**

***[7] For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them : and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.***

We’ve got physical healings and unclean spirits being cast out. After Christ’s ascension, these are the first recorded miracles outside of Jerusalem. And it’s also the first record of someone other than an apostle performing miracles. We’re told Stephen did them too:

Acts 6:8

*And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*

So what were usually regarded as the “*signs of an apostle*” were also done by some others during this early period, as the Lord willed. And the people’s hearts were stirred:

***[8] And there was great joy in that city.***

If we’ve been healed miraculously, we’d be joyful as well. But it’s more than that. I’m sure they were thankful for the healings, but as we read on, the rest of the chapter doesn’t really say much more about the miracles. It’s not the miracles that were the most important thing to them, but the message. And that’s how it should be. The miracles were only ever meant to point to Jesus Christ. But Philip has got a rival:

***[9] But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: [10] To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great***

*power of God. [11] And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.*

Before Philip's arrival, the entire city of Samaria had been completely deceived by this man Simon. They'd all given heed to Simon **"from the least to the greatest."** He'd **"used sorcery, and bewitched"** them into believing him. Sorcery and witchcraft are evil:

Deuteronomy 18:10-12

*There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee.*

Simon had been **"giving out that himself was some great one."** What pride and arrogance! And by his sorcery, by some kind of deceit, the people became convinced he was **"the great power of God."** So they all blindly believed his every word and followed him. It's so easy for us to be taken in by proud people full of themselves. Compare that attitude with Philip's. He didn't strut into town claiming to be some great one from God. Far from it. His message really was from God, but he humbled himself, he never put himself forward. And that's how we should be. Not exalting ourselves. Let God work through His own message.

2 Corinthians 4:7

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

So we'd think the city of Samaria would be rock hard ground as a mission field. But one man, Philip, came preaching the truth, and the city **"with one accord"** turned from Simon's lies and believed the gospel instead. The Lord opened their hearts. Wherever the truth is, the Lord can work. Simon's message was always a lie. He only bound the people to his every word by sorcery, by deceit. Now, that no longer worked. His power had gone. There was no comparison between his false teaching and false miracles, and the truth and real miracles. One was darkness, the other light. No wonder there was great joy in the city.

They've been freed from bondage to a false religion to the freedom that there is in Christ. We shouldn't think that anywhere is too hard for the Lord to change.

***[12] But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.***

Philip preached two things: ***“the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ.”*** And that's all we've got to say as well. We shouldn't try to expand on the message, or include new things in it. Just preach the gospel of eternal salvation:

Matthew 4:17

*Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

Romans 10:13

*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

And Christ doesn't just save us from judgment in the next world, He also changes us now, and gives us new life here, so we can live for Him here, now, and not for self any more.

The people of Samaria believed Philip's message, and professed their faith in baptism. Baptism is an outward ceremony using water as a symbol of our entry into the Christian faith. We don't need it. We can get to heaven without it. True religion is inward, in our souls. No outward ceremonies are necessary. But it's good to profess our faith outwardly. In the Old Testament, the outward ceremony of entry into the people of God was by male circumcision. Females took no part in any ceremony. But of course that didn't mean they couldn't become one of the Lord's people inwardly. Which proves outward ceremonies aren't necessary for salvation. It's the inward change that counts. And it's also why it says ***“both men and women.”*** The outward ceremony's changed, and now includes both.

*[13] Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.*

Simon said he believed too, and asked for baptism. Why? He realised his power over the people had gone. Everybody else was doing it. Had he really been changed in his heart by Christ? We'll soon find out he hadn't. We can't see the heart, so we can never tell who's a genuine Christian and who isn't. Only God knows. All we can do is administer an outward religion. Philip had to take Simon's word for it, until it appeared clearly otherwise.

And it's already becoming obvious. Simon ***“continued with Philip, and wondered.”*** This word ***“wondered”*** is the same Greek word as ***“bewitched.”*** He was amazed. Rather than people being ***“bewitched”*** or ***“amazed”*** at him like they used to be, he'd ended up being ***“amazed”*** at the man Philip. Notice, he followed Philip, not Christ, or His message. And he's ***“beholding the miracles and signs which were done.”*** Once they'd trusted in Christ, the people never really mentioned the miracles. And here's Simon getting all excited about them, rather than salvation. So he's not really trusting in Christ at all.

And the news of what's been happening in the city of Samaria soon spreads:

*[14] Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:*

News travels fast. How, in time of persecution, I don't know. The apostles heard the Samaritans ***“received the word of God.”*** That would shock a Jew, but the apostles knew Christ at His ascension specifically mentioned Samaria. So they sent Peter and John.

*[15] Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: [16] (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord*

***Jesus.) [17] Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.***

These verses have been totally misunderstood by two huge sections of the church. And we need to mention these. Many, just like Simon, think the apostles had some kind of magical power to impart the Holy Spirit at will. The recipients in turn inherit this power to pass on to the next generation, who pass it on to the next, and so on, and so on, right down to the present day. They call this apostolic succession. So churches that believe this contain two levels of Christian: the clergy, who have these powers, and the laity, who haven't. The clergy are the only ones with power to properly administer spiritual things, so the laity become totally dependent on them. Baptism, marriage, funerals all require a priest, otherwise they're regarded as invalid. And they've got the magic power to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. They take Christ literally, when He said:

John 6:53

*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*

So for the laity to enter heaven at all, they must have a priest to change the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood, or they can't get in. That whole system is utterly ridiculous. The apostles here are not imparting the Holy Spirit by a kind of magic.

There's a second misunderstanding of these verses. The people of Samaria believed the gospel when Philip preached it, but the Holy Spirit is given here at a later date, when the apostles came. So some again believe in two levels of Christian: the first who just believe the gospel. They've got eternal life and get to heaven, but there's also a second, higher level of Christian who receives a second blessing, a baptism in the Holy Spirit. They can do exciting things like speak in tongues and perform miracles. That's nonsense too.

There's no such thing as two-tier Christianity. We're all one in Christ Jesus. If we repent and believe the gospel, we receive the Holy Spirit straight away. He doesn't come later:

Ezekiel 36:26,27

*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*

Acts 2:38

*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

Ephesians 1:13,14

*In whom [Christ] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

The Holy Spirit comes to all believers when they trust in Christ. The Samaritans had their hearts changed as soon as they accepted Peter's message, in contrast to Simon, whose heart wasn't changed. So they already had the Holy Spirit, because they were Christians.

So why then do the apostles here pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit, if they'd already received Him? V.16 says **“as yet he [the Holy Spirit] was fallen upon none of them.”** There are two other occasions we come across the Holy Spirit “falling”:

Acts 10:44

*While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*

Acts 11:13-15

*And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.*

In both examples, the Holy Spirit “falls” straight after hearing the word preached, which is what we'd expect. The Holy Spirit comes as soon as we accept the message. But it says: *“the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at*

*the beginning.*“ That must be a reference to Pentecost in chapter 2, when they all spoke with tongues and prophesied. All involved on that occasion were believers already. They’d already received the Holy Spirit previously, when they first came to Christ. The apostles possibly in John 20, when Christ:

John 20:22

*....breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost....*

At Pentecost, tongues of fire fell, and we’re told:

Acts 2:4

*And they were all **filled** with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

I suggest the apostles here were not praying for the people of Samaria to receive the Holy Spirit for the first time, but that that they may be **filled** with the Holy Spirit to do the Lord’s work. We’ve got this idea of being filled with the Spirit elsewhere in Scripture:

Ephesians 5:18,19

*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be **filled** with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;*

Acts 4:31

*And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all **filled** with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

All too often we Christians seem to run along almost empty. We need to be continually filled with the Spirit to do the Lord’s work. That might include receiving spiritual gifts, or giving us boldness to speak. Whatever the Lord has for us. But we need to pray for it.

I think that’s what the apostles were doing, simply praying with the believers to be filled with the Spirit. Not as a group, but by laying hands on each individual. Laying on of hands doesn’t magically convey the Holy Spirit, but that’s what Simon thought:

***[18] And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, [19] Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.***

He saw the believers had changed as they were filled with the Spirit, but he doesn't want to change to be like them, he just wanted power to control them, like he had before.

I said earlier there's no such thing as two-tier Christianity, and there isn't. But there are two types of people in the church: Those who repent, believe the gospel and receive the Holy Spirit. That's the true church, they're the people of God, the ones who'll receive eternal life and escape the judgment to come. And then there are hypocrites, those who profess to believe, like Simon, who get baptised, like Simon, maybe get into high places in the church, like Simon wanted and was prepared to pay money for, but they're not real Christians at all. The church will always be a mixture of wheat and tares. Christ had most of His opposition from hypocrites within the church. He had nothing good to say to them:

Matthew 23:29,33

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ... Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*

There's very strong words from Christ. And Peter here is no less kind to Simon:

***[20] But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. [21] Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.***

On the one hand, we can't see other people's hearts, so we should never judge anyone, but on the other hand, we're warned about false prophets, and therefore hypocrites too:

Matthew 7:15,16,21

*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits.... Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

Because of his words and actions, by his fruit, it was clear to Peter that Simon's heart was **“not right in the sight of God.”** We shouldn't judge, but we should discern.

The Holy Spirit is the free **“gift of God”** given to all who love Him. Nothing that comes from God can be purchased with money. The things of God are all free. Yet Christendom throughout history has been a money-making industry. Paying a priest to say a Mass for the dead. To get a dead relative out of purgatory. Paying someone to learn how to cast out demons and do spiritual warfare. Persuasive people on television who've convinced you that giving to them is the same as giving to God. None of this is right. They're all crooks. Don't waste our hard-earned money. *“Ye cannot serve God and money.”*

So what did Simon have to do, if he couldn't buy this power? Peter told him, it's simple:

*[22] Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. [23] For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.*

It's evil to desire power over others. Simon needed to repent of the very idea of controlling others. It's **“the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”** Always wanting to be in charge. Rather, he should've wanted to become like the Christians he saw all around him.

But, it's not that there was no hope for him. If he repented and prayed to God, perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him. The word **“perhaps”** sounds like it's not very sure. To seek God's forgiveness, we must, as it says, repent and pray to God. If we're genuine, the Lord will hear, forgive our sins and change us. That's Christianity. The word **“perhaps”** here, is telling us that there's no

prerogative on His part to do so. If we get thrown into hell-fire for ever, what has God done wrong? Nothing. We can say “please forgive me, please forgive me” as much as we like, but He doesn’t have to listen:

Psalm 18:41

*They cried, but there was none to save them: even unto the Lord, but he answered them not.*

All we can cry is:

Luke 18:13

*God be merciful to me a sinner.*

And it’s up to God whether He saves us or not. But, having said that, we can have confidence He’ll answer us if we’re genuine, because we’re also told:

Psalm 103:8

*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*

And Christ promised:

John 6:37

*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

***[24] Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.***

We don’t know what happened to Simon. This still isn’t the right attitude. He’s asking the apostles to pray for him. But we’ve got to come to the Lord ourselves, as individuals. The apostles can pray for him, but they’re not greater Christians than the rest of us, they’re not on a higher level, whose prayers are more likely to be answered. No! Simon must learn to pray to the Lord for Himself, that’s the only way the Lord is going to deal with us.

And he's still doesn't repent or ask for his sins to be forgiven at all. He just wants to avoid punishment. What are the things the apostles have spoken he wants to avoid? They must be ***“the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”*** But Peter had said he was already in that, now. It's not future. But he didn't understand that. People find it so difficult to see their own sin and self-centredness. They think everything's fine. But it isn't. We're all born with this sinful nature. And that includes us. One of the best ways to help others understand the situation is by giving our own testimony. And that's what the apostles do:

***[25] And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.***

After the apostles had prayed with the new believers, they testified, (Peter's testimony would've been good to listen to – he denied Christ three times, cut off a man's ear, and still the Lord never gave up on him). And they preached the word, before returning to Jerusalem. On the way back they preached the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

So the gospel had come to the Samaritans. And the same message has come to all our countries too. Let's make sure we preach it faithfully. And we always need to pray we may be kept filled with the Holy Spirit, that we may be effective in what we do.

Romans 1:16

*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.*

## Acts 9:1-31. The Conversion of Paul

We're going to look at this terrible man Saul. He tells us about himself in chapter 22:

Acts 22:3

*I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.*

We first met him as Stephen was stoned to death for being a Christian. Saul was a young man who didn't do any stoning, but held the coats of those who did, and consented to his death. It must have affected him, because the next thing we read about him is that:

Acts 8:3

*As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*

Looking back, he said of himself later:

Acts 26:10,11

*....many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*

And we start chapter 9 here with Saul going to one of those strange cities, Damascus:

***[1] And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, [2] And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.***

What made him so violent against Christians? It went against everything he'd ever known, everything he'd ever been taught, the religious establishment he'd been brought up with.

We'll have to endure this kind of irrational hatred too. People will get angry when they're told everything they've ever known has been wrong. We automatically assume what we've been taught, what we've grown up believing, what our families believe, must be true. Whether evolution, Buddhism, Islam or whatever. Christians are going to bring a different world view, and they won't want to know. On top of that, we've got quite an offensive message. We tell people they're sinners before a holy God who'll judge them if they don't repent. That's not going to go down too well. We then tell them the good news that God sent a Saviour into the world to forgive the sins of all who call on Him. But if they won't believe the problem, the solution's going to mean nothing. We must be gentle and harmless as doves. Yet we'll have to put up with many who'll hate us for no reason.

When people are so zealous and irrational like Saul, I don't think it's primarily to convince others to believe them, as much as to convince themselves. They know in their hearts deep down something's missing. If they don't believe us, why not just leave us alone? Most people do. What's the problem? But they won't. They'll keep on and on about it.

And Saul goes to the high priest to ask him to sign letters to take to the synagogues in Damascus that if any Christians are found, they're to be tied up, taken to Jerusalem and imprisoned. And the high priest is all too willing to do this for him. Which is not surprising because the high priest was Annas. Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas, were the very same high priests who successfully gave Christ over to the Romans to be crucified.

He set off to Damascus determined to persecute Christians. But God had a different idea:

*[3] And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: [4] And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

He'd nearly reached Damascus, and God stopped him in his tracks. A great light from heaven shined round about. When Saul recalls this

later, he tells us it was about noon. The light was greater than the noonday sun. And Saul is thoroughly changed.

And **“he fell to the earth.”** Whenever anybody meets with God, or Christ, or one of His angels in the Bible, they fall to earth. It’s never a light thing to meet with the living God.

And the voice from heaven says, **“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”** Saul had been persecuting Christ. Yet all the time Saul thought he was doing God’s will. And we’re told some of our enemies will think they are too. But, like Saul, they don’t know God at all:

John 16:2

*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*

***[5] And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.***

He calls Him **“Lord.”** When we meet with God, we’ll know it’s a real encounter. There’ll be no doubt about it. And Christ responds, **“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”** Saul knew that, but he now saw who Jesus really was. When we meet God, we’ll come to see both Him and ourselves in a completely different light. He immediately saw how wrong he’d been all along. Meeting God is the only way that’ll show us how bad we really are.

**“it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”** The picture is one of an ox ploughing, with pricks or goads to keep it obedient. If the ox kicks against them, all it does is hurt itself more. Saul knew of Christ’s miracles, he saw the face of Stephen as the face of an angel when he died. By rejecting such obvious signs, all he was doing was hurting himself more. And that’s what we do, when we reject God. Only God can save us from ourselves.

When Saul recalls this, he tells us the Lord also gave him some details of his calling too:

Acts 26:15-18

*And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*

***[6] And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.***

He knew straight away he'd met with God. And he knew this was exactly what had been missing from his life. All his zealous shouting and screaming against Christians hiding all that emptiness in his heart, had now been filled. He's ***"trembling and astonished."*** And so should we be before the living God. And he accepts God's call straight away. ***"What wilt thou have me to do?"*** He'll do anything for the Lord now. A complete turn-about.

After meeting Christ, he just knew that to follow Him was now his heart's only desire. He didn't know the suffering he'd have to endure as a Christian. There's a parable in Luke 14:25-35 about counting the cost. First there's a foolish man who tries to build a tower and doesn't count the cost. Then there's a king who does counts the cost, realises he can't win the battle, so seeks for peace instead. Most think that parable teaches that we should count the cost before deciding to follow Christ. But if we really knew how much living for Christ would cost before we commit ourselves to Him, none of us would choose it. It's not asking us to count the cost to see if we can do it, but showing us we can't do it, so we need to seek peace with God, seek His mercy. Here, Saul already knew the choice he had – carry on the empty way of life he had before, or live for Christ. No contest.

So the Lord tells him to go to Damascus and there he'll be told what to do.

***[7] And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.***

Saul's colleagues would've been angry men, just as zealous as he was about persecuting Christians. And we're told they "***stood speechless.***" Every one of us, no matter how bold we are before men, will be speechless when we come before the Lord on judgment day.

When Paul recalls this event later, he says:

Acts 22:9

*And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.*

Here it says they heard a voice, there it says they "*heard not the voice.*" Here it says they saw "***no man,***" there it says they saw "*the light.*" I suggest the men heard a sound, but only Saul heard the actual words, and the men saw a light, but only Saul saw the form of a man. We're told no more about the men with Saul. But the persecution never happened.

***[8] And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. [9] And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.***

He opened his eyes and couldn't see. He'd been blinded because of the glory of the light:

Acts 22:11

*And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.*

The others who were with him led him to Damascus. And he was blind for three days. The Lord didn't tell him how long he had to wait before receiving instructions, so he wouldn't have known how long he was going to be in that condition. And he neither ate nor drank.

Presumably that was a voluntary fast. But the Lord was working elsewhere in the city:

***[10] And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.***

A believer in the city called Ananias had a vision from the Lord. We don't have visions any more. Daniel 9:24 says God has sealed up vision and prophecy, and Hebrews says that:

Hebrews 1:1,2

*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son....*

So we don't need dreams and visions any more, we've got everything we need in this book. But if we do have a particularly vivid dream, and we're asking ourselves, "Is this dream from God or not?" then it isn't. The dreams and visions God used to speak in, weren't like normal dreams. They knew they were from the Lord, there was no doubt.

The Lord just called his name, "**Ananias.**" That's all He has to do. He deals with each one of us personally like that. And like Ananias, we ought to be ready to respond to Him.

***[11] And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,***

The Lord gave Saul's address and told him to go there. What's the difference between Saul before conversion, and Saul now? "**Behold he prayeth.**" The man who thought he was doing God service persecuting Christians, can't possibly have been doing the Lord's will. Why? Because he never had a real relationship with Him. The difference between true believers and false is, true believers pray. We're in continual communion with our Lord.

***[12] And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.***

Saul also had a vision. He saw Ananias coming and restoring his sight. So two separate people with the same instruction from the Lord is a pretty good indication it's of Him. This is one way we can discern whether something is of the Lord or not. Do we think God has called us to be a great preacher? Well, it's odd that a church hasn't had the same idea!

***[13] Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: [14] And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.***

Ananias had heard of Saul's reputation in Jerusalem, and he knew what he was on his way to Damascus to do. The Christians must've been expecting it. Do we trust the Lord when He tells us to do something difficult? Ananias was still understandably apprehensive of going, so he pours out everything on his mind to the Lord. And we can do that too.

***[15] But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:***

The Lord confirms his instruction. He calls Saul a **“chosen vessel.”** Saul said:

Galatians 1:15,16

*....God.... separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen....*

Saul was separated from his mother's womb. God already had His hand on him from his conception. He was allowed to live such an evil life, persecuting Christians, but only for so long. In time, on that road to Damascus, God called him. God's Son was revealed in him. But there's another sense in which God's choice goes back even beyond the womb:

Ephesians 1:4

*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love....*

If we're Christians, we're all chosen by God from eternity. God had His plan for us from before the foundation of the world. He brought us into this world at a fixed time, and allowed us to live the life we lived before we became Christians. Then, at a point in time He revealed Himself to us, and changed us permanently. But why did God wait so long? Why didn't He make us Christians from birth? Some people He does. We're all different. But our calling as Christians wouldn't be possible without our past experience. We can relate to unbelievers, because we were once just like them. In those days we were no use to anyone, but now we're Christians, we can live the useful life God had planned for us all along. This Christian life we now have, as individuals, is exactly what God wants us to be.

***[16] For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.***

Saul didn't know yet, but he was going to suffer heavily in his new life. We can read of his beatings and shipwrecks in 2 Corinthians 11:21-30. Our Christian life is going to be one of suffering. We don't look for it, but it's going to happen because the world will hate us:

John 15:19

*If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

Romans 8:18

*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

That hope is what kept Saul going for the rest of his life. He wasn't going back. His old life was comfortable. He was liked by the chief priests, the establishment. But, like Moses, he'd rather esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of this world.

*[17] And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.*

Ananias went. He knew what had happened to Saul on the road, because the Lord must have revealed it to him. Saul received his sight again, and was filled with the Holy Spirit.

*[18] And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. [19] And when he had received meat, he was strengthened....*

After he received his sight back, he professed his new faith in baptism. And he ate again.

*...Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. [20] And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*

The disciples in Damascus accepted him. And he spent the next three years based there:

Galatians 1:16-18

*....immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.*

And he started preaching straight away. But surely a preacher should be qualified? Surely we shouldn't put new, immature believers into the pulpit straight away? Surely he needed to go to Bible college for several years and be accepted by the church first?

But Saul made a particular point of saying he didn't confer with flesh and blood, and didn't go to the apostles, but instead went to Arabia. Why Arabia? I suggest he went there with the Scriptures to re-learn all he'd been taught in light of the fact it all pointed to Christ. He was

filled with the Holy Spirit to teach him, so he had no need of a college or church. With Scripture and the Holy Spirit he had all the qualifications needed to preach.

And he preached in the synagogues. They were expecting him to hand them letters to arrest Christians, and he starts preaching that Jesus Christ is the Son of God instead.

***[21] But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?***

Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit, so his preaching had power. That would've amazed them in itself. But what was more amazing was the fact that they knew exactly why he'd originally come. And his message was completely opposite to what they were expecting.

***[22] But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.***

The Jews didn't know what to make of him. But the more Saul grew in strength, the more he could prove Jesus was the Christ. So it is possible to prove absolutely from the Bible, using simple rules of logic, that Jesus is the Christ. We shouldn't need any more proof:

Luke 16:31

*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

The Scriptures are all-sufficient. If people don't believe, it's their own fault:

2 Corinthians 4:3,4

*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

***[23] And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: [24] But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.***

After three years in Damascus, the tables were turned. Rather than Saul wanting to imprison Christians, the unconverted Jews now wanted to kill him. When we become Christians, maybe at first, our unconverted friends think we're just going through a phase, "He'll get over it." And they'll try enticing us back to their empty way of life. But after a while, when they see we're not going back, they'll give up, or worse, like here, turn on us. But thankfully, Saul found out about their plans beforehand and managed to escape:

***[25] Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.***

We get some more detail about this in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 11:32,33

*In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.*

The Jews had got the governor and his troops on their side, so Saul had no choice but to flee quickly. He went to Jerusalem, thinking the Christians there would readily accept him, like those of Damascus, but he was, probably understandably, to be disappointed:

***[26] And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.***

Do you blame them? In Jerusalem, they knew exactly who he was more than anyone else. Imagine a government official coming here and saying, "I'm a Christian now, can I join you?" would we believe him? But one believer had heard of his boldness in Damascus:

***[27] But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.***

We came across Barnabas in chapter 4:36,37, where he sold some land and brought the money to the apostles. He knew of Saul's testimony and his good work in Damascus, so maybe he met him there. So he was able to introduce him to the apostles.

***[28] And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.***

But he only stayed fifteen days in Jerusalem:

Galatians 1:18

*Then after three years [in Damascus] I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.*

***[29] And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.***

His bold speaking, in the place where people knew him too well, quickly got him into trouble. But, surprisingly, it wasn't the Jews who tried to kill him, it was Greeks, whom he'd been disputing with. We can be on the look out for those we expect to cause us trouble, but here, trouble came from an unexpected quarter.

***[30] Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.***

So the brethren quickly got him away to the port of Caesarea, and sent him away to his home city of Tarsus. He wasn't to go back to Jerusalem again for fourteen years:

Galatians 1:21-2:1

*Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, That he*

*which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me. Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.*

Saul became the apostle chiefly to Gentiles. He'd be fairly safe in his home town. But Christ had a word to say about our home town being the most difficult place to witness:

Matthew 13:57,58

*And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*

He probably didn't stay long in Tarsus. He later settled in Antioch, which became a great Christian centre. Believers were first called Christians in Antioch. Galatians tells us Peter and James visited him there. He set off on most of his missionary journeys from there.

***[31] Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.***

Saul's conversion had stopped the immediate threat in Damascus, but the persecution carried on until he left the area three years later. After we're converted, the consequences of our past sins may well continue, but we're not to worry about them. We must leave them to God to control in His providence, and just be thankful we've been saved from it all. The church finally got rest, was edified, walked in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Ghost. And it grew. That's unusual, because today, lack of persecution tends to put the church to sleep. We shouldn't sleep, we've got a message of life and death.

What can we learn from the conversion of Saul?

(1.) No sinner is too great for God to work in and change. cf. Manasseh, Nebuchadnezzar.

(2.) The change God makes in our hearts is complete and permanent:

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

(3.) God came into Saul's life suddenly, when he least expected it. Salvation is of the Lord:

John 3:3

*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

Saul was converted without hearing the gospel. So should we just sit back and wait for God to work in us? No. God normally uses means. The means God normally uses is the preaching of the gospel. If we repent of our sins and call on Jesus Christ to save us from the consequences of those sins, He will permanently change us just like He did Saul. Even though Saul wasn't converted through responding to the gospel, he spent the rest of his life preaching that message, and that's the message we must preach too.

## Acts 17:16-34. Paul in Athens

I thought we'd look for a short time at the apostle Paul's visit to Athens. I want to first of all look at the spiritual state of Athens. Secondly, I want to look at Paul's message, and how he applied it to the situation in Athens, and thirdly, I want to briefly look at the results.

***[16] Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.***

Paul was alone in Athens. We see in v.15 that he was waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him, but in the meantime he was alone for a few days with nothing to do.

Now, if we had some time to spare in a city we'd never been to before, what would we do? See the sights? Visit the museums? Sit in a café? Sadly, I really think that's what we'd have done. Given the opportunity, we too easily fill ourselves with worldly things.

But Paul wasn't interested in sightseeing. His first concern was the religious nature of the city. We're told that, "***his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.***" When we become a Christian, we have new priorities. We're not here to please ourselves any more. We've got higher things to think about now.

We too ought to be concerned at the spiritual state of anywhere the Lord puts us, whether we're visiting, or whether we live there. There are so many people out there who know nothing about God, or Jesus Christ, or forgiveness of sins freely available through Him.

So what did Paul do? How did he spend his time while he was waiting for his friends?

***[17] Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.***

First, he went to the synagogue. Whenever Christ or the apostles entered a new city, they always went to the Jews first, then afterwards to the Gentiles. And the reason for that is that the Jews had the Scriptures. The Messiah came from the Jews. Jesus Christ was the fulfilment of their law, the One to whom the whole of their Scriptures pointed to. So Paul could bring the message of Christ to them through the prophecies of their own Scriptures.

But the gospel is to go to the whole world, not just to Jews. So Paul also disputed with the **“devout persons.”** These were Gentiles who loved God. People like, for example, Cornelius, or the Ethiopian eunuch. They would probably have attended the synagogues too. But Paul also spoke about Christ daily with anybody in the market who would listen. That wasn’t standing on a soap box and shouting at people who didn’t want to hear. We’re told it was **“with them that met with him,”** which implies they wanted to hear.

These wouldn’t necessarily know anything about the Scriptures, so Paul had to find another way to get them to understand the message he had for them.

This is the situation we find ourselves in today. Most people out there, don’t know the first thing about the Bible. So we have to communicate to them with what they do know. And that’s why Paul’s speech here in Athens is so useful for us. He speaks to people with no background in spiritual things. Just like the people we meet every day.

And we’re told that Paul did this **“daily.”** No break. No day off (maybe apart from the Sabbath). Are we as devoted as Paul to spreading the good news of Jesus Christ?

In the course of his discussions in the market, two groups of people encountered him:

*[18] Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.*

Now, if we want to, we can read all sorts of commentaries about what these two groups believed. But I'm not going to go into that, because it doesn't matter. I don't like taking information from outside the Bible to try to explain the Bible. Information we get from outside the Bible might be true. But then again, it might not. All of the Bible is always true. So I'd rather stick to Scripture alone. Epicureans and Stoics don't occur, by name, anywhere else in Scripture, so we should just leave it at that. All we *need* to know is that they were two groups of people with their own particular philosophies. But one thing they both had in common was that they both wanted to listen to what Paul had to say.

They didn't actually understand what he was saying, because they thought he was introducing two new gods, "**Jesus**" and "**the resurrection.**" Isn't that dumb? But they were in a culture which did that. New gods we're being introduced all the time. They didn't understand this was something completely different, they weren't new gods at all. We Christians have got our peculiar vocabulary which we have to educate people in, and we must be so, so careful not to confuse those we speak to in how we say things.

*[19] And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, [20] For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. [21] (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)*

Athens was a city full of people who "**spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.**" Now, we might say that that's far more than we get from most people today. We try speaking about God to people, and nobody's bothered. Most seem only to be interested in their own little lives and what they can get for themselves.

But, especially in a cultured society like Athens, there are more people than we realise who want more than that. Many people are open to finding out new teachings or strange ideas, just like the Athenians. But the problem is, any new teaching they encounter is only regarded as one new teaching out of many. The world is full of religions and philosophies. And such diversity is seen as a good thing. It makes

society such a rich tapestry of many beliefs. But the problem is, only one of them can be right. They're all mutually exclusive.

Christianity is one of many religions that claims to be the only true religion. We regard all other religions as false. Jesus Christ Himself said:

John 14:6

*I am the way, the truth, and the life; No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Do we think that's arrogant, claiming to be the only true religion? A multicultural, diverse society like Athens would. Well, let's allow Paul to explain it to us. And here we come now to Paul's message. Look how Paul dealt with this.

***[22] 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.***

He firstly told them their own society was ***“too superstitious.”*** There were many religions being practised in the city, but they were just superstition. A superstitious religion has its own set of rituals. If we perform the ritual, we've performed our duty to the appropriate god. He's pleased with us, and that's all we have to do. But the true Christian religion, is completely different. We worship the only true God. He's real. He's not impressed with ritual. He wants a living, real relationship with us. We're guided by Him. We communicate with Him. He communicates with us. All other religions have no idea about a God in a real living relationship with His followers. And that's important to understand.

And, Paul then told them why he thought they were ***“too superstitious”***:

***[23] 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.***

Paul had seen an altar inscribed **“to the unknown God.”** He used that, to tell them that there *is* a God they didn’t yet know about. A God, unknown to them at that time.

We don’t have any altars to unknown gods around today. But the point is, we need to start from where the people are, to try to make a connection with them. For example, most people today are materialistic, so we need to show them what Solomon had found:

Ecclesiastes 1:14

*I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

What are we chasing after? Everything here is *“vanity and vexation of spirit.”* It’s temporary, it passes away, it’s pointless. We need something eternal to cling on to.

After making a connection with the people, Paul then told them about the true God, who he equated with this unknown God they didn’t know about yet. And he did this by starting with the nature of God. God is far greater and more powerful than we can ever imagine.

***[24] God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;***

The Greeks thought of gods as creatures more powerful than us, but otherwise very similar. They fought, they became jealous, and so on. But Paul declares that there’s only one God, and He’s all-powerful. By definition, there can only be one God. If there were two or more, neither of them could be God, because both couldn’t be all-powerful.

He ***“made the world and all things therein.”*** He created everything.

Psalms 19:1

*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.*

Not only did God create the world and all things therein, but ***“He is Lord of heaven and earth.”*** He upholds all things in His providence.

There's nobody else in charge. Absolutely everything is under His control.

Matthew 10:29,30

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

There's a common view, which is totally wrong, which says that God is only in control of part of the world and Satan is in control of the rest. A territorial battle is going on between them, but God wins in the end. That's not true at all. Everything, absolutely everything, is under God's control. He ordains and upholds all things in His providential control.

But we might say, "What about all the evil in the world?" That can't be of God. Well, Satan wanted to do all sorts of things to Job, but he couldn't do anything unless God gave him permission in the first place. So, whether it's the temptations of Satan, or earthquakes, famine or wars – all things are under God's overall control. We might often wonder what God's doing, but we live by faith, not by sight. He knows what He's doing, despite what it seems like, and everything is ordained to His greatest glory in the end.

Romans 8:28

*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

And he **"dwelleth not in temples made with hands."** The Greek gods had their own temples, all built by men. But our God is present everywhere. We don't need a special place to approach and worship Him.

John 4:21,23,24

*Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.... 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.*

***[25] Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;***

And He isn't "***worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing.***" The gods of all the other religions need something from us. They at least require our devotion. They often require sacrifices or good works. But our God doesn't need any of that. In fact He doesn't actually *need* us at all.

He "***giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.***" Everything we have comes from Him. Even our very lives, and every breath.

Genesis 2:7

*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

Our bodies are just dust of the ground, but our spirit, our soul, our life is from the Lord. He gives us life and breath and everything else, for a time on this earth, until that day the Lord has ordained when we shall return to Him again.

Ecclesiastes 12:7

*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

And we should be thankful to Him for all of this. Sadly, unless we've ever been near to death or in terrible problems, we don't think on these things and take them all for granted.

***[26] And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;***

We all came from "***one blood,***" the same ancestor, Adam. And all nations, wherever they are, regardless of whether they acknowledge God or not, and regardless of how evil they are, have come into being and been placed where they are by God. Especially after the Tower of Babel, when God confused their languages and scattered them abroad upon the face of the earth. But not only then. Throughout history,

God raises up nations, and He takes them away again as it pleases Him. And there's a purpose behind all of this:

***[27] That they should seek the Lord....***

That's why God ordains things the way they are. In order that men would seek Him. We don't naturally seek God at all. As long as everything is going along smoothly in our lives, we'll forget God. We just will. That's why there are far more mature Christians in places of persecution than somewhere like here, where we're all quite comfortable. It's sad that often the only way God can wake us up to reality, is by giving us trials in our lives.

But that's our purpose in life, that we ***“should seek the Lord.”*** We're not here for our own benefit. *“Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.”*

***....if haply they might feel after him, and find him....***

This implies that it *is* possible to find Him. God would never have said this, if it was impossible to find Him. Have we come to a point in our life yet, where we don't want to carry on living for ourselves any more? We're fed up with it. We maybe want to reach out to God, but we don't know where to start. Well, we're told here that it is possible to find Him. It is possible to have a relationship with Him.

But how do we find God? And why has God made it so difficult? Well, it's not that difficult at all, because:

***....though he be not far from every one of us: [28] For in him we live, and move, and have our being....***

The problem is that men are looking in the wrong place.

Naturally we think that, if there is a God, He's out there somewhere, far away. But He's not a distant god at all. No. He's not far from every

one of us. He knows our every thought, our every desire, our every motive for everything we do. He knows everything about us.

Psalm 139:1,2

*O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.*

Psalm 139:14

*I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

If we want to know God, we must look within ourselves. There's nothing we can hide from Him. So, we communicate with Him, not by outward rituals or great religious works, but by simply talking to Him. We can have a relationship with Him as a man does with his friend. We don't have to go anywhere, or do anything. On the one hand, the one true living God controls the whole universe in His providence, and on the other, He's as near as being right within us, caring about every detail of our lives:

1 Peter 5:7

*Cast all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*

I really don't think we understand how big God really is, He's altogether different from any other god men have invented. The true God is far greater than anyone can ever imagine.

***...as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.***

Paul then went on to show the Greeks that even some of their poets have understood the idea of one all-powerful Creator God and written about it.

Where did these poets get this understanding from? It could have been from their own imaginations. Poets are creative people. But I don't think so.

Parts of this Bible are getting on for 4,000 years old, particularly the book of Job, which is considered the oldest book. But of course, our

Bibles have been especially providentially preserved by God throughout the generations. But what about secular literature?

There was a Greek poet called Homer. He lived about 2,800 years ago, and we still have his works preserved for us today. Now, if poetry can be preserved for 2,800 years for us today, why couldn't literature have been preserved for that long in Paul's day? If Paul was talking about a Greek poet from about 2,500 years before *his* day, that's significant. 2,500 years before Paul's day, there was a worldwide flood. And Noah built an ark to escape it.

All of us are descended from Noah's family. Everyone else died in the flood. And Noah worshipped the one true God. After the flood, especially after the Tower of Babel, men spread throughout the world, and the Greeks ended up where they are today. In the process of moving, most of them rejected the true religion and invented their own gods instead. But in many of these societies something of the true religion remained.

Greek poets from about 2,500 years before Paul, would have still known about an all-powerful Creator God from Noah. The Greeks subsequently abandoned the true religion, but the witness to the truth was always there in the writings of these old poets.

Now Paul had spent a long time telling the Athenians about the nature of God, and describing His attributes. That was a very important starting point. Once that had been established, he can then go on to explain the gospel message:

*[29] Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. [30] And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: [31] Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

That's the gospel message. The gospel is not "Come to Jesus and you'll be happy." Or "Jesus has a wonderful plan for your life," although He may have. Neither is it, "Jesus loves you," although that may be true.

I went to a funeral once. A consultant at the hospital where I worked was killed in a car accident. I knew him because he was an elder in the local Baptist church. The funeral was full of people who worked at the hospital, who otherwise would never go to church. So it was a wonderful opportunity to get the Christian message across, especially because the person who died was a Christian, and had a sure hope for the next world.

Now, I know you have to be sensitive at funerals, but I think the minister was being too sensitive, because all he said in his message was, "God loves us all." That's it. No call to follow Christ. He just kept saying, "God loves us all."

On the way out, I met my boss from work. He's not a Christian, but he knew I was, so he came over to tell me that he had really enjoyed the funeral service. The point is that before he went to the service, he was a drinker and a swearer. After going to the service, he's still a drinker and a swearer, but he now thinks God loves him. So, it's now a lot harder to convince him that God is not pleased with his life, and that he needs to change.

Read through the four gospels and the book of Acts. The main message is always "*repent*." "*Repent and believe*." Because there's a Day of Judgment coming when God will judge the world by Jesus Christ. And that's exactly what Paul tells the Athenians here.

He said that their past ignorance God "*winked at*." We've got to make it clear straight away that God never "winks at" sin, in the sense of ignoring it, pretending it doesn't exist. God takes sin seriously. Sin took Christ to the cross. God never takes sin lightly.

What it really means here is that God is *longsuffering*. He puts up with things He doesn't approve of for a long time. He punishes it eventually, because He's a righteous and holy God. But He puts up with it, He allows it to exist, to give us all plenty of time to repent.

God ***“commandeth all men everywhere to repent.”*** God commands us all, even today, to turn from our empty, meaningless lives, to turn from our sins and sinful nature, and to turn to Jesus Christ for salvation.

If anyone ignores this call, eventually God will judge them. Their time will run out. And they can't complain about it, because they've had plenty of time. God has ***“appointed a day”*** in the future in which He will judge the world.

And He'll judge it ***“in righteousness.”*** God's punishment will be perfectly just, because He can see our hearts. We can't see others hearts, so we can't judge them. But God can.

And God will judge the world ***“by that man whom he hath ordained,”*** Jesus Christ.

The first time Christ came into the world, He came to save the world:

John 3:17

*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

But one day in the future, Christ is going to come as our judge. Nothing else will matter except what we thought of Christ when He came the first time.

So, what do we think of Him? Do we ignore Him completely? Do we think of Him as irrelevant? Do we think He's just another moral teacher, one of many? Or do we love Him, cry to Him for mercy, and ask Him to save us from our sinful nature? It's what we think of Christ that will count on the Day of Judgment, not how good we are. We can never be good enough. We need a Saviour to save us, because we can't save ourselves. And that's exactly why Christ came into the world, to ***“save His people from their sins.”***

And God has ***“hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”*** The resurrection is our assurance that Christ's death was accepted by God as a satisfaction for the sins of all who come to Him. What each one of us must do now is repent of our

sins personally, and turn to Him for salvation. That's the gospel message.

So now we come to see the results of this gospel message. The gospel separates all those who hear it into two groups:

***[32] And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.***

When the gospel is preached, there's always a division. Some people will want to hear more about the salvation of their souls, while others will just laugh and walk away. So what did Paul do about that? Nothing. He just left it there.

***[33] So Paul departed from among them.***

Paul had said and done all he could. He told them the true message of salvation from the one true living God. That's it. That's all we can do. Our duty is to deliver the message in the best way we can, and then we must leave it with God to change hearts. We can't change hearts, only God can.

A lot of Christians today think that the burden's on their shoulders to persuade men into the kingdom of heaven. So they use smooth talking, persuasive sales techniques, like a salesman trying to get you to buy something. That's a terrible witness for Christ. We're called simply to give the message. We can't do anything else. We can't push people into the kingdom of God. We must leave it to God to work in people's hearts. We should never pressure anyone into accepting Christ. If we do that, we'd end up with a church full of false believers – people who are really following the smooth-talking speaker, rather than Christ. We don't want that. We want them to sincerely, genuinely come to know the Lord.

And look what happened. Some may have mocked, but others believed:

***[34] Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.***

Those who wanted to know more, followed Paul and believed. The church will be gathered by the Lord, we don't need to use worldly methods and techniques. We just simply explain the message. Christ said:

Matthew 16:18

*I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Well I hope this passage gives us some insight into what the true Christian message is, and how we should present this message to the world. A world ignorant of the Scriptures, ignorant of the need of salvation from their sins, ignorant of Jesus Christ who is the only One who can save us from our sins. We need to speak of the greatness of the one true living God. Speak of the Day of Judgment to come. Call all men to repent and turn to the God through Jesus Christ. Once we've presented this message, we must leave everything else to God. That was Paul's way of doing things, and it should be ours.

Well, these are a few thoughts on this passage. May all of us come to the knowledge of the truth, and embrace the Saviour of the world.

## Acts 26. Paul before Festus and Agrippa

After spending several years on various missionary journeys in the eastern Mediterranean, the Apostle Paul made plans to go on a longer journey, to Rome, then to Spain:

Romans 15:24

*Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company.*

I'm sure Paul had prayed about all this, and he truly thought at the time that the Lord wanted him to make this journey. But at the same time he would have been aware:

James 4:15

*For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*

I say that, because we don't know if he ever got to Spain. He reached Rome, but in a way he could never have imagined – as a prisoner. And that's the last record we've got of him.

It's not wrong to plan things, but we don't know what the Lord's got in store for us. We've got to trust in Him whatever He brings our way, knowing He's in control of everything.

Paul, at this point, had been imprisoned by the Romans for at least two years. They didn't have anything to charge him with. But they knew the Jews were out to kill him, so they'd kept him in jail to keep the peace, and for his own safety. Here, he gets the opportunity to speak to Festus, the governor, and King Agrippa and his wife Bernice, who were visiting.

### *Paul's Testimony*

*[1] Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:*

Paul had been given permission to speak before such distinguished people. Whenever we get the chance to speak about Christ to anybody, we ought to realise: (1.) it may be our last opportunity, and (2.) we never know who's listening. After he got to Rome we read:

Philippians 4:22

*All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.*

Even some of Caesar's household became Christians as a result of Paul's witness. Which would probably never have been possible if he wasn't a prisoner appealing to Caesar. So:

1 Peter 3:15

*Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:*

***[2] I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: [3] Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.***

Festus and Agrippa were Gentiles. But whereas Agrippa was ***“expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews,”*** Festus thought Judaism was mere superstition:

Acts 25:18,19

*Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.*

So, even before Paul began speaking, there was already a difference in mindset between Festus and Agrippa. And that's often the case. There's often bias in people's minds even before we've said anything. That'll be seen in their responses later on. Paul continued:

***[4] My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; [5] Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.***

Many of Paul's old Jewish colleagues were present. They knew Paul's background – he used to be one of them. They wanted him dead, which is why they brought him to court, but they didn't seem too keen on testifying against him themselves. They'd rather believe he'd never been one of them at all. I met a lady once, who was brought up in an orthodox Jewish family. When she became a Christian, she was thrown out of the house and her parents held a funeral for her. That's how much they didn't want to face the truth. And these Jews didn't want to face the truth. But Paul had renounced that old life of his. And his conscience was now clear, so he had no problem speaking freely about it:

Philippians 3:5-7

*Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.*

***[6] And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: [7] Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.***

He knew King Agrippa was familiar with the Jewish religion, so he spoke about the great hope of the Jews – the promise, throughout Scripture, of resurrection from the dead.

Job 19:25,26

*For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:*

Psalms 49:15

*But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me.*

Hosea 13:14

*I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.*

Resurrection from the dead was the great hope of the Jews throughout Scripture. And Paul had come to realise that the hope of resurrection is actually fulfilled in Christ.

***[8] Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?***

The Jews didn't want to believe Christ had risen from the dead, because if so, they'd have to accept He fulfils their great hope. So rather than accept truth they generated a lie:

Matthew 28:12,13

*And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.*

And so they persecuted Christians, thinking it was God's will. We'll get opposition too:

John 16:2

*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*

***[9] I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. [10] Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them .***

Paul's not ashamed of telling the truth about his old life, because his conscience is now clear. He knows his sins, which were many, have all been forgiven. Have we had a terrible past? We've all messed up, haven't we. But the wonderful news is that our consciences can be

cleared of all that guilt, that sin, simply by repenting and turning to the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't have to do anything. Just accept the truth. And it gets worse:

*[11] And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*

Paul punished Christians in every place of worship. He compelled them to blaspheme, how awful! And he admits he was **“exceedingly mad against them.”** It was madness. It was far more than a rational response to a disagreement. And he persecuted them far and wide, **“even unto strange cities,”** long distances from Jerusalem.

Why would anyone behave with irrational hatred like that? We should be aware of our enemies, and how irrational people can become. We should never respond in kind. We need the Lord for wisdom. What would the Roman authorities think about such disorderly behaviour? At the time he was doing it, Paul didn't care. But now, admitting he was terribly wrong must have embarrassed the Jews, because they're still doing these things.

*[12] Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,*

His trip to Damascus was **“with authority and commission from the chief priests.”** The very same chief priests who were there accusing him before the Roman court.

*[13] At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.*

Paul had a life-changing experience. What had Paul done to earn it? Was God particularly pleased with him? No! He was the chief of sinners. He'd done nothing to deserve it at all.

***[14] And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.***

Everybody in Paul's party saw the light and fell to earth. But only Paul heard the voice. Who were the others in the party? They were going to Damascus to persecute Christians, so they must've been just as hateful against them as Paul was. Were they converted too? We're not told. All we know is that Paul was converted, and the proposed persecution never happened. God is in control of all things, including the hearts of wicked men.

***[15] And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.***

Paul didn't know who was speaking to him at first, but he knew he had to call Him "**Lord.**" When we meet with God, it may not be an audible voice like this, but we'll know it. We'll bow the knee. And Paul's now bowing the knee to the one he's been persecuting. In fact everybody will bow the knee to Christ eventually. To escape the judgment, we must do it in this life. We'll be doing it in the next world anyway, whether we like it or not:

Philippians 2:10,11

*That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

***[16] But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;***

Paul was immediately given his calling. All Christians are called of God for a purpose. We don't become Christians and then just carry on living for ourselves like before. We're finished with that. And if we don't know what our calling is, ask Him. We can now communicate with Him. He'll direct us and keep us in all that we do.

Paul's particular calling was to be a witness. Christ's witnesses were the twelve apostles:

Acts 10:40,41

*Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.*

Paul wasn't one of the original twelve. He became an apostle, as "born out of due time."

1 Corinthians 15:8

*And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.*

***[17] Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,***

He was told to flee from Jerusalem, because the Jews wouldn't accept his testimony:

Acts 22:18

*And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.*

Paul, the great Jewish scholar, found out his calling was to be mainly to the Gentiles. Isn't that strange? We'd have thought he'd be the ideal person to be sent to the Jews. Surely, if anybody could convince them that Jesus Christ was the Messiah promised throughout the Scriptures, it was him. But, no, God knew they wouldn't receive his testimony, they'd just want to kill him, like they do here. So God sent him far away to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 55:8,9

*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.*

*[18] To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*

The work he'd been given to do among the Gentiles was ***“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”*** He can't do that, but God can. God here gives Paul a message to give to the people, the gospel. This is the ordinary means God uses to save people from their sins. God uses it, to open spiritual eyes and turn them ***“from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God.”***

And look at the results. Those who accept the gospel will be renewed by God in their hearts, and will receive ***“forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me [Christ].”*** The freedom of knowing all our sins have been forgiven is so wonderful. Knowing we can never be punished for them. And to stop us thinking we can now live how we want and still get to heaven, at the same time we also receive the inheritance of being one of God's children, sanctified, separated from the world. with a new heart that won't ever want to live the way we used to any more.

So, what is the actual gospel message that God had given him to proclaim?

*[19] Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: [20] But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*

The gospel message is this: ***“that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”*** That's the only message we've got to give to people, we haven't got anything else. And we must be faithful with this message. All we can do is present this message. We can't change hearts, only God can give the increase. Of course, God is completely free to bypass the use of the gospel if He so wishes, as he did in Paul's case.

Paul started fulfilling his calling as soon as he got to Damascus. He didn't wait to be accepted by the church or trained in seminary, he just went. We don't need formal training. Don't get me wrong. We shouldn't just set up shop and start preaching with no knowledge at all. Too many people do that today. Paul received his training soon enough:

Galatians 1:15-18

*But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.*

Paul went to Arabia for up to three years, no doubt with his Bible, to relearn everything he'd been taught at the feet of Gamaliel in Jewish Bible school. He needed to relearn it in the light of the fact Jesus Christ fulfilled it all. But notice, he learned on his own, with the Holy Spirit alone guiding him, not a church trying to force him into their way of thinking.

***[21] For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. [22] Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:***

The Jews were out to kill him, but God protected him by putting him in jail. Wherever he was moved, he witnessed to small and great. What did he witness? ***“saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.”*** He stuck to the Bible. Nothing else is necessary. We don't need anecdotes, funny stories, or to go off at a tangent. Just stick to this book. And what does this book teach?

***[23] That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.***

They only had what we call the Old Testament at that time, but it all points to Jesus Christ. It talks of His sufferings, and that He should be the first to rise from the dead, to give us that great Jewish hope, the resurrection from the dead. And that hope was never just for Jews. It was always for everybody, **“light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.”**

### *The Responses*

***[24] And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.***

Festus, who called the Jewish religion superstition, just thought Paul was mad. Fed up with the whole thing, especially arguments with regards a religion he never believed, he gave his opinion **“with a loud voice.”** And that’s what people do when they don’t understand something and aren’t interested anyway. And that’s what Festus does.

He thought **“much learning”** was making Paul **“mad.”** Actually, that’s a true statement. His **“much learning”** at the feet of Gamaliel had indeed made him **“exceedingly mad”** against the Christians, haling them to prison and compelling them to blaspheme. It’s a good job **“much learning”** isn’t the way to become a Christian. Look at Paul’s response:

***[25] But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.***

Paul’s response is not in the words of a madman:

- He’s not shouting back **“with a loud voice”** as Festus had been.
- He’s courteous. He still uses the title **“most noble Festus.”**
- He’s **“sober.”** The response is calm, measured, gentle and peaceable. And that’s how we should respond to any false accusations. We don’t need to respond in like manner.
- And he’s speaking **“truth.”** If we’ve got the truth, we don’t need to shout, like modern preachers do. The truth is all we need to present. We don’t need to expand it, or add flourishing touches to it. The truth spoken in a peaceable way is always the best witness.

Festus isn't going to respond. Paul wasn't going to cast his pearls before swine, so he turns to king Agrippa. We must just leave unresponsive people to the Lord for Him to deal with and not waste our time. Agrippa, however, was "*expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews.*" So Paul could at least have a useful conversation with him:

*[26] For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.*

Agrippa knew all about what Paul had done, nothing had been hidden from him. So he knew Paul was telling the truth. And he believed the Scriptures were the truth as well:

*[27] King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.*

Agrippa believed the prophets. Does that mean he was a Christian now? No:

*[28] Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

He was only "*almost*" persuaded to become a Christian. He didn't think the Scriptures were rubbish, he believed them to be truth. But he never became a Christian.

*[29] And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

Agrippa thought becoming a Christian was all about being "*persuaded*" with the mind. But Paul doesn't speak in those terms. He wanted everybody who heard him to be "*altogether such as I am,*" apart from the bonds. He spoke of Christianity as a state we're in,

rather than a belief embraced in the mind. And that's what it is. But so many people don't see that. They're looking for intellectual persuasion that it's the truth. Agrippa had that. Christianity is the truth. It is rational. It can stand up to intellectual enquiry. But to believe truth with the mind doesn't make anyone a Christian. It's about a change of state.

John 3:3

*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

And that's exactly what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus.

Finally, I want to contrast Paul with Agrippa. Agrippa heard the gospel, from Paul, but wasn't converted. Paul was converted without hearing the gospel at all. What made the difference? Ultimately, all we can say is God chose one and not the other. Paul was one of God's elect, Agrippa wasn't. Ultimately the reason some believe and some don't is purely down to God's eternal good pleasure, which we don't understand. We must leave it there.

Ephesians 1:5,6

*Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

But whenever we talk like that, we must immediately say that we can never, ever use that as an excuse, and say that it's God's fault that someone never comes to Christ. "I don't believe because God hasn't chosen me. It's His fault." No. We can never say that.

So was there a difference which contributed towards Paul believing but not Agrippa?

– Paul was a Jew, Agrippa was a Gentile. But their background wasn't the difference. Both equally were ***“expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews.”***

– Paul received a direct communication from God, Agrippa didn't. But that wasn't the difference either. Agrippa had heard the gospel, via Paul. The gospel is God's ordinary means of salvation. The gospel is just as much from God as any direct experience. In fact, a lot of people say they've had an experience of God and they've had no such thing. I know we can't see the heart, but a response to hearing the gospel is usually a more reliable indication someone has become a Christian than any mystical experience.

– So what made the difference between Paul and Agrippa? There was one. Christ said:

John 12:25

*He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.*

The reason Agrippa was ***“almost persuaded”*** but not quite, was that he loved his life in this world too much. How do we know? In Acts 25:23 we're told, he came into the place of hearing with *“great pomp”* and the *“principal men of the city.”* He loved it all. And after hearing the gospel and being ***“almost persuaded”*** to become a Christian, what did he do? Renounce his old life, release Paul and join him on his missionary journeys? No.

*[30] And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: [31] And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. [32] Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.*

Sadly, Agrippa never became a Christian. Instead, he conferred with Festus. He was far more interested in his relationship with a man who thought true religion was superstition. They both knew Paul had done nothing wrong. But, to wash their hand of the whole affair, they sent

him to Rome, still as a prisoner, and carried on the life in this world they loved so much. Paul wanted to go to Rome anyway, so he wasn't complaining at a free ticket.

What about Paul? His conversion was the last thing he ever expected. God burst into his life from nowhere. Suddenly, the one he'd been persecuting he called "Lord." He accepted it straight away, "I want this. This is what I've been looking for all my life."

Why did Paul take out all that fury and hatred on Christians? It was an irrational hatred. I reckon deep down in his heart he knew something was missing but he'd no idea what. There was a deep dissatisfaction with this world, and he filled his life with hatred of Christians to cover his emptiness inside. In other words, he hated his life in this world.

When Christ said "*he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal,*" it doesn't mean everybody who hates their life will be saved. There are plenty who hate their lives and they try to end it or use alcohol and drugs to blot it out. The point is that if we love our lives here too much, like Agrippa, we'll never respond to the gospel. But if we just recognise a black hole in our hearts, even if we don't know what it is or what we want, there's hope. The only thing that can truly satisfy the human heart is the Lord Jesus Christ. We're never going to accept Christ's message if we're too comfortable here. But if we can just spot this emptiness, a dissatisfaction with the world, there's hope. Then if we call on the Lord Jesus Christ to change us, He will come into our lives and do just that.

May all that hear me this day, be both almost, and altogether such as I am, except the bonds of this sin that still clings to me.

## Romans 8:31-39. More than Conquerors

Chapter 8 is a summary of the previous seven chapters. And these verses, vv.31-39 are a summary of chapter 8. Chapter 9 starts a completely different subject, which we're not going to go in to. So the first question to ask is, Why do we need these last 9 verses in chapter 8? Why didn't Paul finish the chapter at v.30. All the information would be there.

And the answer is that the Holy Spirit is being good to us. The Holy Spirit is the real author of Scripture. He inspires every word of It. He inspired Paul to write this extra summary. And that's the Holy Spirit being good to us, because we're all prone to unbelief.

When we get some wonderful news, how do we react? Let's suppose we had a brother who for some reason got separated from the family, and because we hadn't heard from him for a long time, we assume he'd died. And then many, many years later someone comes along and tells us he's alive. What would be the first words out of our lips? "I don't believe it." We're just prone to having that reaction. And we still won't really believe it until we see him fit and alive for ourselves. We've got a similar situation here.

We have been given some wonderful news. Far more wonderful than anything we could think. Our sins have been forgiven by God. We no longer need to be punished for them:

Romans 8:1

*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

If we don't think that's good news, just think of all those sins we've committed in the past. Those selfish decisions we've made. Those selfish actions. Things we can't undo. They've happened. We can't do anything about the consequences now, it's too late. Yet:

John 3:17

*God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

If we come to Jesus Christ, put our trust in Him for our salvation, personally, stop any kind of trusting in ourselves for anything, then we too can know for sure in our hearts the forgiveness of sins for ourselves. That's good news. And before we think that means that now we've been forgiven for everything, we can sin all we like and still get to heaven, the Lord changes our hearts so we just wouldn't think that way any more.

And no matter how many times we're told this is true, we still find it difficult to believe. So, the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures keeps repeating Himself, and that's for our benefit. In vv.31-35 we've some quick-fire questions, possible objections we might come up with.

***[31] What shall we then say to these things?....***

What things? Everything in Romans so far, especially chapter 8. There was no hope for us. We, by nature, even now if we just give in to our human nature, cannot please God:

Romans 8:7,8

*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

That's the state we're born in. But Christians have the Holy Spirit, to keep them from sin:

Romans 8:9,10

*But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

Although we suffer in this world, and must go through many trials (because the Lord has ordained them all for our good), the Lord is always with us. The Holy Spirit even prays for us when we don't know what to pray, or what the Lord's will is:

Romans 8:26,27

*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

And why does prayer work? (We might say “my prayers don’t work,” but maybe we’re not praying in the will of God). Prayer can only work because God is in control of all things. There’s nothing outside of His control. If that wasn’t the case, we could argue that God might want to help us, but maybe He couldn’t do anything about it. That’s not God:

Romans 8:28

*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

Because of all these things, we can be confident every aspect of our salvation is assured:

Romans 8:30

*Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

So, what shall we say to these things? What is there that could possibly still concern us?

***...If God be for us, who can be against us?***

These are all rhetorical questions. They’re not there to try to get information because the writer doesn’t know the answer. The answer is meant to be obvious – nobody.

And if God is in control of all things, nothing and nobody can be against us, not even Satan. But what about when things “go wrong”? Earthquakes, famines, illnesses, the loss of loved ones. These things occur, but it doesn’t mean God has lost control. Joseph was sold by his brethren. He was imprisoned unjustly for 3 years. But he became a

leader in Egypt, and saved Israel and Egypt from famine. He said to his brethren afterwards:

Genesis 50:20

*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*

God works through all the difficulties, and works all things together for good. And what was the greatest thing the Lord has ever done in the history of the world?

***[32] He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?***

God's own Son was put to death by wicked men. But it was all in God's plan:

Acts 2:23

*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain....*

Men hated Christ so much, they put Him to death. That was a wicked act, and those who did it will be punished eternally for it, unless they repented. They didn't know it, but without Christ's death on the cross, there would be no salvation for any of His people:

John 3:16

*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

If the most wicked act to have ever occurred on earth was turned around for good by the Lord, how much more shall He not freely give us all things? Paul is arguing from the greater to the lesser. If He gave us such a precious gift as His only Son, especially for us who don't deserve it, all other things are so much smaller, of course He'll give them to us. The "***all things***" being, not everything we want, but everything we need:

2 Peter 1:3

*According as his divine power hath given unto us **all things that pertain unto life and godliness**, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue....*

**[33] Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.**

Even though we know we've passed from death to life, we do still sin, and our continued sinning can still be a genuine concern to us. And so it ought to be. We read verses like:

1 John 3:6

*Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.*

It's verses like this that can make us wonder sometimes if we're one of the Lord's people at all. I still sin. Yes, we do still sin. But the same writer, John, also said this, earlier:

1 John 1:8,9

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So, John can't be saying Christians don't sin any more. What he is saying is that **if we abide in Him**, we won't sin. To the extent we abide in Him, we don't sin, but to the extent we rather follow our old selfish desires, yes, we do certainly sin. But we've an advocate:

1 John 2:1,2

*....these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins....*

So, because we continue to sin, we might think the Father can still bring charges against us. And Satan, the accuser of the brethren, knows this and tries to take advantage of it. But, **"it is God that justifieth."**

Nobody, not even Satan, can lay any more charges against us because we've been freely forgiven by the One who matters, the Lord of Glory.

***[34] Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.***

There are three things here: Christ's death, His resurrection and His intercession.

As we've been reconciled to God by Christ's death, nobody can condemn us any more:

Romans 8:1

*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

And the resurrection is proof of this. Without the resurrection, we wouldn't know whether God the Father had accepted Christ's atoning sacrifice or not. We'd still be in the dark. Nobody else has ever risen from the dead before. Christ did raise a few people from the dead in His lifetime to show that He was "*the resurrection and the life.*" But they all died again later. Only Christ has been raised in His resurrection body. And that's important:

1 Corinthians 15:17

*And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.*

And not only is He risen again, but He "*is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*" We've already been told that the Spirit makes intercession for us:

Romans 8:26,27

*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

We're told here that Christ also makes intercession for us. And this is also in Hebrews:

Hebrews 7:25

*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

We've got the whole Trinity involved in our upkeep. That's remarkable. Why should a holy God, Creator of the universe, Lord of heaven and earth, be bothered with us? Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit both know what we need more than we do, and both pray to the Father on our behalf. All we've got to do is to accept the Father's will, rather than seeking our own will all the time. That's the difficult bit.

***[35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...***

Again, a rhetorical question, the answer is nobody. Christ died for His people. If we were the only one who was going to be saved, He'd still have gone to the cross for us.

1 John 3:1

*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*

The last bit of that verse is interesting. Because we've received Christ's love, because we've now been changed in our hearts, the world is just not going to understand us. We might find that a problem, but it's such a small problem compared to Christ's love for us:

John 15:18,19

*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

And then we've got a list of other possibilities which could separate us from Christ's love:

***....shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?***

And of course the answer is that none of these can separate us from the love of Christ to us. Nothing can. The world won't understand why we put up with these things. They'll try to explain us away using their own ideas. They'll think we've just got some psychological problem, or we've been educated badly or brainwashed. And we've got to put up, not only with the persecutions, but also with these false accusations against us. The apostle Paul was told that he was mad by the Roman governor Festus. But Paul replied gently:

Acts 26:25

*But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*

Often, when people come across something they don't understand, they'll react violently against it. Maybe we'll end up in prison unjustly, like Joseph, Paul, Silas and many others. Maybe we'll be killed, like Stephen, or our Saviour Himself. Whatever anyone does to us, our duty is to glorify God. That's easier said than done when we're stressed. We don't look for persecution, but if the Lord sees fit to send it, He'll also send grace to endure it:

1 Corinthians 10:13

*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

That's the end of the quick-fire questions. And then we've got a quote from Psalm 44:

***[36] As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.***

Psalm 44:22

*Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.*

It's inevitable that we are going to be treated unfairly. Welcome to the Christian life. It's certainly completely different from the sort of life the prosperity teachers tell us. "God wants you rich, healthy, successful." He might do, if God thinks we can handle it and use it to His glory. But that's not the usual way the Lord deals with His people. We don't look for this, and it's certainly not something we should want, but the Lord often takes His people through the valley of the shadow of death, as the way He wants us to glorify Him.

Isaiah 24:15

*Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires, even the name of the Lord God of Israel in the isles of the sea.*

Christ told Peter this:

John 21:18,19

*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.*

We know we ought to glorify God in our good works:

Matthew 5:16

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

But we should also be prepared to glorify God in our sufferings too:

1 Peter 4:16

*Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

***[37] Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.***

Whatever happens to us, whether pleasant or not, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Still difficult to believe? Christ once said to a father of a child with a dumb spirit:

Mark 9:23,24

*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

In the seven letters to the churches in Asia in the book of Revelation, to every one of them, the promises were given to the individuals within each church who overcome:

Revelation 2:7

*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh .....*

That doesn't mean we've got to make an effort ourselves to overcome all obstacles. We can't do that. We can't even forsake one sin, let alone anything else. No, but through Jesus Christ, we are more than conquerors. The only way we can overcome any obstacle, including the biggest one of all, our own sin, we need Jesus Christ. We're losers. Never trust in self, that would be a disaster. Christ alone is the one who can conquer all things.

And then, if that wasn't enough, we've got another list of possible objections:

***[38] For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, [39] Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

What's the difference between this list and the previous list in v.35? The previous list contained all things that could possibly happen to us in this world: ***"...tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"*** These are either what we call "natural disasters," or things men could do to us. All of which are under God's control. But here, this list goes beyond the things of this world:

***"...death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any***

***other creature....***” Even ***“death”*** can’t separate us from the love of God in Christ. We’re not to fear death:

Matthew 10:28

*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Not even supernatural beings can separate us from the love of God: ***“angels, nor principalities, nor powers.”*** And that includes Satan.

We’re not told much about spiritual beings in the Bible, and that’s a good thing, otherwise we might start worshipping them or taking an unhealthy interest in them. But we are told about their existence. We’re told that angels serve God’s people:

Hebrews 1:14

*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*

And we’re told about ***“principalities and powers”*** which are against us:

Ephesians 6:12,13

*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

And we’re told Christ has already defeated these on the cross:

Colossians 2:15

*And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

***“nor things present, nor things to come.”*** If we’re worried about anything now or in future, we cannot be separated from Christ. We can’t lose our salvation. It’s secure forever:

Philippians 1:6

*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ....*

John 10:27,28

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

And then: **“Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature.” “Any other creature.”** That includes our own worst enemy, ourselves.

Have we got it yet? What’s missed out in this list? Either in this world or in heavenly places? Nothing. That’s the point. Nothing **“shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

Do we really believe all that? It’s true because the Holy Spirit says it’s true in the Scriptures. The only objection I can think of now is that we might say, “Maybe I’m not one of the Lord’s people after all.” If that was the case, yes, I agree, none of these promises would apply. These promises are only for Christians. So we need to examine ourselves:

2 Corinthians 13:5

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*

Philippians 2:12,13

*...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

2 Peter 1:10

*Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall....*

Have we been changed in the heart? Do we no longer chase after the things we used to? Do we love God? Do we hate sin? – especially our own continued sinning – do we now hate it? That wasn’t there before, it didn’t bother us then. Do we love the Lord Jesus Christ more than

anything for what He has done for us? I can't answer these questions, and nobody other than each one of us as individuals can. If the answer's "No," or "I'm not sure," call on Him in prayer. He can make everything clear to us. If we want assurance, He is the only One who can give that to us. And He is willing to save all who come to Him:

John 6:37

*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

And if we do know that we are His, then all these promises are ours. Why do we still think they're not? Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.



## Romans 14. Receiving the Weak in the Faith

This chapter is about how Christians should deal with one another. We've got two Christians, one weak in the faith and one strong. Both are true believers. We're not talking about unbelievers here. There's a similar passage in 1 Corinthians 8-10, but that's about meat offered to idols, and mainly refers to our relationship with unbelievers. This here is nothing to do with idols. It's about our dealings with each other in the church.

*[1] Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.*

This is an instruction to every Christian, because there's always going to be somebody weaker in the faith than ourselves. It ought to be obvious we should welcome weak believers into our fellowship. Maybe they've just become a Christian. Of course we should receive and help them. Isaiah prophesied of Christ:

Isaiah 42:3

*A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.*

But then we've immediately got a warning. ***“But not to doubtful disputations.”*** Why on earth should we want to engage in doubtful disputations with a poor, weak believer? Well, that's what we often do. We Christians have a tendency to look down on weaker brethren. We might not mean to do it, maybe we don't even realise we're doing it, but the tendency is there. I know my Bible a lot better than this weak Christian, so I'll try to teach him something. It's a natural tendency. The motivation is good. But it depends on our attitude. If we start bulldozing our views onto them, the poor weak Christian can be dumbfounded by it all. He simply might not understand, or he might not be ready to understand just yet. And that will alienate him. That's the first point. Then we're given an example:

*[2] For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.*

The strong Christian believes he can eat all things, but the weak believer believes he should only eat herbs. This weak believer isn't a Jew who's thinking the Jewish dietary laws are still in place for the Christian. Jews were allowed to eat meat, as long as it was ceremonially clean. And it's not about eating meat offered to idols either. That's what 1 Corinthians 8 is about. Idols aren't mentioned at all in this passage.

I once met a man who'd just become a Christian. He'd read Genesis 1:29 and Daniel 1:8-16 and concluded that all Christians should be vegetarians. If that's all we'd read of the Bible, we'd think so too. He obviously hadn't read Genesis 9:3 where God told Noah, after the flood, he was allowed to eat meat. Or Acts 10:11-15 where Peter is told that all animals are clean, as long as we give thanks:

1 Timothy 4:4,5

*For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*

We're very full of ourselves. We've only become a Christian for a few weeks and we think we know it all. The text tells us that it's the weak believer here that believes in only eating herbs. Not that there's anything wrong with vegetarianism, but to say you're a vegetarian for religious reasons, is wrong. The Bible teaches no such thing. In an absolute sense, the weak Christian here is wrong, and the strong Christian is right. We can eat all things.

Surely, it's expected that a weaker Christian will be wrong most of the time. The Bible is our ultimate authority. The more we study it, the more we'll know what's right and wrong:

2 Timothy 3:16,17

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

A weak Christian won't know his Bible as much as a strong one, so we expect him to be wrong on many things. But he has been born again. He has come to know the Lord, and has a real living relationship with Him. We need to ask ourselves: What were we like when we first became a Christian? How much of the truth did we know then? We

didn't know anything. Before we became a Christian, we had all sorts of crazy ideas. If we're from a church background, we might have some Biblical knowledge, via our unconverted minds. But as we grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we are continually being changed, as the Holy Spirit shows us what the Bible really teaches. The Christian life is a lifelong process of change. None of us will ever arrive at perfect doctrine. In fact:

1 Corinthians 8:2

*And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.*

So, do we think of ourselves as a strong Christian? We're all weak Christians really. It's just that some are less weak than others. Then we've got a very important verse:

***[3] Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.***

I said earlier that a strong Christian has a tendency to look down on weaker Christians. Here he's told not to have that attitude. But the weak Christian has a similar problem. He's got a tendency to judge stronger Christians. The weak Christian doesn't think he's weak. He thinks he's strong. He's only been a Christian for five minutes and he's already looking at the other Christians in church and judging them in his heart. But stronger Christians usually have different views, because they've grown in the faith. Remember, it's probably the weak Christian who's got it wrong. But he doesn't realise that. He might not mean to judge, he might not realise he's doing it, but that's his tendency. It's the tendency we all have in our sinful hearts. We shouldn't despise others and we shouldn't judge others. God has received both strong and weak. They are both believers, despite the differences.

Matthew 7:1

*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

***[4] Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.***

So, even though another believer is different from ourselves, either weaker or stronger, we shouldn't judge them. We all stand before God as individuals. We've all still got many wrong ideas, but some have more wrong ideas than others. Then another example:

***[5] One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.***

Holy days. Many people think of some days as more holy than others. Now the weekly Sabbath is more holy, because it's in the Ten Commandments. Stronger Christians would tend to observe the Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath. But other, weaker Christians would think nothing of working or going to the shops on that day. Should we despise them, look down on them? And what about Christmas? I personally don't think we should celebrate Christmas. It's not in the Bible, it's a Roman Catholic Mass day, it is only on December 25th because the pope decided to Christianise the pagan winter solstice festival. And it causes so much pain and trouble, the suicide rate goes up five times greater than normal. It's a terrible festival, and I think it should be banned. But there's a lot of people who wouldn't agree with me. Should I look down on all you weaker Christians believing in all that pagan superstition? Should you judge me for being weird because I don't celebrate it? No. If we're both born-again, we should accept each other as true believers in Christ, despite differences in what we believe. It's whether we know the Lord or not that counts.

We say, yes of course that's right. But some churches separate themselves from every other Christian church, on issues such as this. What do we think of that? I feel sad really. Many in them are truly converted, and it's such a shame we never even meet them.

But what's this, "***Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind?***" I'm fully persuaded I shouldn't celebrate Christmas. You're fully persuaded you should celebrate it. One of us has got to be wrong. You think it's me, I think it's you. Let's just get on with one another. That's

the attitude we should have. To our own master, God, we stand or fall. We're not accountable to each other. And He is able to make us to stand.

***[6] He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it . He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.***

So we're called to accept everyone who, as much as we can tell, has been born-again in their hearts. Even though in an absolute sense, many of them may be weak Christians and have plenty of wrong thinking. So, and this is a controversial point, should we ever split a church on matters of doctrine? Because every time we do, we're rejecting some true believers.

But before you think I'm opening the door to anybody and everybody with strange ideas coming into the church, there is one doctrine we must insist on:

John 3:7

*Ye must be born again.*

We're all being corrected by the Lord as we grow in the faith. But maybe, in some areas, He doesn't want us to be corrected before we die. Some people will never come to my point of view on Christmas, or even on the fact it's all right to eat meat. Some churches believe singing hymns is a sin. They only sing psalms. They'll never agree with us, and we'll probably never agree with them on the issue before we die. None of us will become anywhere near perfect before it's our time to go to be with the Lord.

So, here we're told to accept other believers who differ from us. People who celebrate Christmas are doing it to the Lord, just as much as those who don't. People who eat meat are doing it to the Lord, just as much as those who don't. People who sing hymns are doing it to the Lord, just as much as those who think we shouldn't. And there's a reason:

***[7] For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.***

Now we've become a Christian, we don't live to ourselves any more:

1 Corinthians 6:19,20

*Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

***[8] 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.***

We live as individuals before the Lord. Not as churches. So we shouldn't think we ought to conform perfectly to our denominational beliefs. That means we might at some point come into conflict with our church's teaching. Choosing a church is like choosing a political party, we can't agree with everything, we just have to go for the one we agree with the most. We're not here to worship a church, we're here to worship our Saviour Jesus Christ. We should join ourselves to a church, but never worship it.

***[9] For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.***

Christ is our Lord, not the church. He came to give us new life in Him:

John 10:10

*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

It's to Christ we live, not men or the organisations of men.

***[10] But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. [11] For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. [12] So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.***

We're all going to have to give account of ourselves as individuals before God. So we shouldn't judge anybody else here in this world. And we shouldn't trust in the church to get us to heaven either. We're going to be standing before the judge of all the earth alone.

So, we should be searching for truth for ourselves. We should be reading our Bibles and growing

2 Peter 3:18

*...in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

But we're all so terribly weak. When we get to heaven, we'll see Him as He is. We'll know true doctrine then, for sure. If we're His, our salvation is secure. But an awful lot of us, no, all of us, will be terribly surprised when we get there. It'll be nothing like what we think it's going to be.

***[13] Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.***

So, we should stop thinking about judging others in any way. But should we ever try to change others? Well, we should all live by what we understand to be the truth at the time. So I continue to not celebrate Christmas, someone else may continue to be a vegetarian, or refuse to sing hymns. And if someone asks us why we do or don't do things, we should be ready to give an answer. But in the end, our lives are the best witness. We must live what we believe. And the Lord will change people when He's ready. Maybe He'll use our witness to change others, or maybe He'll use somebody else's witness to change us.

And we should make sure ***“no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.”*** How can we do that? What is a ***“stumbling-block”*** or an ***“occasion to fall”***? We don't argue. We just live what we believe according to the light given to us, and leave it to the Holy Spirit to convict others they're wrong, or convict us we're wrong.

***[14] I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.***

To this weak believer, if he thinks something is unclean, it's unclean to him. Even though in an absolute sense, it's not. How can we change him? Do we just say, "You're talking rubbish, listen to me instead"? No, we need to be sensitive to this issue. The weak believer thinks he's right. We know in an absolute sense he isn't. So we don't follow him if he tries persuading us of his ways. We simply have to be gentle in the way we do things.

***[15] But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.***

When we try persuading our brother, we must make sure we don't grieve him. We don't deliberately eat a bacon sandwich in front of anyone who thinks we should only eat herbs. We can eat bacon sandwiches, but not in a deliberate way directly in front of his face, trying to make him seem foolish. It's not necessary to do that. We must walk charitably.

And then we're told, ***"Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died."*** Notice this person is a true believer, ***"for whom Christ died."*** This passage is not about unbelievers. But does this mean our heavy-handedness in trying to persuade him out of his ideas can ***"destroy"*** his faith altogether? It can't mean that. Once we're saved we can never be lost:

Romans 8:38,39

*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The word ***"destroy"*** here means to destroy his peace. His conscience will be troubled by what we say to him, if we're not speaking charitably. We're going to conclude at the end of this chapter that everybody should live by what their conscience tells them, their conscience being

instructed and led by the Holy Spirit. Our job is not to persuade people of anything because we say so, even if we're right. Our job is to persuade them because the Lord says so, and only the Holy Spirit acting on their consciences can do that.

***[16] Let not then your good be evil spoken of:***

We're persuaded ourselves that the way we think is right, and in this example it is right in an absolute sense, it's "**good.**" But if we don't act charitably with others, if we grieve our fellow-believer in any way, he could turn around and start speaking evil of us. Remember, he's weak, but his conscience tells him he's right. If we come along, in his view, trying to bulldoze our views on him, he's going to reject us, even if actually we're in the right. That will harden his heart against what is actually the truth, and it will, humanly speaking, become more difficult to persuade him of the truth later.

***[17] For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.***

The kingdom of God is spiritual. We can argue all we like as to whether we should eat meat or not, or celebrate Christmas or not, or sing hymns or not, but actually, in the end, none of it matters. We won't have any of this in heaven. It's good to try to do things in a right way while we're here, but in the end none of it matters. It's whether we know the Lord or not that counts. Righteousness, peace, joy. These are gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are the things that should be really important to us, not earthly things.

***[18] For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.***

And if we serve God in these things, spiritual things, getting our hearts right with him, rather than arguing all the time about outward observances, then this is what is acceptable before Him. And if we live our lives being acceptable before God, then we'll automatically be the witness we should be towards our fellow men.

When it says **“approved of men,”** it can’t mean we’ll be popular. God forbid. Christ said:

Luke 6:26

*Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*

The Christian will be hated of all men:

Luke 6:22,23

*Blessed are ye, when men shall bate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.*

What **“approved of men”** means is that we’ll be the witness God wants us to be.

***[19] Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.***

So, when we meet a Christian different from us, we should be peaceable, and try to edify. It’s right to witness for what we believe to be truth, but we must do it peaceably, or we run the risk of affecting his conscience against the truth we’re trying to teach him.

***[20] For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.***

Here’s that word **“destroy”** again. If we grow *“in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,”* we can only do so if God works in us. It is the **“work of God.”** We should never get in the way of that. Especially if it’s just **“for meat,”** for things of the world which pass away. It’s easy for us to offend others, hardening them against the truth.

We’re back to the example of whether we should eat meat or not. **“All things indeed are pure.”** That’s the opinion of the strong Christian, and he’s right in an absolute sense, we can eat all things as long as we

give thanks. But if our eating things that other, weaker Christians, don't believe we should eat, in front of them deliberately, it may be right in an absolute sense, but it's being unnecessarily offensive. And here we're told, that's evil.

***[21] It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.***

It's better not to eat flesh, or drink wine, or do anything else that makes our brother either stumble, be offended or be made weak. Even though, when they're not around, we can lawfully do these things acceptably before God. Notice this includes drinking wine.

And then we've got a really good definition of faith:

***[22] Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.***

Faith is something the individual has before God. The individual's conscience is involved in the way the Lord teaches us the truth. But what about this verse?:

Jude 1:3

*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for **the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints.*

And this:

Ephesians 4:4,5

*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, **one faith**, one baptism....*

These verses seem to imply there is only one faith, and if we don't hold it we're heretics. And indeed, throughout church history, those who haven't toed the line behind orthodox creeds such as the Nicene Creed and so on, have been persecuted as heretics. Surely there is only one faith, which we should all hold to. It can't be up to the individual.

Yes, there's only one truth, in an absolute sense. That's the faith we should follow. That's the faith of the Bible. But we're all weak Christians. None of us know the whole truth. We should be heading towards knowing the truth, but we're all so far short. In practice, we all have our own individual faith, which is unique to ourselves. If we knew everything, we'd all have the same faith, the faith "*once delivered unto the saints.*" But we don't.

The church is full of those who think they're strong Christians, persecuting or looking down on those they see weaker than themselves. That's why we need this chapter.

Eating only herbs is not "*the faith.*" We can eat meat, as long as we give thanks. But if someone who eats only herbs, because he's weak, really thinks it's the Christian way, and his conscience doesn't condemn him, that's fine, let him carry on. It's his faith. "***Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.***" We don't come down heavy on him. After all, eating vegetables isn't actually sin. The Holy Spirit will convict him of the truth eventually. We all started far away from the truth when we became Christians.

But in everything we do, we've got to have a clear conscience.

***[23] And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.***

If we're not sure about something, if we doubt as to whether something is right or not, don't do it. Until we, personally, are convinced by Scripture that something is right or not, we shouldn't do it. Because then we're not doing it "***of faith,***" we're doing it for some other reason, like our church teaches it, or to fit in. This is a definition of faith. Something we believe with all our heart and a clear conscience, is what we believe, that's our faith.

For example, some churches believe ladies should cover their heads in public worship. If we're visiting one of those churches and we know this, ladies, wear a hat, even if we don't believe in it ourselves, just wear it so as not to cause offence. That's what's being taught in this passage. On the other hand it's wrong for a church to force all female members

to cover their heads anyway. Because the ladies aren't then all doing it out of conviction, but because the church says so. Maybe secretly some don't really believe in it.

The point is, our consciences should be clear in all that we do. And, yes, as we grow in the faith, we'll change as the Holy Spirit convicts us of more and more truth. And what do we do if we really want to know the truth about anything? Ask the Lord:

James 1:5-8

*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

So, to conclude:

Colossians 2:16,17

*Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.*



## 2 Corinthians 11. Glorifying in Our Infirmities

The nearer we get to the end of the New Testament, the more warnings we've got about false teachers. We can't ignore it. These people exist, and we need to be aware of them.

Paul is concerned about whether false teachers have come into the church in Corinth and led them astray. False teachers are very subtle enemies. They can be very clever. They can put on an outward show of godliness, but are really wolves in sheep's clothing.

***[1] Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.***

These false teachers were boasting in themselves. I don't know what they were saying, maybe boasting about how many degrees in theology they'd got, what pedigree they had, how many people they'd brought to the Lord last week.... I don't know what they were boasting about, but the idea was to impress their listeners they were worth listening to. And they used worldly boasting to do that. On the other hand, Paul's calling was from the Lord. As soon as he had been converted and baptised by Ananias he began preaching:

Acts 9:20-25

*And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.*

Paul actually mentions this incident at the end of this chapter, as one of his trials:

***[32] In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascuses with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: [33] And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.***

Paul's calling came from the Lord. Our individual calling comes from the Lord. How do you know what my calling is? How do I know what your calling is? But Paul was concerned the Corinthians wouldn't accept his calling, because they accepted these false teachers who impressed them by using worldly means. That's what people do to try to prove their authority. But Christians shouldn't do that. We've got nothing to boast of.

But what Paul was going to do, was use this concept of worldly boasting, to make his point. He was going to boast in rather different things than the false teachers did, and we'll come to that later on. The whole chapter builds up to Paul's boasting at the end. He makes it clear several times beforehand that boasting is folly, and that he's just using the technique to make his point. A Christian should never really boast, except in Christ:

Galatians 6:14

*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*

***[2] For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.***

This was the real reason why Paul cared so much about the Corinthians. Godly jealousy. This is a mark of a true teacher. False teachers would never have this attitude. They'd just be out for what they can get for themselves. When we speak, we should be jealous of only one thing: to espouse other people to one husband, Jesus Christ. Nothing else.

***[3] But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.***

False teachers work through subtlety. Deceit. We don't know it's happening, that's the terrible nature of it. Just as Eve was deceived by the subtilty of the serpent in the garden of Eden, so we should be very careful not to be taken in. Notice the warning is to our minds. ***“So your minds should be corrupted...”*** That's where it starts. We know that:

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ....*

So we're told:

1 Peter 1:13

*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end....*

We've got to make sure our minds are not corrupted ***“from the simplicity that is in Christ.”*** Christianity is simple. It's not complicated. Men are complicated. If a man wants us to follow him, he'll often try to impress us by appearing very complicated. So we end up being impressed by his education, or his insight or he'd say one thing and mean another. That's how men attract followers. But Christianity is simple. We're not like that.

2 Corinthians 1:12

*For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.*

So here's another mark of a true teacher, as opposed to a false one. We shouldn't be complicated. We should say what we mean and mean what we say. In other words we should be simple, like Nathanael:

John 1:47

*Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*

Worldly people take simplicity for foolishness, and take advantage of us, so we should be:

Matthew 10:16

*....wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

***[4] For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him .***

Here's a good three-point sermon. Another Jesus, another spirit, another gospel. Preach, receive, accept. Paul is concerned that false teachers are coming in to the church and they're happy to put up with them. But they're preaching another Jesus by another spirit, which leads them to accepting another gospel altogether. They are bearing with this man. He's not being stopped, nobody seems to realise the false teaching, they just accept it.

***[5] For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.***

Paul is concerned they'll readily accept false teachers, but they might not accept him as an apostle. After all, he wasn't one of the original apostles. The qualifications for being an apostle are set out in Acts 1 when they were looking for a replacement for Judas:

Acts 1:21,22

*Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.*

Paul didn't have these qualifications. He wasn't with Christ during His lifetime. So, why should people accept him as an apostle? He himself admits his case was slightly unusual:

1 Corinthians 15:8

*And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.*

***[6] But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been throughly made manifest among you in all things.***

His apostleship had been made manifest, shown to the world, by God. He had the signs. Only apostles has the signs and wonders:

2 Corinthians 12:12

*Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*

But now, the first mark of false teachers. They're after your money. That's why they do it.

***[7] Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? [8] I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. [9] And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.***

Paul preached the gospel of God freely to the Corinthians. He made sure he was chargeable to no man. If there was a shortfall, the brethren who came with him from Macedonia supplied it. But that's not ***"robbing other churches, taking wages of them,"*** it was supply of a shortfall which he hadn't anticipated. He normally paid his way himself.

Paul made sure he preached the gospel free of charge. Now this is very important. One of the best things a church can ever do is stop the tradition of having a collection in the middle of the service. We can tell

visitors not to be embarrassed about passing the plate by as much as we want, but however much we say it, it's still embarrassing really.

Jehovah's Witnesses make a big deal about the fact they never hold a collection, as though everyone else did. We've really got to make sure we're not after anyone's money.

But didn't Paul say something about not muzzling an ox as he treads out the corn?

1 Corinthians 9:14

*Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.*

I knew a church where they insist the members tithe and that the pastor gets a salary equivalent to a headmaster's. I've seen on the internet a Christian speaker charging £300 per day. And this is the text they'd probably use to justify their actions. No. This is about giving a man reasonable expenses, not payment for preaching. We should read on:

1 Corinthians 9:15-18

*But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.*

Paul was a tent maker, that's how he made a living. The preaching of the gospel should be absolutely free of charge. We should never, ever, ever take money for preaching. This is so important in the day of the professional preacher or evangelist. Some of these people make millions, they have mansions and helicopters. But:

Matthew 6:24

*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.*

***[10] As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.***

Paul again prepares them for the fact he's going to use a boasting technique in a minute.

***[11] Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth. [12] But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.***

He has to make sure they realise the reason he's going to do this is because he cares about them so much. He genuinely loves them. Another mark of false teachers is that they don't love you. They're out to get what they can for themselves. They're crooks.

Whatever these teachers glory in, Paul tells the Corinthians to ask the question, Do they really care about their listeners? Do they really love their followers?

***[13] For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.***

These people are false apostles. Paul uses the word "***apostle***" here because he's comparing them with himself, a true apostle. They deceive. They transform themselves from what they really are (a crook) into what they think an apostle of Christ should be like. It's putting on a show. It's all fake. It's certainly not "*simplicity and godly sincerity*."

***[14] And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. [15] Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be***

***transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.***

And of course, it's from Satan. That's how he works. He's the great deceiver. He can transform himself into an angel of light. In other words, he appears very reasonable:

Genesis 3:1,4-6

*Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? .... Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

And here, we're shown the very real and frightening truth that there are many church leaders who outwardly seem to be ***“ministers of righteousness”*** but they're actually ministers of Satan. I'm not making this up. This is reality. They're of the devil. We need to be aware this is all around us. We must make sure we can tell the difference.

***[16] I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. [17] That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. [18] Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.***

Paul is again preparing his readers for the boasting he's just about to do. "These false teachers glory after the flesh, glory in their achievements. So, all right, I'll do the same."

***[19] For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise.***

They ***“suffer fools gladly.”*** The Corinthians thought themselves so wise in accepting a false teacher, but they were actually putting up with a fool. The crazy thing is they were doing it gladly. And here's another

important mark of false teachers. They're controlling. They not only love money, but they love power, and want to control their followers.

***[20] For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you , if a man take of you , if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.***

It's amazing what power people can have over others. It happens in every area of life. How did Adolf Hitler come to power? The people voted for him. Why do people in abusive relationships always go back to their abuser? This is all around us, and it's in the church too. Leaders with such persuasive powers, getting others to do exactly what they want.

Who would really want to be brought into bondage, be devoured, be stolen from, have someone exalt themselves over you, or be smitten on the face? Nobody in their right mind would put up with such a thing. But it's happening in the church, and people are happy with it. That's how we are. We need to wake up and get out of anything like this.

It's the way they rebuke their followers. We'll put up with all kinds of abuse if we think we need to be punished. Paul's rebukes in his first letter, seem weak in comparison:

***[21] I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.***

In his first letter, Paul rebuked them for sin, and it indeed produced godly sorrow which led to repentance. But they now see the way the false teachers rebuke them, by abusing them, and they consequently thought of Paul as weak. So Paul now begins to use this worldly boasting, but he doesn't boast in the same things the false teachers boast in:

***[22] Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.***

So far, so good. Paul's pedigree is beyond reproach. But in Philippians, he calls this dung:

Philippians 3:7,8

*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.*

He then goes on:

***[23] Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more....***

This is where his boasting departs from what anyone would expect. He doesn't tell them his qualifications from Bible college, although he could have done. He tells of his trials:

***....in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. [24] Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. [25] Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; [26] In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; [27] In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.***

Instead of boasting in his achievements, or anything else you might expect, Paul gives them a long list of trials and persecutions he's been through since he became a Christian. This is the Christian life, not a life of ease and achievement, but a life of trials and tribulations. But the Lord delivers us from them all:

Psalm 34:19

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.*

***[28] Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.***

On top of these trials, he also had the burden of caring for all the churches he'd been involved with. That's the mark of a true minister, a true apostle. He really cares about his flock. A false teacher will never do that. A false teacher uses and abuses his flock.

***[29] Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?***

Such trials and care left Paul weak. He's not strong and bold like the false teachers who just want to abuse their flock for their own advantage. But he was like that Himself once.

Back to verse 6 for a second, he was ***“rude in speech.”*** We know he had a thorn in the flesh, although we're not told what it was exactly. In the previous chapter we get a hint:

2 Corinthians 10:10

*For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.*

I imagine him to be a little hunchback with a squeaky voice. And it's hinted in Galatians he also had eyesight problems. Before he became a Christian, he compensated for his disability by being loud and aggressive, beating Christians and casting them into prison:

Acts 8:3

*As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*

He used to be just like these false teachers. But after he became a Christian, he didn't glory in his achievements any more, but in his weaknesses:

2 Corinthians 12:9

*And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

***[30] If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.***

This is the Christian way. Not like the false teachers, boasting all the time. What have we really got to boast about? We're weak. Anything we have that's useful comes from the Lord anyway. We should glory in our infirmities in the sense that we must recognise how weak we are, that we've got nothing to boast of, and glory only in the Lord.

***[31] The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.***

Let's be finished with self. If we let self get the upper hand, we'll either end up like these false teachers, boastful, proud, and arrogant, or we'll be led astray by them.

2 Corinthians 10:17,18

*But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.*

## Philippians 2:5-11. Of No Reputation

*Read Philippians 2*

We call ourselves Christians. We follow Jesus Christ. If we say we follow somebody, surely we've got to have a desire in our hearts to be like that person, to behave in the same way they did when they were on earth. Otherwise it's wrong to say we follow them.

As Christians, we know Christ is far more than simply an example. He's primarily a Saviour. He saves His people from their sins. But He is also a real example for us:

1 Peter 2:21

*For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps....*

I've got no desire in my heart whatsoever to be a polygamous, warmongering paedophile, like Mohammed. Neither have I any desire in my heart to dump my wife and family to go off and seek "enlightenment," like Buddha. And I've no desire to behave like so many popes did in history. I really, seriously, don't want to be like any of these religious leaders. Did any of them lead by example? No! They lived an awful life. We shouldn't be stupid enough to follow any of them. But Jesus Christ was altogether different.

1 Peter 2:22,23

*....Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*

Jesus loved His enemies. He blessed them that cursed Him. He did good to them that hated Him, and prayed for them that despitefully used Him and persecuted Him. He is altogether lovely. This is the one we should want to follow. He's the only one in history who lived a life worthy of being followed. And here we've got instruction how to do that.

But before we look at the passage, we've got to say straightaway, that such a life is so high, so different from the everyday life we live, that,

even if we tried, we couldn't do it. We can't live up to His standard. We'll always fall short. That's why so many people reject Christianity. It is too high for them. They want something easier.

I'll give you an example. When I was working, one of my work colleagues was a young girl in her twenties, married with three young children. One day she related this story to us. The night before there had been a knock on the door, and there stood two very smart men in suits and ties. I don't know if they were JW's or Mormons, probably the latter. They had a brief conversation with her on the doorstep and then left. She was telling us the next day, "I really wanted to be like them. But I know I just can't be." She realised she just couldn't live such a high, moral, squeaky-clean life like the one they were presenting. So a highly moral lifestyle does attract. But people resign themselves to the fact they can't achieve it, so they just carry on the way they are.

But we shouldn't be put off. It's good to see the absolute beauty of the life Jesus Christ led. It should attract us. It's a life we should desire in our hearts to live, even if we can never achieve it ourselves. In fact, it's a good thing to realise we can't achieve it, because that's that's the first step in understanding what the Bible tells us about ourselves:

Romans 3:23

*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*

Only when we see we can't live to such a high standard, are we in a fit state to recognise our need of a Saviour to save us from this condition. Those Mormons just appeared outwardly to be squeaky-clean. If they were relying on themselves to live such a highly moral life, they would have to have just been putting on a show. My workmate was right. A highly moral life is attractive, but we can't do it. We need cleansing from the inside.

We only ask for help when we realise we can't do something for ourselves. And that's what God wants us to do. What's the point God sending Christ if He was only an example, and nobody could reach that standard? What would that achieve? Nothing. God sent Jesus Christ not simply to be an example, but to be a Saviour. He can save us from our small, low, self-centred little lives and raise us up to

something far, far better. But we've got to recognise the way we are by nature first, and desire to turn from it.

Only then can God begin to work in us. And He can give us a real, living relationship with Him. We can talk to Him, and tell Him we want to be changed. He will hear us. This what Christianity is all about. It's a real inner change. But we don't become instantly like Christ. Nobody does. Christians still live lives far short of the way Christ lived. But this fundamental change of heart is the beginning of a lifetime of change. Without it we can't even begin. So that's the most important thing. Otherwise we can't follow Christ at all.

Now, with that said, let's look at the passage. The passage describes the way Christ lived His life. And we're told that this is the same mindset that we should have to live our lives:

***[5] Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:***

We've got to change our minds, get our minds thinking along the right lines. Any change of behaviour must start in the mind. We'll only follow what our minds have grasped.

And this isn't just something we do once at the start of our Christian lives, it's a continual thing. We're always in need of having our mindset more and more conformed to Christ's.

Romans 12:2

*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

So, it's got to start in our minds. And our mindset should be the same as Christ's:

***[6] Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: [7] But made himself of no reputation....***

We're told here that Jesus Christ was "*...in the form of God...*" The church has been split on what this means since at least the fourth

century. I'm not going to argue about it. It's not necessary to argue about it. We've got to first of all acknowledge how little we really know. The most important questions we need to ask, whenever we read the Bible, is "Does this affect my life?" and "Does this show me how I should live?" Beyond these questions, we don't really need to know anything.

Having said that, information is here. We're looking into what our mindset should be, "***Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus....***" So there must be something here we do need to know, because it's about how we're to change our way of thinking.

And the first thing we need to see is that Christ is far more than just a man. We read that Christ was "***....equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation....***" That's a huge contrast. And that's the pattern we, to a far lesser degree of course, are to follow.

So when we read that He was "***....in the form of God....***" we're meaning He was far more than a man. Other Scriptures tell us a bit more about Him:

Proverbs 8:22,23

*The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.*

John 1:1-4,14

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

Colossians 1:15-17

*Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

Jehovah's Witnesses leap on that phrase in v.15, "*the firstborn of every creature*" and tell us that He was just a creature like us, but they don't read on. This person created all things. He's a Creator, something that can only be attributed to God. When it says He's the "*firstborn from the dead*" in v.18, it means the first to be resurrected.

Colossians 2:9

*For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*

From what we can gather from Scripture, Christ is fully God and fully man at the same time. God became man. The Word became flesh. He was "*God manifest in the flesh*" (1 Timothy 3:16). Now, that's all we can say. We can't understand it. We can't explain it. And we shouldn't think we can explain God with our tiny little minds. I'm just giving a few Scriptures which teach He is somehow divine. And He's fully human too, except for sin:

Hebrews 4:15

*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

And Christ "***....thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation....***" He voluntarily left the heaven He'd been in with the Father from all eternity, to come down to earth as a man. He didn't feel aggrieved He had to come, He wasn't upset He had to leave glory to come to earth, but didn't really want to. God forbid we should think that way. He "***....thought it not robbery....***", He, fully, voluntarily, became man. From being omnipresent, to limiting Himself in a body. And He lived and laid down His life fully voluntarily, so we might be free, if we only avail ourselves of His mercy.

1 John 3:1

*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.*

We weren't in heaven like Him to start with. But that's the pattern. We by nature think we're so wonderful. We make ourselves like little gods. That was the first temptation:

Genesis 3:4,5

*And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*

We're so full of ourselves, we think we can achieve so much, and make ourselves some great thing. But here we're being told our mindset should be completely changed from that. In the same way Christ, who was God, made Himself of no reputation by coming to earth as a man, so we, who think we're so great, should make ourselves of no reputation too. Have we really begun to do this yet? Or, after conversion, have we simply transferred our desire to be somebody in the world to a desire to be somebody in our church?

So how do we do this?

*....and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

Christ became man, and temporarily left being **“in the form of God”** to be **“made in the likeness of men.”** Now, if God ever was to become man, we'd think He'd at least come as some great man, an emperor perhaps, or a pope. Not at all. Christ not only became man but took upon Himself voluntarily **“the form of a servant.”** From **“the form of God”** to a man in **“the form of a servant.”** That's Christ, and that's the example to follow.

On more than one occasion, the disciples asked Christ which of them would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. What were they thinking? Is the greatest in the church going to be a pope or an archbishop? Someone who'll be looked up to and respected, with authority in the church, lording it over the people? No. On the first occasion they asked:

Matthew 18:2-4

*Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

They didn't get it. They were still asking this question close to the time of His crucifixion:

Luke 22:25-27

*And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.*

Matthew 23:11,12

*But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

That's the principle. And even today, we don't really understand it. We have to continually challenge ourselves about this. That was Christ's way, and it should be ours.

***[8] And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.***

Christ humbled Himself even unto death, ***“even the death of the cross.”*** At any time, as God, He could have got out of it. In Gethsemane He said:

Matthew 26:53,54

*Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*

In fact, He could have walked away from any part of His life and calling at any time. But He didn't. Every step of His life was in obedience to his Father's will.

That's the high standard we're called to. We fall so far short. We should be ashamed of ourselves. We need to change. Obedience to the Lord is what we need, rather than pleasing ourselves. And look at the reward Christ had for His perfect obedience:

***[9] Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:***

But, as God, surely after He'd finished here, He just went back to where He was before. He was God from all eternity anyway. There's surely nothing greater He could possibly be. So what's the point of Him leaving His glory, coming to earth, suffering in a limited body for a short time, dying on a cross and then going straight back to where He came from?

Hebrews 2:17

*Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.*

"Reconciliation for the sins of the people." That's what it's all about. So few are bothered about this. A few years ago, my wife was in a taxi going to Manchester airport. The driver, in conversation, told her he and his family were going to Mecca the following week. He then asked her, "Do you know why we're going to Mecca?" (This is evangelism!). My wife replied, "Doesn't every faithful muslim, if he can, have to visit Mecca once in his life?" He said, "No, it's not that. We go every year. Do you know why?" To which my wife replied "No." He said, "To purge ourselves of the sins we've committed over the past year." So, there's a man who cares about the forgiveness of his sins. He goes the wrong way about dealing with them, but at least he's concerned. How many people do we know, who are concerned about their sin before God? They might be concerned if they've hurt someone, but what about sins before God? We should all be concerned about our sins before God.

Isaiah 53:6

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Most people just live for themselves. They're not concerned about their sins before God at all. They don't have any time for Him. They think of religion as totally irrelevant.

But some people *are* concerned. And they think they have to do something to make themselves right with God, like that taxi driver. Maybe we need to go to Mecca every year. Maybe we have to take the Mass. Maybe we have to do more good works than bad. Most people who think on these things at all, reckon they're all right. They think that just by doing something difficult but achievable, they'll make it through any kind of judgment.

But sin is far greater than that. No matter what our religion teaches, we can't do enough. And the people in all these different religions, sort of know it. They take their trip to Mecca, they take their Mass. But very soon they need cleansing again, and they'll have to do it all over again, and so it goes on. And, sadly, they can never be sure their sins have been fully forgiven, because there'll always be more sin.

Israel in the Old Testament had its animal sacrifices, which the people had to continually offer, because their sins came up before them time and time again.

Hebrews 10:1,4

*For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.... For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*

We might find that surprising, because, after all, didn't God Himself ordain the animal sacrifices and the rituals of the Old Testament? Yes, He did. But they were never, ever meant to be a means of salvation in themselves. They were only ever pictures of the truth.

Hebrews 9:22

*And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.*

They were never meant to take away sin, but to point to a sacrifice in the future that would really take away sin. And that's why Christ's death on the cross is so important.

Galatians 3:24,25

*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.*

1 Peter 3:18

*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.*

Hebrews 9:13,14

*For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

Many religions believe in the forgiveness of sins, and they all produce various methods of cleansing from sin. But the problem with all of them is that they've got no tangible basis for God to forgive sin at all. God is Holy. He is perfectly just. How can God, who is perfectly just, forgive sin, without the shedding of blood? Because that's what the Old Testament animal sacrifices were teaching. God can't just forgive, with no basis. That might be mercy, but if God just let's us off, it's not justice. The only way for God to be just **and** merciful at the same time is through the blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:24-26

*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

So all these other means of cleansing ourselves from sin, whether it's going to Mecca, taking the Mass, sacrificing animals over and over again, are all a waste of time. God has provided the one real sacrifice that can take away sin in Jesus Christ. Putting our trust in Him to take away our sin, is the only way to be made right with God.

Acts 4:12

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

He is our Saviour and He is our judge. All men must come before Him. It's what we think of Him that matters, not how good we are, or whether we go to Mecca or the Mass or not.

Acts 17:30,31

*God... now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

***[10] That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; [11] And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

***“...to the glory of God the Father.”*** Everything that happens in this world is ordained by God for His own glory. It's God's glory that we should be living for in this world:

Westminster Larger Catechism Q.1

*Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.*

And it's God who will be glorified to all eternity in the next world as well. And how will He be glorified? Everybody one day will bow the knee to Jesus Christ. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Whether they want to or not. He is the only one worthy of worship, because He is God Himself who came into this world to save sinners.

Nobody can get away from Jesus Christ. People tried to. When He was here, they put Him to death because they hated Him so much. But one day, whether we like it or not, we'll all be bowing the knee to Him.

So, what do we think of Jesus Christ now? Are we bowing the knee to Him now, in our lives in this world? If we are, we'll be in a real, living

relationship with Him. We'll be fleeing from sin, and we'll have the mindset of Christ as we've seen it in this passage.

And if we really do bow the knee to Him here, by conforming our life to His way of living, we'll be bowing the knee to Him and glorifying Him for ever in the next world too. And we'll be doing it willingly. And there'll be nothing more joyful to us than worshipping Him.

But if we don't bow the knee to Him in this world, if we hate Him, if we'd rather go our own way, then we're still going to be bowing the knee to Him and calling Him Lord in the next world regardless. And we'll know it's right. We'll know He is worthy of all worship. But we'll be hating every minute of it. That's the hell of it. Eternal misery. Eternally not being able to do our own will any more. And we'll never be able to get out of it.

That's the decision we have to make while we're here now. There's no second chance later on in the next world. Our status in the next world is determined by what we think of Jesus Christ here, now. What would we rather do? Live for self now, but never be able to live for self in eternity? Or live for Christ now, and continue to live for Him to all eternity, being finished with self altogether? Either way, we'll all be worshipping the one true living God who alone is worthy of all our adoration.

Let's make sure we get right with God while we still have breath. And the way to do that?

Luke 14:11

*For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

## Philippians 4:6,7.

### Be Careful [*Anxious*] For Nothing

*[6] Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. [7] And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

“*Be careful for nothing*” or “*be anxious for nothing*,” in other words, don’t worry about anything. Now, when we use a phrase like that, it’s usually because a problem’s come along in somebody’s life, so we tell them, “Don’t worry about it.” And that’s a good thing to say as far as it goes, because we’re reassuring them that we care about their situation, and we’re trying to comfort them, so that’s good.

But sometimes it can be quite a silly thing to say too actually, because a lot of the time, we’ve got no basis whatsoever for saying it. It’s just a comfortable phrase to use in times of trouble. Most of the time we can’t actually give the person a reason *why* they shouldn’t worry. Maybe all their fears will come to pass. Maybe they will end up in the worst case scenario that they’ve always dreaded. Maybe their own nightmare will come true. But we don’t like to tell them that, because we simply want to comfort them in their affliction.

When we use the phrase, “Don’t worry about it,” without any basis for saying it, it’s rather like the person James talks about in His epistle:

James 2:15,16

*If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*

“*Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled.*” Great, lovely, comfortable words. But if there’s no basis for saying them, in other words if we don’t give them the food and clothing they need, then the words are completely hollow.

Similarly, when we say, “*Don’t worry about it.*” If our statement has no basis behind it at all, it becomes a completely meaningless phrase. So, when we do use phrases like that, let’s make sure we can back them up with some kind of action. Maybe we could help the person practically in some way. Let’s not just sit there and use empty words all the time.

But when **God** says “*Be careful for nothing,*” there’s always a real reason behind it. God’s words are never empty, hollow words with no basis behind them. God doesn’t just say things for the sake of saying them. He always has a basis for saying what He says.

Isaiah 55:11

*So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

Now there’s a very important principle here. God is God. He’s in control of all things, at all times, and knows what He’s doing. He always has been in control, is now and always will be in control. Nothing, absolutely nothing is outside of His control. So consequently there’s actually nothing for any of us to ever worry about at all.

Psalms 145:14-16

*The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down. The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.*

Luke 12:6,7

*Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

Once we’ve really understood this idea that God is in control of everything, worry and anxiety ought to completely disappear from our lives. But it doesn’t. We can’t really get ourselves to understand the providence of God fully in our hearts, and that makes us anxious. How can it be that we still get so worried about things in this world?

If we truly lived a holy life close to God, we ought to be able to fully trust Him, and live our lives without any worries at all. Then we wouldn't need this instruction. But we do need it.

Many times it seems to us as though God isn't there. Many times we ask, "Where is God in all this?" Where was God in two world wars? Where is He in an earthquake? Or a famine? Or a terrorist attack? The Paris Bataclan attacks got the Archbishop of Canterbury to say it made him doubt the existence of God. What kind of spiritual leadership is that? In China they were laughing at him, from the pulpit – a "foreign pope" who doubts God's existence. That's a terrible witness to the world.

Such atrocities, far from making us doubt the existence of God, ought to prove to us even more that what the Bible says about the nature of man is absolutely true. We are all totally depraved and really do deserve eternal punishment.

Genesis 6:5

*And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

Ecclesiastes 9:3

*The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.*

It's incredible that even after atrocities like these, many people, even religious leaders, still go on about having faith in human nature.

And then what about the Aberfan disaster? Aberfan was a small coal mining village in South Wales. In 1966, 144 people, mostly children in a primary school, were killed as a huge heap of coal waste slid onto the school, after it had been raining heavily for several days. Where was God? If God is in control of all things, why on earth did He allow that? A BBC news reporter asked a minister of one of the local chapels, "Where is God in all this?" And the minister said: "I think this is one time God made a mistake." Terrible witness. Who wants to follow a religion like that? No wonder the churches are empty.

But God is in control. He knows what He is doing. He never makes mistakes. Even though we can't understand *why* God allows something to happen, we should still realise that He's always in control.

Romans 8:28

*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

But there's something in our nature that gives us a tendency to worry about things. There's something about us that makes us unable to trust in God. And that's because we're fallen creatures. God originally made man upright, but we have fallen into sin:

Ecclesiastes 7:29

*God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*

Romans 5:12

*By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned....*

So now, after the fall, we can't naturally see God, or detect Him with any of our senses. Which is why vast multitudes throughout the world don't believe He exists at all, and they live their lives completely apart from Him. And we're all born into that condition.

If we can't see God, why should we believe He's even there, let alone the fact that He's in control of everything? Why should anybody believe in a God who allows all these so-called "disasters" to happen, and seems not to be doing anything? So instead, people start believing that there's no God and that things must only happen by random chance. They talk about probabilities instead. And because we think things happen randomly, and don't know the future, we become anxious and start worrying about it.

But, even under these circumstances, can you believe it, millions of people do believe in God. How can that be? Isn't that marvellous? How on earth can anyone believe in God, when all these terrible things are happening all around them? Yet millions do. And this can only be God in action, changing human souls, from living in darkness to living in the light.

2 Corinthians 4:6

*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Acts 26:18

*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*

This is what God is doing all over the world today. He is opening people's eyes. We all need to be turned from darkness to light, and to receive the forgiveness of sins that only God can give. And God is there now for us to cry to, if only we would come to Him.

Matthew 7:7

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

Anyone who calls upon Him in truth, will not be disappointed.

But, notice that this instruction **“Be careful for nothing,”** is given here mainly to believers. There are lots of gospel messages today that call unbelievers to come to Christ, and at least imply that if they do, somehow their worries will be over, and everything will be plain sailing from then on. But that's not true.

If we come to Christ, our lives will certainly be changed for the better. We'll receive a new heart. We'll know forgiveness of sins. We'll have the Holy Spirit in our lives to guide us into the paths of righteousness, which we could never do ourselves. We should be calling everybody to know Jesus Christ for themselves, for to know Him is life eternal. But we shouldn't be telling people that as a result, everything will necessarily be plain sailing.

Outwardly, things will be exactly the same. We'll still not be able to detect God with our senses. We must now:

2 Corinthians 5:7

*Walk by faith, not by sight.*

*We'll have renewed hearts, but now there'll be a battle going on inside us which wasn't there before. As long as we're still in these bodies, we'll be continually dragged back into our old ways. We need to trust in the Lord. We need to trust implicitly in His providential control of all things, despite what we see with our natural eyes. The Holy Spirit comes into the heart of a believer to guide him in the right way. We should follow Him in everything we do. But we don't, because at the same time we still have unbelief lurking in our hearts. And consequently there'll always be worries and anxieties even in the Lord's people.*

So believers still need instruction as to how to be helped over these anxieties. And we have the answer in the text here.

***[6] Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.***

Here's the solution to the problem of anxiety. It's not go to the doctor to give you pills. That'll just cloud your mind even further. Prayer is the answer. And I mean real prayer.

What is prayer? The Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us:

*Q: What is prayer?*

*A: Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.*

And, apart from the subject of confession of sin, that's what we've got here in this verse. Now, I don't want to minimise confession of sin, confession of sin is a vital important part of prayer. And it's completely missing in most churches today. But it's not connected with the subject we have before us, so that's why it's not mentioned in the passage.

But look what prayer is. It's a real, living, heartfelt, true, relationship with our heavenly Father. No other religion in the world has this. This is the uniqueness of the Christian faith. All true Christians have a real living relationship with the one true living Creator God, Lord of heaven and earth. Nobody else on earth has that.

In every other religion, people often talk about “saying prayers,” but they mean no more than simply reciting words. Buddhists have prayer flags with written prayers on them, which they chant endlessly. Muslims recite the same old words in the same old way all the time, and think Allah is going to be impressed. Roman Catholics recite prayers. They buy books of prayers from supposed saints, and think repeating them can help them get nearer to God. And many so-called Christians use the Bible itself, and recite what we call the Lords Prayer, using it purely as a chant, a recitation, a good luck charm, and nothing else, when it’s really only meant as a template for real prayers in our own words.

No other religion knows what prayer really is. Real prayer is calling on the Lord of glory in a two-way living relationship. It was said of Moses:

Exodus 33:11

*And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.*

Now, that’s real prayer. Speaking to Him. Communicating with Him. Crying to Him. That’s prayer. Not merely reciting words.

The Lord is there to call upon at any time. We are not to be afraid of doing so:

Hebrews 4:16

*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

We are to pour out our heart to Him:

Psalms 62:8

*Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.*

1 Peter 5:7

*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*

And we are always to pray ***“with thanksgiving”***

One of the worst things we read about the wicked is that they were never thankful for God's mercies:

Romans 1:21

*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, **neither were thankful**; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Now, if we're true believers, that can never happen to us. But as true believers we should be all the more thankful in our hearts for the Lord's mercies. He has given us everything we have. He gives us life, health, strength, food and clothing. Every breath comes from Him. Every heartbeat comes from Him. And above all else, true believers have been given the most precious gifts of all: repentance and faith in Christ. We should never cease to be thankful to Him. We have so much to thank Him for. The psalms are full of thanksgiving.

Psalms 136:1

*O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

1 Thessalonians 5:18

*In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

Prayer consists of making our requests known to God, and that's what we're told to do here. But that's often all we do. Thanksgiving, is a neglected area of our prayer life. Let's be thankful for every blessing we receive from God, because we don't deserve anything.

Lamentations 3:22

*It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*

***[7] And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.***

And if we pray to God, not in empty recited prayers, but in a real heartfelt relationship, our anxieties will be quenched. We will receive the peace of God in our hearts and minds.

Our spiritual problem is in our hearts and minds. That's where the battle takes place. It's there that we get anxious about things. And it's also there where the Lord works in us.

When we're spreading the gospel, we don't do it at the point of a sword. And I have to say, many people who have called themselves "Christian" in the past have done that. The Crusades were the most horrific battles ever fought, and the world regards that as Christianity. But it's not. It's nothing to do with Jesus Christ at all. True religion is spiritual.

Ephesians 6:12

*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

***"...the peace of God, which passeth all understanding..."***

This is not talking about peace with God. If we're truly the Lord's people, we already received that when we first came to Him in repentance and faith:

Romans 5:1

*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*

This is talking about the peace of God. This is a state of heart and mind that we can have. But we need to ask for it. It is something to be attained.

Romans 15:13

*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.*

Isaiah 26:3

*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*

And we can't understand it. We can understand lots of things the Bible has revealed to us. But the peace of God is incomprehensible. It's impossible to explain what it is, especially to someone who's never experienced it.

1 Peter 1:8

*Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*

Notice that, it doesn't say wait for the answers to our prayers, then we'll receive the peace of God. It says **“let your requests be made known to God”** and then we'll receive it. So we don't need to wait for answers, saying to ourselves, “I'll get the peace of God when I get the answer to my prayers.” We'll be waiting a long time if we think that. Here we're taught that we receive the peace of God as soon as we make our requests to Him.

But how can this be? If I ask you a question because I'm worried about something, I won't have any peace in my mind until you've at least given me some sort of answer. If you just sit there and say nothing, my anxiety, if anything, is going to be increased. But with God, we get the peace in our hearts and minds before He's answered. Isn't that strange? And another question that ought to cross our minds: What's the point of prayer, when God knows what we want before we ask anyway? Have you ever asked that?

The answer to all of this is quite simple. Prayer, real prayer, is for our benefit, not God's. He knows what we want before we tell Him anyway. God knows everything. In fact He knows far more about what we need than we do. Our prayers only scratch the surface of what we really need. The Holy Spirit prays for us:

Romans 8:26,27

*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

And Christ is also praying for us:

Hebrews 7:25

*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

What a comfort it is to the Christian to know that both Christ and the Holy Spirit are praying for him. We need them. Our prayers are so shallow, even at the best of times. We feel so inadequate in prayer.

2 Corinthians 2:16

*who is sufficient for these things?*

***“...through Christ Jesus.”***

Finally we see all our prayers should be **“through Christ Jesus.”** These aren’t just words to say at the end of every prayer. As though God will hear us better if we always say the magic words, “*In Jesus name, Amen*” at the end of every prayer. That’s superstition.

But all our prayers should be through Christ. Christ is the one we must acknowledge in everything. We can have no access to God the Father unless it is through the Son.

Ephesians 2:18

*For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

Jesus Christ is absolutely central to our faith.

John 3:35,36

*The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

John 5:22,23

*For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.*

Acts 4:12

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

If we don't know Jesus Christ for ourselves, we need to make ourselves right with God. We can only do this if we acknowledge that God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, and that He is the only way of salvation. We need to cry to Him, start communicating with Him. He can and does answer genuine prayer from anyone who will call upon Him.

We may not be able to understand prayer. We may not know how God is going to answer our prayers. But we know that prayer works. We have promises and examples throughout the Bible that this is true:

James 5:16

*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Let's make sure that we're fervent in our prayers, and that we have a true, real relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can answer our prayers and lead us in the right way. And this, according to this passage, is the perfect answer to all our worries.

## Colossians 3:1-17. Risen With Christ

I want to look today at how different a Christian ought to be from everybody else around us. And, it needs to be said that we should be different.

There are lots of people today who think that Christians should try to be as much like everybody else as possible. They'd say we should "be like the world to win the world." We should dress like them, have the same hobbies as them, enjoy the same entertainments as them. Rip the pews out and replace them with coffee tables. Have a barista ministry. That's the sort of thing that would attract the world.

But if that's true, if we have exactly the same priorities, the same tastes and the same aspirations as everybody else around us, then Christianity is effectively nothing. If our lives are no different from theirs, we got nothing to offer them. The only difference is that we "do God." We believe God exists and they don't. That's all it boils down to.

If Christianity is real, there ought to be a fundamental difference between the way the Christian lives his life, and the way everybody else lives their lives. That difference is the very witness we should be to them. We really need to understand what this difference is.

Then there's the opposite extreme. Some Christians think they should be so different from everybody else, they end up becoming oddballs. I was in a supermarket once, and a group of young women came in, all dressed in long skirts and wearing headscarves. I guessed Exclusive Brethren. They just looked odd and unapproachable. We've got to be able to relate to people around us, we can't just ignore them, live our own lives and pretend they don't exist. That's not a witness to the truth either.

Now, the Bible does give us some instructions about outward appearance. We're to dress modestly, not wear what pertains to the opposite sex, and we're not to draw attention to ourselves unduly – and that's exactly what those ladies were doing by the way they dressed. We're not to seek attention like that. Outward appearance is not our witness.

1 Samuel 16:7

*Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*

In Peter's first letter, he speaks to Christian women whose husbands aren't believers. Now, I know this is a particular case, but we can apply this passage to generally in our witness to unbelievers. Peter tells these women that if their husbands don't listen to their words, then they can still be a witness simply by the way they live:

1 Peter 3:1-4

*Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*

Many people use this verse to justify women never wearing jewellery, plaiting their hair, wearing makeup and so on, but that's not actually what it says. It just says that these things aren't our witness, but that our true witness is inward, not external. Our witness is about "*the hidden man of the heart.*" Having a "*meek and quiet spirit.*" That's the witness we should be to other people. Not dressing oddly, or doing unusual things to attract attention. So how can we develop this inward life, this inward witness, this "*meek and quiet spirit?*" That's what Paul talks about in this passage in Colossians.

***[1] If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.***

***"If ye then be risen with Christ..."*** That's a strange expression. We need to know what it means because the instructions in the rest of the passage are just for those who are "***risen with Christ.***" "***If ye then be risen with Christ..."*** then the rest of the passage.

If someone asked us, "Are you risen with Christ?" what would we say? We could answer, "Yes, we'll rise up with Christ one day in the future after our death." The Christian does have a sure hope of a bodily

resurrection. But here the phrase is in the present tense, “*If ye be risen with Christ,*” as though it’s already happened. Martha had a problem with this subject too, after the death of her brother Lazarus:

John 11:23,24

*Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*

Jesus could then have said simply, “Don’t worry, I’m going to bring him back to life in a minute,” but He didn’t. He gave an answer that also referred to something far more than just bodily life:

John 11:25(a)

*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life....*

He talks about two things: resurrection and life.

John 11:25(b)

*...He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*

He talks about being dead and yet living at the same time.

John 11:26

*And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*

And then He says that to never die, in other words to attain the resurrection of the just, there are two qualifications: living and believing in Christ. It’s not just a simple decision to follow Christ. We have to live, to be made alive, as well.

The bodily raising of Lazarus was a figure, a type, of a far greater kind of resurrection. Not a bodily resurrection, but a spiritual resurrection. A spiritual quickening, if you like, in the heart or the soul. And that’s absolutely fundamental to the Christian faith.

Ephesians 2:4-6

*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*

Do we know this new spiritual life? This spiritual resurrection? Because without it, there's no hope for any of us. By nature, we're "dead in sins." And if we carry on like that, we'll eventually receive the just punishment for those sins. God won't have done anything wrong in giving us that. But God is rich in mercy. So if we're going to receive this new spiritual life, He's the one we need to go to. And all those who call on Him and receive this new life, these are the people who are referred to here as being "**risen with Christ.**" They've become new creatures in Christ. They've been given a new heart. They've had the Holy Spirit put within them. They've been born-again.

So, are we "**risen with Christ**"? Are we truly born again of the Spirit of God? If so, then the rest of this passage is for us. We find out here what our witness should be.

***[1] If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. [2] Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.***

We're to "**seek those things which are above**" – heavenly things, because after all, that's where Christ is. We're to set our affection, our desire, our love, on these things, not on the things of the earth any more. It's impossible to set our affection on things we can't see, unless we've been given this new spiritual life from God. So if we're not "**risen with Christ,**" we won't really understand what heavenly things are. This new life changes our desires. We no longer want to chase after the things of this world any more. Things we once loved, we now have no delight in any more, we find them wearisome.

John gives us a stark contrast between the things of the world and the things of God:

1 John 2:15-17

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

So, do we love the world? Because it says here that if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us. In other words, we've not received this new life, this spiritual resurrection at all.

What do we chase after? Do we chase after "*The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life?*" The people all around us every day pursue these things – self-gratification and self-exaltation. They live for themselves, and chase after these things wherever they can find them. And they encourage each other to do the same. But here we're told that if we do these things, "*the love of the Father is not in*" us.

When it says "*love not the world,*" it doesn't mean we shouldn't deal with anything in the world ever again. Go off and become a hermit somewhere, or an Exclusive Brethren, not interacting with the world in any way. No. The Lord keeps us in this world for a purpose. We're still called to deal with the things of this world every day. That's not wrong. But our desires, our longings, the things we yearn for in our hearts, shouldn't be set on the things of this world any more. We've now got far more important things, heavenly things, to love and to long after.

And notice, it's a "seeking" process. "***Seek*** *those things which are above.*" We have to make an effort to find these things. We have to search them out.

Jeremiah 29:13

*...ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

***[3] For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.***

We're dead, but yet we're alive at the same time. So this must be referring to a spiritual death, just as being "***risen with Christ***" refers to a spiritual resurrection. If we've had a spiritual resurrection, then we're told here the old nature we used to have is now dead. But if "***dead***" means it no longer exists, then we wouldn't need any instruction as to how to deal with it. But we've got plenty of instruction in the Bible as to how to deal with it. So, it can't mean that it's not there any more. It's "***dead***" in the sense we don't desire to follow it any more. It's still there, and it drags us back. Christians are so painfully aware that even though we've truly received this spiritual resurrection, we still sin against God.

The apostle Paul talks about a battle going on within us, the old nature against the new nature. We won't be perfected completely until we die and receive our resurrection bodies. So at the same time we're **"dead"** in our own sins, and yet alive in Christ:

Romans 7:22-25

*For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

It's the easiest thing in the world to do what the flesh wants. We slip in to it without thinking. It's always going to be an effort to do what the Spirit wants. But that's what we're called to do. He does give us the ability and strength to do it:

Romans 8:10-14

*And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

It's a question of who we're going to be led by. The flesh or the Spirit? The old man or the new man? That's what we need to get to grips with. We can't lose our salvation, we can't be un-born again, that's a silly idea. But we can fail, and we do fail many times, in doing what we ought to do. And we grieve ourselves, and the Lord, in the process.

And we are told that our new life is now **"hid with Christ in God."** Our new life is hidden from the world, in the sense that the world won't understand it. It's spiritual. It's to do with **"things which are above."** People will notice a change in us, and that change is our witness to them. But they won't understand us. Our fundamental philosophy of life will be completely different. We now no longer want to please ourselves, but to please Christ. We don't follow the crowd. This earth is no longer our home. It was said of Abraham he:

Hebrews 11:10

*...looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

Hebrews 13:14

*For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.*

We live as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. The world may tell us we're too heavenly minded to be any earthly use. But there's no danger of that as long as we're in this body.

***[4] When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.***

We've got a sure hope in heaven after our death. We'll one day "***appear with Him in glory.***" But it says here "***Christ, who is our life.***" He's our life here now. He's the one we love, the one we desire to please now. He is our life here, now, as well as after death.

Philippians 1:21

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

So, if we're heavenly-minded, if we're different because we follow and love Christ rather than ourselves, we need to know exactly how He wants us to live. What's the Christ-like way to live our everyday lives? We need to know that because that's our witness.

It's more than simply following a set of rules outwardly, like other religions would teach. We've had an inner change. Our witness is to come from the heart, from the Holy Spirit:

John 14:15

*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

The Christian life isn't putting on a show. We must always be honest and genuine:

2 Corinthians 1:12

*For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.*

So, with this in mind, the rest of the passage gives us a few instructions. And first of all we've got a list of things to "mortify," or put to death:

***[5] Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:***

***"Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence."*** That's *"the lust of the flesh."* These are sins against the seventh Commandment, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery."* That Commandment doesn't just forbid adultery, it forbids plenty more.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us helpfully that it forbids, "all unchaste thoughts, words and actions." The Larger Catechism gives us an incredibly long list of things forbidden by this commandment. Not only the usual things you would expect, but "idleness" [David], "gluttony" [Esau], "drunkenness" [Lot]. That's *"the lust of the flesh."*

Then we have ***"covetousness, which is idolatry."*** That's *"the lust of the eyes."* When we covet our neighbour's ox, ass or Ferrari, we're really idolising it. *"The lust of the eyes."*

***[6] For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:***

It's because of these lusts and desires, there's going to be a judgment. The world out there is full of sin. Everybody following after *"The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."* If God exists at all, there has to be a judgment. Otherwise God would be a monster, letting everybody get away with what they do. But before we get carried away complaining about others, look at the next verse:

***[7] In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.***

This verse brings us right down to earth. We're no different from anybody else. We too deserve the very same judgment. The reason I'm going to heaven and my neighbour isn't, is solely down to the grace of God, and certainly not me being better than him in any way. That fact ought to bring us low. That ought to break "*the pride of life*" in us. We should no longer be proud of anything in ourselves.

We're called here to mortify the flesh, to put it to death. So we should hate ourselves, and everything we are by nature. Modern psychologists tell us that we ought to have a sense of self-worth, self-acceptance, self-esteem, but that's just another way of telling us to be proud, to nurture "*the pride of life*." No. We should mortify pride, not nurture it:

1 Samuel 2:3

*Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.*

***[8] But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. [9] Lie not one to another....***

Here's another list of things we need to mortify in ourselves, against various other of the Ten Commandments. You get the idea. The Ten Commandments aren't a set of rules simply to be followed externally. They're a guide as to what we should be putting to death within ourselves. We've got a natural tendency to get angry, to want to take vengeance out on others ourselves, to lie, to laugh at questionable jokes. It's these natural instincts, that the Christian is called to put to death.

***....seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; [10] And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:***

We're called to put off the old man, to mortify the flesh, and to put on the new man, to nurture the fruit of the Spirit within us. Notice the

new man is said to be ***“renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.”***

Man was originally *“made in the image of God.”* Whatever that was, we lost it after the fall. And when we receive the new birth, the spiritual resurrection, we’re told here that we gain it again, it’s “renewed” in us. An equivalent passage in Ephesians says:

Ephesians 4:24

*And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

From these two passages, we can work out that the *“image of God”* seems to involve three things: knowledge (spiritual), righteousness and holiness, all of which were lost at the fall, and are regained once we’ve received the new birth.

***[11] Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.***

In the world there are divisions. To the Jew, the big division was that of Jew and Gentile (Greek). Circumcision and uncircumcision. But there are other divisions. Each nation is a division in itself, Barbarian, Scythian etc. There are social divisions, like the one between bond and free. These are the divisions we see in this world. Outward divisions.

But in reality, none of these matter at all. They’re insignificant compared to one great division that God has ordained. Only one division of men really matters. The division between those who have received this new birth, and those who haven’t. Christ said:

Luke 12:51

*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division*

This is a division we can’t see. The world doesn’t believe it exists at all. They go about saying all men are equal under God, and base their philosophy of life on that statement. Well yes, we’re all equally sinners

in need of salvation. Some have been saved, and are **“risen with Christ,”** and others haven’t been and aren’t. That’s the one division that really matters, an invisible division, but our eternal destiny is wrapped up in it.

“*What think ye of Christ?*” (Matthew 22:42)? Was He just a nice man who lived once, but has absolutely no relevance for our lives today? That’s what most people think. Or is He our Lord and Saviour? That’s the great division, and we must work out in our own minds what side we stand. This is the most important, most serious business in the world.

We’ve had our list of things we should mortify, put to death. Now we’ve got a list of things we should nurture:

***[12] Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; [13] Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.***

The elect of God, those who’ve been **“risen with Christ,”** are **“holy and beloved.”** We are holy, separate from the world. Still in the world, but not of it. And these are the things we should be nurturing in our lives: **“mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.”** What have they all in common? They’re all fruit of the Spirit:

Galatians 5:22,23

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...*

That’s not an exhaustive list, there are others. The natural man can’t do any of these things. Only the Spirit of God living within us can do them. These are what we should nurture. These are our witness. We’re in this world for one purpose: to grow fruit:

John 15:5

*I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

***[14] And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.***

Love is the **“bond of perfectness.”** It’s the greatest of the spiritual fruit:

1 Corinthians 13:13

*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

Romans 13:10

*love is the fulfilling of the law.*

***[15] And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.***

The peace of God should rule in our hearts, not our lusts and desires. That’s what we’re called to. And thankfulness. Thankfulness keeps us humble, because it makes us realise that we don’t deserve anything at all in this world. In fact we deserve God’s wrath and curse for every sin. The first thing we should be thankful for is that we’re not in hell fire.

***[16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.***

We’re called to **“seek those things which are above.”** But where can we find out about them? How can we become heavenly-minded? How can we find out what heaven is like? What Christ was like? We let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly. We should become people of the Book. We should teach and admonish one another from it. That’s why this book is so important to us. And we’re to do it in **“psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”** The equivalent passage in Ephesians talks about speaking as well as singing. The point is that we should be using the word of God frequently. But we should also be a joyful, singing people.

Now this isn’t particularly talking about a formal worship service, but I’ve been in churches that only sing the psalms and wouldn’t sing anything else. Their argument is that the phrase **“psalms, hymns and**

*spiritual songs*” is a Hebrew idiom, a threefold description of the book of Psalms, in the same way the phrase “*the Law, the Writings and the Prophets*” is a threefold description of what we call the Old Testament. Most people don’t go along with that, but think the phrase includes other songs as well. I don’t think we should split or leave the church over such an issue. But I have to say that, today, in most churches, the Psalms have completely disappeared. And that’s a great shame. We’ve got here a New Testament injunction to use them. They’re still relevant to us today.

***[17] And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.***

So what is it to be a good witness to the world around us? How should we be different from everybody else? It’s not in outward appearance, in behaving oddly, in putting on any kind of external show. But it’s the “*hidden man of the heart,*” “*a meek and quiet spirit,*” “*simplicity and godly sincerity.*” Here’s a summary of how we should live: “***And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.***”

Let’s evangelise the world. But let’s make sure we do it as holy, godly, Christ-like people. Only then can our witness be truly effectual.

1 Corinthians 10:31

*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*



# 1 Thessalonians 1. A Model Church

I thought we'd have a look at Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, the first chapter. There's something a bit different about the Thessalonian church, compared to most other churches Paul writes to. The introduction might give us some hint of this:

*[1] Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Normally when Paul introduces a letter, he usually makes sure he introduces himself as an apostle. He'd say something like, "Paul, called to be an apostle," "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ," or something similar. But in four epistles, two letters to the Thessalonians, Philippians and Philemon, he doesn't do that.

I suggest that the reason was that in most of Paul's letters, he had to deal with problems. He had to correct and rebuke the recipients, sharply in some cases. So it was necessary for him to show some form of apostolic authority, to make sure they took to mind what he said. But he didn't feel it necessary to do that to the churches in Philippi or Thessalonica. They were good churches. They didn't have serious problems like the others. Rather than correction, all they needed was encouragement. And that's why Paul wrote to them.

So, amazingly enough, it is possible to be a good church. Let's see what we can learn from a letter of encouragement to a good church. Maybe we too can learn exactly what constitutes a good church and how we can become one ourselves.

*[2] We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;*

Before we look at the church itself, we can learn something from Paul's prayer life. Paul gives thanks to God for the Thessalonian church. He

gives thanks always for all of them. And he makes sure he always remembers them in his prayers.

I can't help thinking that this puts our prayer life to shame. When was the last time we gave thanks for anything? In prayer, we're all too eager to give God a long list of what we want, but we're so slow in giving thanks when God has answered prayer.

In fact, the prayers of most Christians generally today tend to be very shallow. Do we know what prayer really is? The Westminster Shorter Catechism gives a very good definition of prayer:

*Q. 98. What is prayer? A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.*

We're very good at offering up our desires unto God, we like that bit. But we're not so good at the other two things mentioned, namely confession of sin, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.

We can always tell a good, mature, exercised Christian in prayer, by the amount of time they spend not just asking for things, but humbling themselves in acknowledging their sinfulness before God and being thankful.

Now, when I say confession of sin, I'm not saying that we should confess individual sins to each other in a prayer meeting, that just ends up feeding our desire for juicy bits of gossip to spread around. That sort of confession should be between ourselves and God alone. But there ought to be, in prayer, a real, genuine acknowledgement of our sinfulness. And at the same time, the humility that would entail, would also produce thankfulness for what we've got. God showers blessings on us every day, and we just tend to take them for granted. We almost assume that we've got a right to what God has given us, when actually it's a tremendous privilege to receive anything from Him.

***[3] Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;***

Paul particularly remembers, without ceasing, three things about the Thessalonians. Their **“work,” “labour,”** and **“patience.”** What have these three things got in common? I suppose **“labour”** is similar to work, but it’s got a connotation of being a more arduous, tiresome, harder more prolonged form of work. But what have **“work,” “labour,”** and **“patience”** all got in common? The answer is, we’re not very good at any of them. By nature all of us, whoever we are, tend to be lazy and impatient. We can all relate to the fact that we find work tiresome, and we find it very difficult to be patient.

Now, Christians would immediately recognise this as part of the curse that God put on the earth as a result of the fall of Adam:

Genesis 3:17-19

*Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*

So, since the fall, we’re just going to find work difficult and toilsome. Our bodies now have this inbuilt natural reaction against **“work,” “labour”** and **“patience.”** But, the Thessalonians were commended for having these things, and not giving in to their natural desire for ease in this world.

Not only that, but look what they’re having patience in, and working and labouring for. They’re not working for the things of this natural world, like their trade, or their business, or any of the things we normally associate with work and labour – although there is such a thing as the Protestant work ethic, and Christians should work hard in all these things – but they’re commended for their **“work of faith,” “labour of love,”** and **“patience of hope.”** These are spiritual things, not physical things.

**“Work of faith.”** The NIV says “work produced by faith.” If we have real faith in God, it should produce good works. This reminds us of what James said:

James 2:14-17

*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*

Any old fool can say “I’ve got faith in God,” “I believe in Jesus.” But if their faith isn’t showing itself through works, then we’ve got to doubt the reality of their faith. Christ said:

Matthew 7:20

*...by their fruits ye shall know them.*

**“Labour of love.”** Love isn’t just a gooey feeling you get whenever you think of somebody – in the Christian context, Jesus. You have to work at love. And it’s described here as labour – the more arduous, hard, prolonged type of work.

For example, love is sacrificial:

John 15:13

*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

Love involves a life of service:

Galatians 5:13

*...by love serve one another.*

And we’re called to love people who we don’t particularly want to love. Christ said:

Matthew 5:44

*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.*

**“Patience of hope.”** The Thessalonians are commended for their patience. They don’t seem to get impatient at all the frustrating things

that happen in this world. That's because they're not putting their trust in the things of this world, but are hoping for something far, far better in the future.

By definition, to hope for something is to put our trust in something that we don't have now but will have later.

Romans 8:24,25

*For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.*

So, the Thessalonians are commended for their **“faith,” “love,”** and **“hope.”** Where have we come across these before?

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, there's a section towards the end of that letter which deals with spiritual gifts. Now, I'm not going to go into that subject, but right in the middle of the discussion on it, Paul inserts chapter 13. Many people in Paul's day were boasting in the spiritual gifts they had, or they thought they had, and Paul in chapter 13 brings them down to earth.

1 Corinthians 13:1,2

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*

And Paul concludes that there are only three things in this world, that we're to consider really important:

1 Corinthians 13:13

*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

These are the three things that the Thessalonians are commended for, and these are the things that we should be concentrating on in our lives.

As I said earlier, naturally we're lazy and impatient. And that's just in the things of this world. It's even harder to concentrate on spiritual

things, things we can't see. So, how could the Thessalonians have possibly attained to the level they were at, when by nature we find it so difficult? In fact, impossible?

The answer is that something had happened to them. They had become fundamentally different from everybody else. They'd somehow been changed from what they were born into by nature, into something completely new, something that God can now use to His glory. They'd been chosen by God to this end:

#### ***[4] Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.***

When I was a very young Christian, I saw a poster on a church wall with a slogan in big letters, "God loves everybody." I went home, and tried to find that text in the Bible. But it's not there. Now, don't get me wrong. There's a sense in which God does love everybody. He gives every one of us food and clothing, rain and sunshine. He gives all of us far more than we deserve, and we should all be thankful to Him for His provision. But the main message of the Bible isn't actually about that. The Bible is primarily a book about a particular group of people whom God chooses out of this world to be His own:

1 Peter 2:9

*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light....*

But, how can Paul possibly know that the Thessalonians were among these elect people of God? After all, he couldn't see their hearts. Surely only God knows who His elect are, because He's the only one who truly knows everybody's heart?

Well, yes that's true, Paul couldn't actually see their hearts to find out for sure whether they were God's chosen people or not. But he had seen two things in their behaviour. As we've already seen, he saw their outward fruit, their "***work of faith,***" their "***labour of love,***" and their "***patience of hope.***" But he'd also seen that they'd undergone a complete change of nature after they'd heard the gospel message:

*[5] For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.*

The gospel. By nature we're all sinful creatures. We spend our entire lives living for self, pandering to self, caring about nothing but ourselves and our own little pleasures. We don't live as we should live, as God wants us to live. If we carry on in our sinful ways and ignore Him, then eventually He'll have no alternative but to one day judge us and punish us according to our sinful nature. But there is hope. There is a way out. God sent a Saviour into the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. And all those who put their trust in Him, – I mean really put their trust in Him, not just say, "I believe in Jesus," and then carry on as before – all who really put their trust in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life.

The duty of all men everywhere, is to repent of their sins, cry to God for mercy, and I mean really cry to Him, – not just come forward at the end of a meeting, sign a document, recite a sinners prayer, join a church or whatever – but really cry to Him, really cast themselves upon Him, really want to be changed and follow Him instead of living for self, these people will surely be saved to eternal life. God'll hear their prayer. They'll be made new creatures in Christ. They'll be given the ability now to get out of their lazy, impatient lives and begin to live a new life for God. That's the message we should be presenting to the world. That's the gospel.

There are only two possible types of response to the gospel message. The first is that the message comes to the hearer "*in word only.*" They hear the words, the words hit their eardrums, they may even understand it, but no real change ever takes place inside them.

That could manifest itself in different ways: To some, the gospel message will just go in one ear, and out the other with no reaction at all. Others might get angry at the message, because, after all, it does tell people that by nature they're sinners, and some might object to that. And there may be others who would even receive the message with joy initially, but, as in the parable of the sower, when trials or persecution come into their lives, the gospel message is found to have meant

absolutely nothing to them and they drift away. All of these receive the gospel message **“in word only.”**

But there are others – amongst whom the Thessalonians were, and amongst whom every one of us ought to be aiming to be – who do respond to the message and truly meet with God. To these, the gospel message does not just come **“in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.”**

These people have been truly changed at a fundamental level, in their hearts, in their souls. To them the gospel isn't just words, it isn't just theory, but it's the power of God unto salvation. And they've become new creatures in Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

If we've truly responded to the gospel message, the Holy Spirit will come into our hearts to dwell with us, and to guide us, and give us the full assurance that we're God's chosen people and have been saved from the judgment to come.

A lot of people think that truly born-again Christians, who've experienced this fundamental change, are arrogant, because they're so sure that they're saved. They're so sure that they're going to heaven. And I'm sure we can understand that attitude, because it appears to the outsider, to one who's never experienced the new birth, that Christians who are so sure that they are saved, can sin all they like and still be saved in the end. But that's not true. When we truly come to the Lord and truly know His forgiveness and changing power, we really do get the assurance of knowing absolutely that we're one of His and that He'll never leave us nor forsake us. But at the same time, we get a new heart. This new heart, now hates sin. It only ever wants to do good, to please God. The very thought of sinning all we like is hateful to anyone who's been truly changed by God.

And look at what happened to the Thessalonians after they had experienced this real life-change in their hearts:

***[6] And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:***

They became followers of the apostles and their teachings. We do that today, in that the apostles' teachings are given to us in the New Testament. Coming to the Lord gives us a love for His Word. We want to drink in this book. Now we're His, we can't get enough of this book. It comes alive to us.

But there were also consequences to the Thessalonians' new-found faith. They were persecuted. They received the word ***“in much affliction.”*** And if we become a true Christian, we'll be persecuted too. It's inevitable. Christ said:

John 15:18,19

*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

John 16:33

*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

But at the same time as we undergo such persecution, we are also filled of the joy of the Holy Spirit:

Romans 5:3-5

*We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

It was actually through the persecutions that they were under, that God was working in them the ***“patience of hope”*** that they had. Patience in this world because they had the sure hope of the next. Patience in persecution or times of trial is actually one of our main witnesses to the world:

2 Thessalonians 1:4,5

*We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.*

And this new life and attitude of theirs didn't go unnoticed throughout the region:

***[7] So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. [8] For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.***

Paul didn't need to commend the Thessalonians to the churches in the neighbouring areas, because they'd already heard about them, and their wonderful witness to the truth and to the new life they had in Christ. Would to God that we as a church could be such an example to everybody around of what it is to truly know Christ, and to be a company of believers who've had their lives completely changed by Him.

But to do that, we've got to be different from the world. It's a popular teaching today to say that we should "be like the world to win the world." No! Too many churches today are spending their time trying to imitate the world in their dress, their music, their attitude and their lifestyle. The thing is that Christians behaving like the world, will just make the world laugh at them and they'll just walk away. They've got nothing at all to offer the world.

But if they see us living out the Christian life, producing the fruit of the Spirit, being different from them in the right way, – not just dressing peculiarly, or being cranky or being different for difference sake – then that's what's needed. That's the witness.

***[9] For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;***

The nations around knew and could clearly see the change that had taken place in the Thessalonians. They'd turned from their old life, their idols, and been completely renewed from the inside. Now they worshipped the living and true God. They'd now got a new world-view. They no longer had any interest in the empty religion of their forefathers. That in itself would invite persecution. We must pray to God for wisdom how to deal with it.

Once we've come to know the living and true God for ourselves, we can't carry on any longer in empty religion. We find it pointless, vain and empty. We want to live the new life that God has put in our hearts, and we no longer have a desire to carry on the old life. And we want everyone else we come into contact with to have this new life too.

It's not surprising that people who've never experienced the new birth, won't understand us. Maybe they'll laugh at us, ridicule us or even kill us. But we now serve the living and true God. It's a completely different lifestyle from the world. Despite the difficulties of not being understood, our job is to be a clear witness to everybody around us of the new life that can be had in Christ.

***[10] And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.***

And the other main thing that stood out in the witness of the Thessalonians, was that they now produced the fruit of patience in their lives. They wait.

Now, waiting sounds pretty uninteresting, but that's what we should be doing. We should be waiting ***“for His Son from heaven.”*** The return of Christ is the Christian's sure hope.

We've already got a token of this by the fact that He was raised from the dead and shewed Himself to many witnesses whose testimony we've got in this book. It's the return of Christ that we are waiting for, and it'll be obvious when He comes.

I knew someone once who was brought up in a church which believed, instead of waiting for Christ to come again, we should rather be

waiting for what they called “the rapture.” This is the idea that one day all the Christians will suddenly disappear from the earth and be “raptured” into heaven, leaving all the unbelievers behind, none the wiser for what had just happened. This man told me that when he was about eight years old, this teaching really frightened him. He kept waking up in the middle of the night wondering if “the rapture” had happened, and he’d been left behind. We shouldn’t scare people like that.

And there are also many sects and organisations that frighten people into thinking that the return of Christ has already happened. And of course, only the initiated in the sect come to realise this. The Jehovah’s Witnesses thought Christ would come again in 1914, and when he didn’t, they just changed their teaching and said that, well, actually he did come, but invisibly. Now, if you believe that, you’ll believe anything. And no less than 90 million people really believe that Christ has come again in the form of a farmer woman from Henan province in China. I don’t know why on earth people believe this, but they do.

But Christ won’t come secretly. We needn’t bother about whether we’ve missed Him. It’ll be obvious when it happens:

Matthew 24:27

*For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

That’s the event that Christians are all patiently waiting for. It’s a sure hope.

And look at this. **“Which delivered us from the wrath to come.”** If we become new creatures in Christ. If we repent of our sins, renounce the world and follow Him, then we too can have this sure hope within our souls now. We don’t have to wait for Judgment day to find out if we’ve made it or not. We can know today.

Note the word **“delivered”** is in the past tense. He’s already done it. On Calvary 2000 years ago, Christ took upon Himself the sins of all who would come to Him. He’s paid the price for their sins in His body on the cross, so they don’t have to pay themselves.

We shouldn't wait and think that we can come later, or that we can still earn our way to heaven. We can't. We need to cry to Him for mercy now. Accept His free and unmerited pardon. Repent of our sins, and come to Him. And we can all become like these Thessalonians. A marvellous example to all the region round about. Having a real heartfelt, powerful change in their innermost being, that completely transformed them into becoming what God wanted them to be.

May each and every one of us not rest until we've made sure that we've come to that position personally for ourselves, and truly and fully experienced the salvation that Christ can give us.



## Titus 2:11-14. Salvation

In Titus 2, Paul instructs Titus:

Titus 2:1

*But speak thou the things which become **sound doctrine**.*

And then, rather than being given a series of theological points, which is what we might expect, we've got a set of instructions on godly living. "*Sound doctrine*" should lead to godly living. There are too many people who think "*sound doctrine*" means being clever and able to debate theology. But if they're not living godly lives, their religion is vain.

And then there is a set of instructions to various groups of people: aged men, aged women, young women, young men, servants. This is good, we all need this instruction.

Titus 2:10

*.... That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*

Our godly living is not to show off how holy we can be. It's not for our own glory. It's to "*adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*" That God may be glorified, not us.

Matthew 5:16

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

But I don't want to look at that subject today. I want to look at this title: "*God our Saviour.*" We very easily use this word "*Saviour*" to describe Jesus Christ, who is God, but do we really know what it means? I want to concentrate our thinking on vv.11-14:

*[11] For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, [12] Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; [13] Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; [14] Who gave*

*himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

In verse 11, we see the word “*salvation*,” which is a word related to “*Saviour*.” And it’s all to do with being “*saved*” from something. “*Salvation*,” “*Saviour*,” “*saved*.” These aren’t just interesting words, they’re actually the most important words of the Christian faith.

### *(1.) What are we saved from?*

When we use the word “*saved*” or “*salvation*,” we understand that there’s a problem that we can’t save ourselves from, so someone else, a “*saviour*,” comes along and rescues us. Suppose we’ve fallen from a boat and we can’t swim. We’re drowning. We can’t save ourselves because we can’t swim. But someone else comes along, rescues us and brings us to safety. That “*saviour*” has “*saved*” our life. Our “*salvation*” has come from him.

Now, apply this to God and men. We’ve got a problem. We’re born with it. We can’t save ourselves from it. God comes along and “*saves*” us, just like the rescuer with the drowning man. In v.14 we see that we are saved “*from all iniquity*.” That’s our problem by nature. Whoever we are, whether we realise it or not, that’s what we need to be saved from. The wickedness of our own hearts.

So, firstly, we must see our need of being “*saved*” at all. Most people don’t see a problem. They don’t see a need to be saved from the wickedness of their own hearts. To use the metaphor, they don’t think they’re drowning. They’re quite happy out at sea swimming around. Some of them even happily keep on swimming further and further out to sea. None of them even realise they’ve gone out too far and can’t get back to land.

Men invent all sorts of philosophies and religions, to try to explain why the world is so evil. And if people can surround themselves with like-minded people who all have the same religion or philosophy, they can ignore the real problem in their own heart altogether. That’s what people do. It’s easy to follow a crowd. It’s safe. If we follow the crowd, we can have a huge social life with people who are like-minded. That’s

the easiest thing in the world to do. And so most people just go along with the majority around them.

And they can either do one of two things, depending on their surroundings. They either try to suppress any idea of God's existence completely out of their minds, or, in more religious societies, they live for another god or gods, ones which their ancestors have invented, and which are easier to deal with than the true God. That's not difficult to do. Nobody can see God. So just follow what everybody else around us is doing. It's easy.

Because of the wickedness of our own hearts, we don't want the true God to exist. We want to be independent. We want to be in charge of our own lives. The idea of an all-powerful Creator God, who hates sin, and who judges the world, we don't want to hear about. Because we know we'd be found guilty, and we'd rather like to carry on in our sins.

But God has put inside all of us a conscience. I'm not asking anyone to follow me, or my religion. Let's just see what our own consciences are telling us. We shouldn't just ignore our conscience by listening to the people all around us. They don't know anything. We need to come to understand and acknowledge the fundamental problem with the human heart. We're all evil by nature. If we don't like the word "evil," try "self-centred."

Genesis 6:5

*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

Jeremiah 17:9

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

Matthew 15:19,20

*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man.*

In this last passage in Matthew, Christ confronted the church leaders of His day. They thought the difference between clean and unclean was simply to do with outward things. But Christ told them it's the heart

that's the problem. It doesn't matter how much anybody seems to be nice on the outside, or what outward religious ceremonies they go through. The real problem lies in their hearts. Every one of us has a wicked heart by nature.

Our hearts are not something anybody can see, normally. But when outward circumstances stress us enough, the problem is inevitably going to be exposed. Do we have a bad temper? Do we hate somebody in our heart? Do we lust after other women apart from our wife? Are we tempted to steal from our employer, or the taxman? Do we lie to people? Do we secretly covet our neighbour's property? Or his wife? That's most of the ten commandments broken. And I suggest we break all ten of them on a regular basis in our hearts. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Christ said:

Mark 12:30,31

*And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

Do we really do that, all the time? That's the standard God requires. He's a holy God. The more we think about it, the more we ought to realise how far short we fall from this standard. It's our evil hearts we need to be saved from, even if our evil thoughts and desires are never usually expressed outwardly. And only God can do this.

That's what we need to be saved from, our own hearts.

## ***(2.) There is going to be a judgment***

God is a God of perfect justice. We must be judged.

2 Corinthians 5:10

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

We're all responsible to God. It is to Him we'll give an account, not men:

Romans 14:12

*So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

What's more, we'll all be found guilty:

Psalms 130:3

*If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*

When we see murderers or child abusers getting away with their crimes, we're rightly horrified. God has put a sense of justice in all of us.

Also, we see many crimes on this earth that are never punished, people get away with it. And we see many innocent people punished unjustly. This all seems so unfair. But we shouldn't worry. God is perfectly just. He hasn't forgotten. He'll punish everyone eventually. And because He's the only one who can see our hearts, unlike men, He'll judge with perfect justice. But it'll be in the world to come, not here.

Justice is clearly not done on this earth. So, for God to be perfectly just, which He is, we must continue to exist beyond death, when we'll all be judged in righteousness.

Hebrews 9:27

*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:*

Psalms 96:13

*The Lord... cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.*

So, we can't escape these two facts: We're naturally born with wicked hearts, and there's going to be a judgment after death. If we're going to be "saved" at all from the judgment to come by a "saviour," then we have to be saved from our wicked hearts while we're still on this earth, here, now. Because we can't save ourselves. That's the problem.

We could just sit back, do nothing, and ignore the problem altogether. Most people do just that. But the Bible says if we do that, we're condemned already:

John 3:18

*He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

If we ignore any rescue plan from God, and especially if we rebel and fight against any rescue plan, we'll be condemned when God's judgment finally comes.

So, after death there's going to be a judgment, and we'll all be found guilty. We need to be saved from our own hearts because we can't save ourselves.

### ***(3.) How can we be saved?***

If we are going to be saved at all, it will be by the grace of God.

***[11] For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,***

We're all too keen to believe that God is a God of love and forgiveness, which He is. But God can't simply say, "Oh, I'll just forgive everybody, everything." There'd be no justice in that at all. Muslims believe that Allah is all-forgiving, but by that they mean he'll just let people off. They don't see a problem. But there's a huge problem in that way of thinking. Our God is a forgiving God, yes, but that can't possibly be at the expense of His justice. So we need to ask the question: How can God be just and merciful at the same time? We're all guilty. But, how can God ever show mercy, when He can't avoid dealing with us in perfect justice? The only way that's possible, is for Him to punish the sins of those He's going to save in somebody else. And that is exactly why He sent our "*Saviour*" Jesus Christ into this world. We see from verses 13 and 14 that:

***[13] Jesus Christ.... [14] ....gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity....***

That's how God can be perfectly just and also merciful at the same time. God sent a Redeemer, a "*Saviour*," into the world to die in the place of His people, for their sins. Can we see how wonderful this is? This was Christ's purpose, when He came into the world.

The Old Testament shows us that, from the very beginning of time, a blood sacrifice was needed to cleanse men from sin. An elaborate system of animal sacrifices was set up, by God, as a picture of this. The Jews ended up thinking that these animal sacrifices actually took away their sins, but they were wrong. The animal sacrifices were only ever meant to be a picture of one true sacrifice for sin that would come in future. This is the sacrifice the Lord Jesus Christ came to make of Himself. He did this at one point in time for the sins of all His people throughout time. Now Christ has been, in history, we don't need animal sacrifices any more as a picture. We simply look back to Him and His finished work on the cross. Jesus Christ willingly gave Himself for His people. We're told about Christ:

1 Peter 2:24

*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*

2 Corinthians 5:21

*[God] hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

No other religion involves a blood sacrifice that can truly turn away the anger of God. Other religions either think God just lets us off freely (which would be against His justice), or that we actually have the ability to do something ourselves to achieve God's favour. But we don't have that ability. Our hearts are evil. No amount of outward works can ever change an evil heart. True believers in Christ know the evil of their own hearts. But they also know that they've been forgiven freely on the grounds of the blood of Christ.

1 Peter 1:18,19

*Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:*

So, how can we be saved? We're saved by the grace of God through the blood of Christ.

#### ***(4.) How can we receive this salvation?***

At this point, we could ask the question: Why has God bothered to save any of us? He never saved the wicked angels who fell, why should He bother with wicked men? Well, He didn't have to or need to. God could send every one of us into hell-fire for ever right now, and He wouldn't have done anything wrong at all. We'd just get what we deserve for the wickedness of our own hearts. But, God placed His love on His people, a number that no man can number, because He had a purpose for them. We see this in v.14:

***[14] Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.***

God is purifying a people for Himself who are ***“zealous of good works.”*** But we can't do good by nature, because our hearts are evil. We need a new heart. The old one's no good.

John 3:3

*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

Ezekiel 36:26

*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

So we need a new heart. How do we get one? We can't make one ourselves. We must cry to God to give us a new heart. He's the only one who can give us one. I know this sounds very simplistic, but, ask

Him for one. Start praying. Start communicating with Him. We must repent of our sins, and hate our own sinful nature before we can cry to Him for mercy. But He is a merciful God, and won't cast away any who call on Him in truth.

Psalm 145:18

*The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.*

If we haven't started a relationship with the Lord, start one now. Only then can He help us. He can give us a new heart. Recognise our need to be changed in our heart, in our innermost being. We must have this new heart to be saved from the judgment to come.

Only when we've received this new heart, we really then do become **“zealous of good works.”** We then get all the equipment necessary to:

***[12] ....live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world....***

To practise this godly living mentioned earlier in the chapter. Don't we want that? Aren't we sick of this life, and our old sinful heart yet? To get a new one is the only way.

As long as we have breath, God hasn't judged us yet. Let's all make sure we get right with God. Begin a relationship with Him. Communicate with Him. Want to love what's right, and hate what's evil. Or do we still want to continue in sin and destroy ourselves?

So, how can we receive this salvation from God? We ask Him for a new heart.

***(5.) What are we saved to?***

***[12] Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;***

Without the new heart, we'll always be dragged back into the **“ungodliness and worldly lusts”** of our natural heart. And we won't be able to help ourselves. But with the new heart, we now have the power

to deny ***“ungodliness and worldly lusts.”*** We didn’t have this power before. We must get this new heart. Only then can bondage to sin be broken.

Of course, even the Christian backslides. Christians aren’t perfect. They’ll never be perfect while they’re on this earth. That’s because the old heart is still there lurking. The real Christian now has a battle going on within him between the old heart and the new heart. He never had this before. He really loves the new heart, and desires to follow it. That’s his real self now. But the old heart keeps on dragging him back to sin. And whenever this happens, he hates it. The new heart not only gives us the power to deny ***“ungodliness and worldly lusts,”*** it also gives us the power and ability ***“to live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world,”*** which we never had before. This is the pursuit of holiness that is the Christian life.

Romans 8:13

*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

And the real Christian also has the assurance that one day this struggle with sin and his old heart will finally be over. After death he’ll be given a new body that will no longer be able to sin any more. That’s the blessed hope of the Christian.

***[13] Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;***

One day, Christ is going to come back again. He came the first time to save people:

John 12:47

*I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.*

He’ll come a second time to judge the world:

Acts 17:31

*[God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

In this period we're now in, between Christ's first and second coming, there's opportunity to be saved before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. Everyone who doesn't trust in the salvation Christ offers the world will go to eternal punishment. Which is just what all of us deserve anyway. But those who hunger and thirst after righteousness in this world, and who do embrace the salvation Christ came to give, and who do call on the Lord and receive the new heart, will go to everlasting glory.

Daniel 12:2

*And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

Matthew 25:46

*And these [the wicked] shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

Where will we be for eternity? We only have one life to get right with God. It's a narrow path that leads to life, because it goes against the crowd. But it's worth it in the end.

Matthew 7:13,14

*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

Let's all make sure that we renounce the world and its wicked ways, and begin our journey on the narrow way that leads to life. That is what true Christianity is all about.

Titus 2:15

*These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.*



## 1 Peter 4:1-11.

### The Cost, The Judgment, The Life

This passage splits up simply into three sections:

- vv. 1-4 What it costs to be a Christian.
- vv. 5-6 That there's going to be a judgment.
- vv.7-11 The all important question which we should always ask ourselves every time we come to Scripture: How then shall we live?

#### *1. The Cost*

First of all, we find out what it really costs to become a Christian. Imagine standing up at work one day and suddenly announcing to everybody that we've become a Christian. How do we think they'd react? Would it make any difference?

It'll make a difference all right. We will get opposition from our old friends and maybe even our family. Anything from light teasing, to ridiculing, to being killed for our faith. We'll soon find out that the world doesn't like us any more. Mainly because it doesn't understand us. But that's exactly what happened to Christ, and what He said would happen to us:

John 15:18,19

*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

So, why do people bother becoming Christians at all? Let's look at the passage.

***[1] Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.***

In this verse Peter is comparing the suffering Christ had in His body with the suffering the Christian has in his body. We're told that in our

sufferings, we should have the same attitude that He had in His sufferings. But there are some of Christ's sufferings that we can't possibly enter into, and conversely there are some aspects of our sufferings that Christ can't enter into.

So, first of all, the sufferings of Christ that we can't enter into: Christ was God, perfectly blessed from all eternity, yet He was born into a human body, limited by time and space. He grew up as a sinless child. He must have had a very lonely childhood. As a perfectly sinless person, He had to endure living every day constantly surrounded by naughty children, by sin. And when He was on the cross, the agony of soul He went through as He took on His shoulders the sins of all His people, so that they wouldn't have to take them on themselves. We can't even begin to share His sufferings in any of this.

But there's something we have, that Christ can't enter into. We're sinners. We're born slaves to a sinful nature. Christ was sinless. To understand this a bit better, we need to know exactly what becoming a Christian involves.

Becoming a Christian is not merely an outward decision. That's very important to understand. A Christian is not just someone who "decides" one day to follow Jesus Christ and His teachings, just as other people may "decide" to follow another great teacher like Mohammed, or Buddha, or Confucius.

Becoming a Christian is far more than a mere decision. The reason it isn't is simple. We can't follow any of Christ's teachings by ourselves. It's impossible. Our sinful natures prevent this. Try loving your enemies continually. Try doing good to those who persecute you. Try keeping any of the Ten Commandments, not only in actions but in your thoughts as well. None of us can do it. We're simply incapable of following Christ's teachings by ourselves. We need far more than just a moral teacher. We need a Saviour. Someone who can not only teach us how we should live, but also someone who can actually save us from our sinful nature. Christ compared our sinful nature to an illness:

Mark 2:17

*They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

Only when we see our need of a Saviour and cry to God for mercy, can God begin working in us to change us on a permanent basis.

The Bible describes this change in several ways: as being “*born-again*,” as having a new heart put within us, as our being made a new creature. Once we have been given this new life from the Lord, we’re freed from slavery to our sinful natures, and now have the ability to begin to follow Christ’s teachings. That’s what it is to be a true Christian.

Has this life-changing experience happened to us? Have we been brought from darkness to light? From the power of sin to salvation in Christ? If not, or if we’re not sure, we should pray to God. Communicate with Him. And He will let us know.

Matthew 7:7

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

But, even after we’ve become a Christian, we don’t become perfect. For the rest of our lives, there’s a battle going on inside us. Our old sinful nature is still there, and will try to drag us back into sin all the time. Only when we die will we be freed from it altogether.

Christ never had this problem. Christ never had an old life, or an old nature, dragging Him back all the time, like we have. He was altogether sinless. He was fully human, and so suffered human frailties such as tiredness and hunger, so He really:

Hebrews 4:15

*...was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

But He could never have experienced, like we do, an old heart battling within Him, constantly dragging Him back to sin.

Now that’s what we don’t have in common with Christ’s sufferings. But what Christians do have in common with Christ, is suffering unjustly in this world for doing good. That’s what this verse is talking about. In this respect we should have the same attitude as Him. To the extent that we follow the leading of our new hearts, we will suffer the same kind of persecutions He suffered.

We don't look for persecution, but the Christian would rather love God and be persecuted to death if necessary, than give up the Christian life and go back into the world and let the persecution be lifted.

All we have to do to escape persecution, is to renounce our faith and go back to our old ways, our old life, our old friends, who I'm sure would accept us back. But we can't. We don't want to. We've got no taste for the old life any more. In fact we're totally ashamed of the life we lived in the past. The new heart has given us a desire for new things, and the taste for old things has become unpleasant. The passage describes this as having "**ceased from sin.**" That doesn't mean we don't sin any more, but that we hate it when we do.

***[2] That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.***

Our desire now, and our duty, as Christians, is to follow the leading of the new heart and put to death the old:

Romans 8:13

*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

But our old friends just won't understand any of this at all, because they've never experienced this new birth. And that's when the persecution will begin:

***[3] For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: [4] Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.***

Upon becoming a Christian, we now have an extra problem to contend with which we didn't have before. We're now persecuted by the world, our old friends. They think it strange we don't follow them any more like we used to. But we'd rather seek a new life, a life that pleases God.

Our attitude ought to be altogether different from the world from now on. We now have Christ as our example, and the new heart within us gives us the ability and desire to begin to follow Him. How did He live His life?

1 Peter 2:21-23

*For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*

Whatever our situation, we should never retaliate. That's the Christian way. We're called to love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us. Our new heart gives us the ability to do this, we can't do it naturally:

Matthew 5:44

*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.*

Romans 12:19-21

*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

But surely, the Christian should care about justice being done. Yes, of course. God isn't going to let sinners get away with their sin. But the point is we should leave any kind of vengeance or retribution to God. He's the only one who can see the hearts of men. He alone knows how to judge justly. We don't. We should leave judgment to the just Judge to sort everything out.

## **2. The Judgment**

And this leads us onto our second point in verses 5 and 6. There's going to be a judgment. Men think they can get away with their sins. But God sees the heart, and will one day judge all men for the deeds done in the body.

***[5] Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.***

Most people don't think there's a judgment coming, or rather, they don't want to think about it. But if there wasn't going to be a judgment to come in the next life, then God would be totally unjust, because it's obvious that justice is not done in this world. If this world is all there is, God would be unjust.

Everyone naturally lives for themselves, and their own pleasure. A judgment at the end of their lives, is going to be awkward for them, so most people choose not to believe in it. They'd rather believe death is the end and there's no judgment, so they can freely enjoy living for their lusts here and now:

1 Corinthians 15:32

*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*

But the Bible is clear:

Hebrews 9:27

*....it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*

So, if there is going to be a judgment, what should we all do?  
**REPENT!**

Acts 17:30,31

*[God] now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

We're born living a self-centred and sinful life. We all need to repent and turn to the one Saviour that God has appointed to save people from their sins. That's why it's vital for us to receive the new heart and the new nature that only God can give. It's the only way possible to escape the judgment to come.

***[6] For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.***

The gospel is, the good news that there is a Saviour for sinners. This verse is teaching us that this good news has been preached throughout history. It has been preached ***“to them that are dead.”*** That is, all those throughout history who have since died, who are “now dead,” as I think the NIV says, in order that they too may be able to escape the judgment to come.

But, many people mistakenly understand this phrase about the gospel being preached to ***“them that are dead,”*** as meaning that people are given a second “chance” to hear the gospel and respond to it after death. They also use 1 Peter 3:19,20, in the previous chapter, which talks about Christ preaching to the *“spirits in prison”* in Noah’s day.

Those who believe this are mainly those who have a problem with the fact that many people on the earth live their whole lives without ever “getting a chance” to hear the gospel before they die. They would say that it’s “unfair” of God not to give everyone at least a “chance” of salvation. But this verse can’t mean that there’s a “second chance,” because we’re clearly told elsewhere that:

Hebrews 9:27

*...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*

In Luke 16, Christ told a parable of a rich man and Lazarus, that clearly shows (v.26) that after death there’s a great gulf fixed between heaven and hell that no-one can ever cross.

There are two main problems with the idea that people get a second “chance” to hear the gospel after death. Firstly, it takes away the urgency of missionary work here. Why bother spreading the gospel at great hardship to ourselves when everyone’s going to get a second chance to hear it anyway? Especially as after death it’s Christ who’s supposedly going to be preaching to them. He’s a far better preacher than any of us are. So let’s just leave it to Him. Secondly, there’s a big problem with the word “chance.” Nothing happens in this world by “chance.” Everything is under God’s control:

Matthew 10:29,30

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

So is it unfair of God to allow so many people in this life to never hear the gospel, and go to hell without hearing the gospel?

God knows who'd respond and who wouldn't. God knows that even if these people had heard the gospel, they would've rejected it. He isn't going to waste resources by sending a missionary somewhere where nobody will be converted. God guides each individual believer to be where He wants them to be, in order that all His elect will be gathered in:

Acts 16:6-8

*Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.*

God didn't want Paul, at that particular time, to go to Asia or Bithynia, but to go to Troas, because God wanted him to go to Europe. The responsibility of God's people is that we should make sure we're in God's will, and not worry about the gospel not going to some places. Where the gospel goes is in God's hands alone. He knows what He's doing. We shouldn't be unduly concerned about these things. We should just be obedient.

### ***3. How Then Shall We Live?***

Now the third and final section, in verses 7-11: In the light of the fact that there's soon going to be a judgment, How then shall we live? It's pointless reading the Bible, or listening to sermons, or coming to church, unless it changes our lives.

***[7] But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober...***

We certainly should no longer live our lives to please ourselves. We should rather live our lives to the glory of God. We should be sober. Not only will this please God, but it'll also be the best witness possible to those around us.

*...and watch unto prayer.*

We should also be a PRAYING people. We should be constantly in communion with our heavenly Father. Having a relationship with Him. Telling Him all our needs. Wanting to discern His will for us in the smallest circumstance.

If we're not alert or sober, but instead slothful, lazy, and tired all the time, we aren't going to have a very good prayer life. We need to get our priorities right.

*[8] And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves,....*

We should LOVE one another. Do we know what that really involves? It involves time and effort, because by nature we're all the most unloving of creatures.

John 13:35

*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

In Matthew 24, where Christ tells us about what's going to happen in the last days, one of the things that we will see is that:

Matthew 24:12

*....the love of many shall wax cold.*

We should particularly make an effort to love those around us who are unlovely. It's all too easy to love someone who we think has something lovely about them. But in reality, none of us has anything lovely about us at all. Why should God bother with any of us? The wonder is that He does bother with us:

Romans 5:8

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

***...for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.***

This doesn't mean that if we love someone we should turn a blind eye to their sin. God doesn't turn a blind eye to sin. God loves His people, and to deal with their sin was a very costly business for Him:

1 Peter 3:18

*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.*

So, love isn't turning a blind eye to sin, but exactly the opposite. If we love someone and they're sinning, love for them should motivate us to at some point tell them about their sin. Not only because of the judgment to come, but also because sin ruins lives. We should want the best for everyone around us. Christ said:

John 14:15

*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

To walk around and continually see people sinning ought to motivate us to tell them about the love of God in Jesus Christ. They need to know how they can be saved from the inevitable consequences that their sins will lead them into. That's real love. Covering over sin, pretending it doesn't exist, isn't love at all.

Romans 13:10

*Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

***[9] Use hospitality one to another without grudging.***

We should offer HOSPITALITY towards each other without grumbling. In 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 we see amongst a list of requirements necessary for becoming a bishop, or overseer, of a congregation is being “*given to hospitality*,” or “*a lover of hospitality*.” And

this is not just an instruction for church leaders either, because in Romans 12:13 we are told that we should all be “*given to hospitality.*” This is a continual attitude of heart.

Hebrews 13:2

*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

***[10] As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.***

This is all about spiritual gifts. The Lord gives to every Christian spiritual gifts, in order to serve Him. Every Christian is different, and will receive different gifts. Spiritual gifts are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. Rather than going through a list of them all, Peter quite cleverly boils them down to two elements. All spiritual gifts are made up of a combination of these two elements in varying proportions: SPEAKING and SERVING:

***[11] If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God....***

SPEAKING – not our own words, but as one who speaks the very words of God. That should shut our mouths.

Speaking about the things of God is a very serious subject. We’re talking about heaven and hell. Sin and repentance. God and eternal judgment. How can anybody be light-hearted or humorous in any way when speaking on these things? Too many preachers today just want to tell funny stories to endear themselves to the audience. But the subject we have is far more serious. But, also, even in our everyday conversation, we’re told that flippancy, lightheartedness and joking, shouldn’t be named amongst us:

Ephesians 5:3,4

*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.*

Matthew 12:36

*But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.*

That doesn't mean we can't have a sense of humour. But generally speaking, we ought to be serious-minded people.

***....if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth....***

SERVING – We should never try to do anything in our own strength, but only with the strength that God provides. We're such proud people. We want to do things in our own strength all the time. Then we wonder why things go all wrong. We need the Lord:

Philippians 4:13

*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

And it's not just a question of simply saying it's the Lord giving me the strength. We should mean it. How many of us, for example, glory in our infirmities, like Paul did?

2 Corinthians 12:9,10

*And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

And also, of Christ it's said that He:

Philippians 2:7,8

*....made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

Do we really live like this? Servant lives with servant hearts. Do we really make ourselves nothing? Do we really humble ourselves, and would we be obedient even unto death, if necessary? This is a challenge to all of us.

And the ultimate aim of all our actions should be:

***.... that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.***

God is working everything out to His greatest glory in the end. All the glory in everything we do, should therefore go to Him and never to ourselves.

Matthew 20:26-28

*But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

This is the Christian's calling.



# 1 John 1. The Message

John and the other disciples spent about three and a half years with our Lord Jesus Christ. They learned a lot from Him. They may not have understood much of it at the time, but later on the Holy Spirit brought it back to their remembrance, and they wrote about it. That's what we've got in the New Testament. That's a lot of teaching. And it's good, and it's right, and we should love this book and learn from it ourselves. We can spend all our lives just studying it, and even then we'll have only just scratched the surface.

But we can accumulate all that knowledge, we can talk about this subject, or that subject in our meetings. And let's talk about the things of God. But in doing this, we can miss out or sideline the one fundamental, basic Christian message altogether. What is Christianity about? What is the message of hope we've got for the world out there, a message that can change the world? Why did God send Jesus Christ into this world in the first place?

In this letter, John puts this fundamental Christian message into a concise form in verses 5 to 9. And that's what I really want to look at. The rest of the letter expands on this message. But first of all, for completeness, let's take a quick look at the introduction.

***[1] That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;***

***“That which was from the beginning.... of the Word of life.”*** Does that sound familiar? It's very similar to the way John starts his gospel:

John 1:1

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

We could spend the whole time just looking at that one verse. We haven't got time for that today. But what is obvious is that John here in his first epistle is talking about the same subject – *the Word, the Word of life, the Word of life which was from the beginning.*

And John says something very unusual about this Word. “...*which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled....*” In other words, this Word, which was God (John 1:1), who is normally invisible, was made visible to us. We ourselves have heard, seen, looked upon and handled it. The Word of life was made detectable to our senses. In other words, God appeared in the flesh, in the form of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:15

*Who is the image of the invisible God.*

John 1:14

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

***[2] (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)***

This Word of life was “*manifested unto us.*” Our Lord Jesus Christ manifested Himself to a lot of people when He was on earth. When John says He was “*manifested unto us,*” he’s speaking about the Apostles in particular, because he says they “*bear witness.*”

The Lord has left two witnesses of Himself in this world, so that:

2 Corinthians 13:1

*In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.*

And if we don’t accept these witnesses, there’s no other way we can understand anything about God. The two witnesses are the witness of the apostles and prophets, in other words the Scriptures, and the witness of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:32

*And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.*

So the apostles are witnesses to us of Christ.

And John tells us that he bears witness of **“that eternal life which was with the Father.”** Which is an unusual way of describing Jesus Christ, but that’s exactly what He was. He was with the Father from the beginning:

Proverbs 8:23

*I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.*

And He’s the only one who can give us eternal life:

1 John 5:11

*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*

John 17:3

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

John and his fellow Apostles had encountered the living God as He appeared in the flesh in the form of Jesus Christ. And John tells us that he writes this letter for two purposes.

Firstly:

***[3] That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.***

John writes about his eyewitness experience of the Lord of Life, so that his readers may have the same fellowship with God the apostles had. Now, we can’t see Him for ourselves as they saw Christ with their physical eyes, but we can still have fellowship with Him. We can have a real, living relationship with the true God of heaven.

And the second purpose for John writing this letter:

***[4] And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.***

1 Peter 1:8,9

*Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*

So that's the introduction. Now, I want to spend the rest of the time on the message:

***[5] This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you,....***

This is the message the disciples heard from Him, that is from God, through Jesus Christ when He was with them. John declares this message to his readers.

***....that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.***

The message starts with God. It doesn't start with me. How I can live a happier life. How I can achieve inner peace. Or how I can be a better person. All these things are included in the wider Christian teaching, but, contrary to popular opinion, life isn't all about me. It's primarily about God and His glory. Not me and my glory and pleasure.

So the first thing we need to do is stop thinking about ourselves and concentrate on God. And we're told here that God is light. And He's only light, because we're also told that ***"in Him is no darkness at all."*** That's the one true living God. And that light is so bright that no man can look upon it. Moses once asked God if he could see His glory, but He said:

Exodus 33:20

*Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.*

And it's not just His light we can't see, but when the Israelites were on Mount Sinai, they couldn't even stand to hear His voice:

Exodus 20:19

*And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will bear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*

And Manoah, the father of Samson, met an angel of God, and said to his wife afterwards:

Judges 13:22

*We shall surely die, because we have seen God.*

In the Scriptures, when anyone got close to the living God, either by meeting an angel, or hearing His voice or whatever, they trembled, they feared. Because God is so holy. That's what it means when it says "**God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.**" It's like a blinding light, a light none of us could ever stand. It's not an easy thing to approach God. He's not just a big daddy in the sky like Santa Claus. He is to be feared.

Hebrews 10:31

*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Hebrews 12:29

*For our God is a consuming fire.*

And it's not so much a physical light as a moral light. God is good. We're not.

Isaiah 6:5

*Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*

Job 4:18,19

*His angels be charged with folly: How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?*

But, we might say, if God's light is a moral light, and He's only light, in other words, only good, then what about all the evil in the world? Where does that come from? Well, it doesn't come from God, because

we're told that "*in Him is no darkness at all.*" Darkness, or evil, comes from men. And we've got that in the next verse:

***[6] If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:***

John tells us, amongst other things, that men "*walk in darkness.*" And Christ said elsewhere that men deliberately walk in darkness. They love it. They don't even want to see the light:

John 3:19

*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

And John also tells us later on in this letter that:

1 John 5:19

*The whole world lieth in wickedness.*

That's why we can't see God. One of the commonest objections we get is people saying, "Where is God? I can't see Him. Where is He? Show me." And they're right, we can't see Him. And that's because the whole world is in darkness, and He is light.

Men think they're in light, but it's only light they've generated for themselves. That's why we've got so many religions. Men think they see light, but they're walking in darkness.

Isaiah 50:11

*Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.*

Only the one true God Lord of Heaven and earth is light. Everything else is darkness.

In v.6 here, John specifically mentions people who walk in darkness but at the same time say they have fellowship with God. But if they're walking in darkness, they can't be having fellowship with the light.

They're either mistaken or, as John says here, they're lying to us. What can we learn from this?

Well, if we want to know anything about Christianity, we should be careful where we get our information from. We might come across someone like this, who, knowingly or not, is deceiving us. But not only that. Even the best Christians, with the best of intentions, will still make plenty of mistakes. We'll say wrong things. Because we're all still learning about the faith. None of us knows everything. And not only that, but we're all pretty poor examples. We'll get angry when we shouldn't, we'll do wrong things and regret it later, and so on. So we shouldn't dismiss Christianity because of wrong words or actions we've seen from some Christians. To find out about Christianity, the only truly reliable source we have is Jesus Christ Himself. Not men, not a church, but Jesus Christ Himself. Find out how He lived, and what He had to say. Then we won't get a distorted view.

And we're told about these people who are lying, that they "*do not the truth.*" So it's not just that they're telling us rubbish, their actions betray their true beliefs.

Matthew 7:20

*By their fruits ye shall know them.*

When we think of the word "doctrine", we think of teaching, academic things, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of election and so on. Things to be understood with the mind. And these are good things, there's nothing wrong with them, we should be learning the truth. But if all we have in our heads is correct doctrine, without it affecting us practically in any way, we're still missing the one thing needful. Paul says to Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:3,4

*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 nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,...*

And Paul says to Titus:

Titus 2:1-3

*But speak thou the things which **become sound doctrine**: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things....*

Our behaviour should be becoming of sound doctrine. To have sound doctrine in our mind is important, but it should affect our behaviour. As we grow in the faith, we:

2 Peter 3:18

*...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

The more we grow in Bible knowledge, the more it ought to change our lives. The more we should become gentle and kind and peaceable and produce the fruit of the Spirit.

There's no point having a degree in theology if we're not walking in the light of what we know. If we can understand the difference between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism but don't know how to love our neighbour as ourselves, as James says:

James 1:26

*If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

***[7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin***

A Christian is one who walks in the light as God is in the light. Or at least that's what the Christian's aim is. That's what the Christian wants more than anything else, to be like Christ. Christ was perfectly sinless. He was the only one who has ever lived who never at any time walked in darkness. In fact He said of Himself:

John 8:12

*I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

But how can we walk in the light, when by nature we're in darkness, the whole world lieth in wickedness and we can't even see the light because it's too bright? There is a way.

Ephesians 5:14

*Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*

There's no other way to escape the darkness. We must be changed from darkness to light from the inside, and only Jesus Christ can do that. Nobody else, no other religion, no other teaching, can change a man from the inside. Only the light of the world can.

Even then, Christians, who've been changed from the inside and turned to the light, are still far from perfect. But we have become different from the world. We no longer walk in darkness. We've got the beginnings of new light in our hearts. We can't see it in others, only God knows truly who are His. But this new light changes our view on life completely.

After having this light put within us, we now have the capacity to follow Christ, which we didn't have before. We still fall far short of what we should be, but to the extent that we do ***“walk in the light, as he is in the light,”*** we're told here, ***“we have fellowship one with another.”***

Christian fellowship is something the world can't understand. The world lies in darkness. But Christians are those who, although maybe still very dark in themselves, they are at least aiming towards the light, they are wanting to be Christlike. Christian fellowship is the fellowship of all those heading the same way. Which is the opposite way from the world. We encourage one another along the way towards the light. Those still in darkness won't understand that. It's a completely foreign experience to them. They've never experienced what it is to be changed from the inside from darkness to light. But we have, and we can understand them. Because every one of us was in darkness ourselves at one time:

Ephesians 5:8

*For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:*

So that means two things: **Firstly**, we know what people are like by nature, because we were there ourselves. We know we can't trust anyone. Even Christ didn't trust in men:

John 2:24,25

*But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*

Christ said:

Matthew 10:16

*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

**Secondly**, now we're light and no longer in darkness, we should walk as children of light. We should be finished with our old life completely and now live for Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:5,6

*Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.*

And that means putting to death the flesh and producing the fruit of the Holy Spirit:

Galatians 5:22,23

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance.*

As I said before, we won't do this perfectly, but that's our aim. The best Christian still has plenty of darkness in him. That's why we need Jesus Christ for more than just teaching. The good news is: ***“the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”***

Men – who live in darkness remember – put Jesus Christ to death on a cross, because He was light and never did anything wrong. Men, naturally, in their darkness, don't like Him, because He told them they're ways are evil, which they are. Christ said of Himself:

John 7:7

*The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.*

But what these men who crucified Christ didn't know, was that His death would become life for all those who put their trust in Him. That blood which He shed on the cross cleanses His people from all their sin. Because we should have been there, accepting the punishment for our sins. But He died in our place, so we could be made free. That's the wonderful news we have for the world. The Bible tells us that:

Hebrews 9:22

*without shedding of blood is no remission [of sin].*

In the Old Testament, this concept was symbolised by a series of animal sacrifices. The animal sacrifices didn't take away sin, but they pointed forward to the day when a sin-bearer would come to do just that. And that sin-bearer has now come. He is Jesus Christ.

We all need Jesus Christ to take away our sins. Otherwise we have to pay for them ourselves, because we're all born in darkness, in a sinful state before God. We need to acknowledge our sins and turn from them to Jesus Christ, because there's no other way.

And even we who've been brought to the light by Christ, and so no longer need to pay for our own sins because Christ has paid for them Himself, even we still fall so far short of what we ought to be. Every one of us, believer and unbeliever alike, still needs the blood of Jesus Christ to continually cleanse us from our sins.

How do we make sure His shed blood has taken away our sins? We must believe on Him:

Acts 16:31

*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

Trust in Him to cleanse us from our sin, and He will. Call upon Him. Pray to Him. Communicate with Him. Start a living relationship with Him. And if we are genuine, I guarantee we will know our sins all forgiven, for sure. We just will, He'll let us know.

But do we really want this? So many people reject Him. Many people don't want to talk about their own personal sins, because they don't want to believe they have any:

***[8] If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.***

This is repeated in v.10, just to make sure we get it:

***[10] If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.***

All of us have sins before God. We have to be honest and acknowledge that, otherwise we deceive ourselves and make a God a liar. In fact we don't really see how dark we are inside at all. That only comes the nearer we get to the light. But this is what God wants us to do, acknowledge our sins before Him, repent of them and come to the Saviour which He has provided, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's so easy, and yet we find it so difficult.

And notice, v.8 says, ***“the truth is not in us.”*** Compare that to v.10, ***“His Word is not in us.”*** So, God's Word is truth. When we become a Christian, when we come to the light and experience the fundamental life change that entails, God writes His law in our hearts:

Jeremiah 31:33

*But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

We no longer need a written law to tell us what to do, because we could never keep it anyway. Our hearts are changed so we know what to do and are able to do it. Not perfectly, we're still fall short, but God's law is no more a burden, rather, we delight in it.

The apostle Paul said:

Romans 7:22

*For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.*

And the Psalmist said:

Psalm 119:11

*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

***[9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

God doesn't require much of us. We don't have to do some great thing to get to heaven. We can't do enough anyway. All God requires of us is we confess our sins to Him, and come to Him through Jesus Christ. We don't need to confess them to anyone else, a priest, a minister, an angel, or Mary. Nobody else need know, it's not their business anyway. It's between each individual and God. And if we do genuinely confess our sins to Him, ***“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”***

The one true God Lord of heaven and earth is ***“faithful and just.”*** He is worthy of putting our trust in. He is not going to cheat us, or deceive us. He won't let us down, like men, or gods of men's invention. He is worthy of all worship. And He alone can forgive sins:

Mark 2:7

*Who can forgive sins but God only?*

That's it. Just come to God confessing our sins to Him, and accepting the blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ on the cross to cleanse us from all sin. It's not difficult at all, just come to God through Christ. After all, there's no other way:

1 John 5:12

*He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*

Do we want a clear conscience before God? We can know for sure our sins are forgiven. We'll still sin. We won't become perfect, but we'll know for sure we won't receive the punishment we deserve, because it's all been put upon Christ.

That is the Christian message that John had heard from God, and gives us here in these few verses. Yes, there's plenty more teaching the Lord Jesus Christ gave us, the Bible is full of good things for us to learn about how we should live, but this is the one message whereby everyone who hears it can begin a new life right now. A life of following Christ, of becoming in our hearts more and more like Him. This is where the Christian life begins.

## Jude 1:1-4.

### The Faith Once Delivered unto the Saints

*[1] Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:*

Who was Jude? Most scholars tell us the letters of James and Jude were written by the half-brothers of our Lord. Now, we know that after Mary gave birth as a virgin to Christ, she married Joseph and had at least six other children with him in the normal way. Two of them had these names:

Mark 6:3

*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of **James**, and **Joses**, and of **Juda**, and **Simon**? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.*

But I can't see for the life of me where scholars get the idea from that these letters James and Jude were written by them. While Christ was alive, His brothers didn't believe on Him:

John 7:5

*For neither did his brethren believe in him.*

Although after His ascension, we find they did:

Acts 1:14

*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*

Would God really choose men who didn't follow Christ during His life to write Scripture?

In Galatians, Paul, on a brief visit to Jerusalem, tells us he met James the Lord's brother, and seems to imply he was called an apostle, but not one of the twelve:

Galatians 1:19

*But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.*

And there's one reference in v.17 of Jude, here, which refers to the apostles in the third person, as though the writer wasn't one. But none of this proves anything really.

The New Testament is based on the testimony of the apostles. Mark and Luke weren't apostles, but they seem to have got a lot of their information from Peter and Paul respectively. There *were* apostles called James and Judas. Why couldn't these letters have been written by them? Obviously not Judas Iscariot, and not James the son of Zebedee, as he died early on in Acts 12:2. But other apostles had these names:

Acts 1:13

*And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomen, and Matthen, **James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.***

I suggest it was this Jude, or Judas, the apostle Judas (not Iscariot), who wrote this letter.

But what does it matter who wrote it? The Holy Spirit inspired it, as it's in Scripture. We can have scholarly arguments over all sorts of things in the Bible, but what's it here for?

Romans 15:4

*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Jude wrote this letter to ***“to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.”*** This is a three-point sermon in itself: **“sanctified,” “preserved” and “called.”** And notice too, all three persons of the Trinity are here, as we're called by the Holy Spirit.

We're **“sanctified,”** set apart from the world, by God the Father. That's a fundamental principle in the Christian. Whether the world likes it or not – and it usually doesn't – the Christian is different from others in a

way they just can't understand. We don't follow their ways any more. We used to, they're the natural ways we're all born with. But we've been fundamentally changed in our hearts, we've got no desire to carry on like that. We hate that way of life now, living for self, serving self. We now want nothing else but to please the Lord, not ourselves. So we love His Law, they're our delight, no longer a burden to us:

Psalm 1:1,2

*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*

We're "**preserved**" in Jesus Christ the Son. Not only are Christians set apart from the world by God the Father, but we're kept in that state by Jesus Christ the Son. We might not think so sometimes, but we are. Once we're truly saved, we can never be lost. But that doesn't mean we can live how we like. If we think that, we're not saved at all. A truly saved Christian would never want to go back into sin. Christ keeps us to the end. That's a great comfort to the Christian. The millionth time we let Him down, He still preserves us:

Romans 8:38,39

*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

And we're "**called**" by the Holy Spirit. Why do people become Christians in the first place? Why do they renounce the world and its ways, and seek the Lord, desiring to follow Him instead? Because the Holy Spirit comes into their heart to change them, to draw them. To show them the emptiness of this world, and to call them to a life that is altogether different, altogether more satisfying. They're called in their hearts to a new life as the Holy Spirit comes to dwell with them and lead them away from living for self.

2 Timothy 1:9

*Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*

***[2] Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.***

This is a blessing given by Jude to his readers, “**mercy**,” “**peace**” and “**love**.” And we should always wish people such things. But these things don’t come by magic. How do they come? They’re all gifts of the Holy Spirit. So, at the same time, we need to ask ourselves, are we merciful, peaceable and loving to those around us? Otherwise we’re just like the man James tells us about:

James 2:15,16

*If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*

And because these are gifts of the Spirit, worldly men don’t have them, although they can maybe mimic them to some degree. But their insincerity can soon be found out.

Matthew 7:18

*A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

***[3] Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.***

It seems to be the case that Jude originally intended to write on the subject of “**the common salvation**.” Which is a good subject. We’re encouraged to:

Hebrews 3:13

*Exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

And Jude “**gave all diligence**” to try to do this. But the fact that the word “**gave**” is in the past tense implies that although that was his intention, the Lord put a more pressing need on his heart. So the letter is on a different subject from what Jude originally intended. The Holy

Spirit moved Jude to write on a new subject, which we now have in Scripture.

It's important to be sensitive to the Lord's will in everything we do. We might think that something we want to do would be really good, but the Lord might have other ideas.

So what was the more pressing need the Lord put on Jude's heart? It was to **"write"** and **"exhort"** the readers that they **"should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."** The reason being that (v.4) **"certain men crept in unawares,"** teaching falsehood, another gospel. Jude's readers need to be aware this is happening. And, as this letter was inspired to be part of Scripture, that includes us too.

So there's something here more important even than edifying one another on **"the common salvation,"** good and wholesome though that is. We need to be aware that false doctrine is in the church. We shouldn't pretend for a moment that everybody, or every church, that calls itself Christian, necessarily is. There are a lot of false doctrines, false gospels, false teachers out there. Just because something is called Christian, it might not be. The nearer we get to the end of the New Testament, the more warnings there are about this.

I hasten to add, if somebody calls themselves a Christian, we must accept that at face value, even if their experience doesn't quite match our own. Even if they believe things we don't. We stand for the truth that God has revealed to us. Christians are always learning and changing their views on things the more they understand the Bible. That's normal Christian growth. So when we come across a Christian who differs from us, we don't just blindly agree with everything they say, neither do we try to correct them by having a jolly good argument. We merely accept them as a fellow believer, until such time it becomes obvious they're not. Like they rob a bank, or they've got a cupboard full of idols or they've got three wives or something. We tell false prophets by their fruits:

Matthew 7:29

*By their fruits ye shall know them.*

Not one of us is perfect in our doctrine, we all make mistakes, although we try not to. So we don't just rubbish someone because he's got something wrong. And let's not worship preachers, thinking they never get anything wrong, because they do. The point Jude is making here, is that there are people in the church deliberately teaching wrong things, so at least some will be led astray. They'll start believing another gospel, like the Galatians:

Galatians 1:6,7

*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.*

And why would anyone start believing another gospel? Because it's attractive to them:

2 Corinthians 11:4

*For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.*

We're told to ***“earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”***:

1. What is ***“the faith”***? In v.4 we read that these false teachers are turning ***“the grace of our God into lasciviousness,”*** so ***“the faith”*** must be the ***“doctrine according to godliness”*** mentioned by Paul in his first letter to Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:3-5

*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 nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.*

2. And because of these false teachers in the church, we must **“contend”** for the true faith. What do we mean by contending? Do we set up great debates with them? Write great polemic discourses to prove them wrong? Maybe. There’s a need to prove them wrong. But we shouldn’t become seen as aggressive debaters, always arguing to make our point. Remember, it’s the *“doctrine according to godliness”* that is under fire here. So unless we are godly, producing fruit of the Spirit, being kind, gentle and peaceable, why should anyone listen to us? The best way to witness against false teachers, is not to be like them. They’re of the world. They will be aggressive and loud. Look at the so-called “Christian” TV channels, they all shout. Don’t be like that. Unlike them, we’ve got the truth. Truth alone will convince the gainsayers. We don’t need to shout:

Titus 1:7-9

*For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*

3. And this faith was **“once delivered unto the saints.”** Who are the saints? They are the sanctified ones, the set-apart ones, in other words, us. Those who have been **“sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called”** by the Holy Spirit. **“The faith”** is the faith of the Lord’s people. And this faith has been **“once delivered unto”** us. In other words, there’s only one faith, and it doesn’t change.

Ephesians 4:4-6

*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

The one true faith *“according to godliness,”* is the faith we’re to defend and contend for, because so many people have over the years introduced other “faiths,” other religions, other philosophies into the church, and called it Christianity. But it’s not, because it’s not the **“faith once delivered unto the saints,”** it’s something else. We really must understand this.

Our faith is based on the witness of the prophets and apostles:

2 Peter 3:2

*That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour.*

Acts 10:43

*To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

In other words, our faith is the faith of the Bible. The Bible is complete. It needs no more additions to it. The book of Revelation completed the canon of inspired Scripture:

Revelation 22:18,19

*For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

The Bible alone is sufficient. Nothing else is necessary. Except that men think that other things are necessary, like Holy Tradition, or the decrees of men in Holy Synods. No. The Bible is ***“the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”*** It’s unchangeable.

***[4] For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.***

So, Jude’s concern, and the Holy Spirit’s concern, is that his readers earnestly contend for the true faith, because ***“certain men”*** have crept into the church teaching other things. The word ***“men”*** here, does include women. The church in Thyatira had a problem with a female:

Revelation 2:20

*Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.*

And they **“crept in unawares.”** The people in the church weren’t aware of it happening. That’s a warning to us. People today are creeping into churches teaching lies.

It also means they’re doing it deliberately. Otherwise they wouldn’t **“creep.”** They know exactly what they’re doing. This isn’t preachers making the odd mistake, this is deliberate. Why? To get a following. They want to lord it over the flock, for power and for their cash:

3 John 1:9

*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.*

1 Peter 5:2,3

*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.*

Then we’re told: **“who were before of old ordained to this condemnation.”**

Ordination to eternal damnation. This is a difficult subject for some, but it needn’t be. People say it’s unfair. God ought to give everybody an equal chance to be saved. To which I say, first of all, why should any of us be saved from our sins? The wonder, the unfairness if you like, is that anybody is saved to eternal life at all. Salvation is all of grace. Damnation to hell fire is exactly what all of us deserve for our sins. That’s fair.

Secondly, only God knows who is ordained to condemnation, we don’t. So, to us, these terrible, wicked men, are objects of evangelism. So if we come across any, tell them the gospel. It’s God who changes hearts. We just preach the message to all men everywhere.

And they're "**ungodly men.**" That's the point. They don't teach the "*doctrine according to godliness.*" They don't teach godliness in any way, and neither are they godly themselves. We can know them by their fruits. Do they aggressively shout? Are they always asking for money, and making us feel guilty if we don't give generously? That's the giveaway.

Instead of teaching godliness, the fruit of the Spirit, they turn "***the grace of our God into lasciviousness.***" How is that possible? It's quite simple. They tell us that we're saved by grace, because we can't save ourselves by our works. And I would wholeheartedly agree with them on that. But they then go on to conclude that that must mean we can now live how we like. We can throw the Ten Commandments away, because we'll be saved anyway. That's a very common misunderstanding of the gospel. And these false teachers jump on it. They misinterpret Scripture, thinking it teaches that the law no longer applies:

Romans 7:6

*But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.*

2 Corinthians 3:6

*....the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*

Anyone who thinks we can now live how we like, misunderstands the concept of the new birth altogether. If we're saved by grace, we're given a new heart. The new heart now no longer wants to live how we like. The new heart wants more than anything else to please God. But these false teachers and their followers have never been born-again. They think to become a Christian is just mental assent to some statement. "I believe in Jesus," or "I believe Jesus has taken away my sin." Now I can carry on my life just as before. I now believe in Jesus, which maybe makes me a bit happier. That's all the difference there is. But there's no concept of being born-again, of a fundamental change in the heart.

When we become Christians, we really become new creatures in Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

We have a new heart put within us, a heart of flesh, not of stone:

Ezekiel 36:26

*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

We no longer have any desire to follow our old ways, we now want to please the Lord. We still fail, because we're still in these bodies, but we now love the Lord. We don't follow the law outwardly on tables of stone any more. It's now written on our hearts. What used to be a burden to us is now a delight. That's what people don't understand.

Jeremiah 31:33,34

*But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

Psalms 119:97

*O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*

These false teachers know nothing of this. They love the word “*grace*.” They teach we’re saved by grace, but they think that means the law no longer matters, so we shouldn’t worry about it. That makes people happy. They can carry on as they are, in sin, and don’t need to change. So these false teachers get a following, as naturally it’s quite attractive. But not only are these false teachers “*turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness,*” but, even worse, they’re also “*denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

On a simple level, what do these preachers talk about? They’re eloquent speakers. They attract our attention. That’s why they get followers. They keep us hanging on to every word they say. We think they’re building up to say something important, and then it’s all over,

and they haven't actually said anything. They've managed to waste an hour of our time, but they've not said anything. More to the point, they've never mentioned Christ.

And by talking about anything and everything except the truth, they by definition have denied the **“only Lord God.”** Because our God is a God of truth:

Deuteronomy 32:4

*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.*

There is only one God, whom we should love:

Deuteronomy 6:4,5

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

Exodus 20:3

*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

If there is only one God, which there is, then there is only one way of salvation from our sins, and that's through what our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ did on the cross:

1 Timothy 2:5

*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus....*

The only way for us to be saved from these sinful natures we're all born with, is to put our trust completely in the Lord Jesus Christ to do it for us. When He died on the cross, He took the punishment for the sins of all His people upon Himself, so we may be free. Free from the punishment our sins deserve. Free from the thought of condemnation. Free from the guilt of our sins. All we have to do is come to Him, pray to Him, put our trust in Him.

Salvation is all of grace, His grace, because there's nothing we can do ourselves to escape the judgment to come. In us is no good thing. If

we're going to be saved at all, it must be by Him. He is the only one who has come into this world to save sinners:

John 3:17

*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

1 Timothy 1:15

*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*

But by saying salvation is all of grace here, I'm not "**turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness.**" The true grace of God involves us **wanting** to be finished with ourselves. Our **wanting** to be changed. Our **wanting** to follow Jesus Christ. That involves **repentance**.

We must **want** to get away from the life we're living at the moment. Maybe we're a drug addict. Maybe we've made a mess of our lives and desperately want a new start. Maybe we hate ourselves for some habit we can't give up. Whatever it is, there's always hope for the thirsty soul. For those who hate themselves and want to change. If we're quite happy with our situation, we'll have no interest in any of this, but we'll still be just as needy:

Acts 2:38

*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

Anyone who truly repents and trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation, will have a new heart put within them, they'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The law will be put on their heart and we won't want lasciviousness any more. We'll want to please the Lord. We love Him.

May everybody here be finished with their own sinful, selfish lives, repent and turn to Jesus Christ, then all of us will have the abundant life the Lord alone can give:

John 10:10

*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*



## Jude 1:5-19. False Teachers

Jude exhorts his readers to *“earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”* False teachers had crept into the church *“turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness”* teaching that because we’re saved by grace, we can live how we like. And *“denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”* By not teaching truth, they were denying the God of truth and His only way of salvation, by Jesus Christ.

That’s the whole point of Jude’s letter. The rest of the letter expands on this. And here, Jude refers to Scripture no less than nine times, to help us remember these things:

*[5] I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this,....*

Jude urges his readers to remember the Scriptures. They once knew them well, but it seems they’ve forgotten. We should be familiar with Scripture too. Not just for the nice stories and the good advice. We must be able to apply the Scriptures to our lives today.

1 Corinthians 10:11

*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

Under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration to Jude, three of these nine references give us more information than recorded previously in the rest of Scripture: v.6, the angels who kept not their first estate; v.9, Michael disputing with the devil; and vv.14 and 15, more detail about Enoch. Jude complains they’d forgotten the Scriptures, then gives them material that wasn’t actually in the Scriptures that they had.

The point is, they should have been familiar with what had already been revealed. The angels, Michael and Enoch, were all in the Scriptures that they had. They weren’t completely new to them. Now with this extra material given by Jude, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we today have got even less excuse not to learn from them.

1. So, we've now got a nine point sermon. Here's the first reference to Scripture:

***....how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.***

God miraculously led the Israelites out of slavery into the promised land. But that didn't mean God was pleased with them. With most of them He was angry, because they didn't acknowledge Him. In Scripture the Israelites are a picture of the visible church:

Acts 7:38,39

*This is he [Moses], that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt....*

The point of reminding us of the Israelites in the wilderness, is to show that not everybody in the outward, visible church is a true believer. There'll be many unbelievers in it.

2. The second reference to Scripture, is the first one of the three with extra material:

***[6] And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.***

The readers would be familiar with the existence of angels and devils. We're not told much about them in the Bible, because we don't need to know. We're not to speculate too much. We're humans, here in this world. We need to concentrate on what the Bible says about man. God created Adam and put him in the garden of Eden with a command:

Genesis 2:17

*But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

But Adam fell by eating that fruit, and that means all descended from him are born fallen:

Romans 5:12

*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned...*

We might say, that's unfair. Why should we be punished for something somebody else did? That would be a fair comment, except for one thing. God has provided a way out:

1 Corinthians 15:22

*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

Jesus Christ came into this world to die and take the punishment for all who put their trust in Him. To be saved from the judgment to come, we must repent, and call on Him:

1 Peter 2:24

*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*

Most out there in the world aren't in the slightest bit interested in this message. Why? Because they're quite happy carrying on in their own sin, doing whatever they're doing right now. And they'll end up being judged for it. But the way out is still held out to them:

John 3:17-19

*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

So there is a way out for men. But angels are different. We read here that some angels ***“kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation.”*** They fell too. But God had no plan of salvation for them, like with man. Angels ***“he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”*** One sin and they're out.

So, what's this supposed to tell us about false teachers? There's no hope for angels who commit even one sin. So we should take sin seriously. God hates sin. Habakkuk said:

Habakkuk 1:13

*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity....*

How many times do we sin against God day after day, and He's still merciful to us. How much more are false teachers in the church provoking the Lord? It might seem they're getting away with it, but there's a judgment coming, they need to repent or perish.

3.The third reference to Scripture:

***[7] Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.***

God destroying the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is in Genesis 18 and 19. The Lord promised Abram that even if only ten righteous men were in Sodom, He wouldn't destroy it. But there weren't. Today Sodom is just salt pits. And they act as a warning to us:

2 Peter 2:6

*And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly....*

What exactly was the sin of Sodom? There were plenty:

Ezekiel 16:49,50

*Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.*

And Jude gives us more sins here. They were ***“giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh.”*** Notice ***“giving themselves over.”*** That's what men do with sin:

Ephesians 4:19

*Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

And not only were their cities destroyed in this world, but they also suffer eternal judgment. They **“are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”** What has this got to do with the false teachers coming into the church? Well...

***[8] Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.***

These false teachers deserve **“the vengeance of eternal fire”** too. But they’re not bothered about it. In fact they’ll get a hotter place in hell than those who never heard of Jesus at all:

Luke 12:47,48

*And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.... For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

These false teachers **“defile the flesh,” “despise dominion,”** and **“speak evil of dignities.”** To **“despise dominion”** is to hate having anybody over them. Nobody tells them what to do.

To **“speak evil of dignities”** is to speak evil of anybody who is above us. The essence of the fifth Commandment is to honour our superiors. Not to obey them if they tell us to sin, but honour them. But the word in Greek for **“dignities”** here is *“doxa,”* which means *“glory.”* So this is really talking about speaking evil of glorious, supernatural beings. So this is a far more serious sin that it seems at first. These **“filthy dreamers”** not only put themselves above all that’s seen, but all that’s unseen too. Making gods of themselves.

4. The fourth reference to Scripture:

***[9] Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.***

Michael appears in the book of Daniel. Notice **“the archangel,”** singular. There’s only one archangel, and that’s Michael. At Christmas we often hear about “the archangel Gabriel” visiting Mary, but that’s not accurate. Gabriel is not an archangel. Only Michael is.

I suggest originally there were two archangels, Michael and Satan. Satan became one of those angel who (v.6) **“kept not their first estate,”** and he fell, taking other fallen angels with him. Michael is referred to in the book of Revelation, and he’s at war with Satan:

Revelation 12:7

*And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,*

That’s all we know of Michael from Scripture. But the Holy Spirit adds extra material here. **“When contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses.”** That’s new.

Deuteronomy 34:5,6

*So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.*

Moses died in Moab. The Lord buried him, nobody knows where. Just think if we knew where his tomb was, we’d worship it. In Jerusalem, thousands worship the tomb Christ was supposedly laid in, the stone He was supposedly laid out on before His burial, the spot where supposedly the cross was set up. They kiss rocks, weep over them, and they’re probably not the genuine sites at all. That’s not Christianity, that’s superstition. It’s awful to see so many really believing that such superstition is true religion. Superstition is the devil’s religion. We need to be set free from all that.

In Numbers 21:6-9, Moses made a brazen serpent on a pole, so that everyone who simply looked at it was cured from a plague of fiery

serpents. But that pole was kept and worshipped for centuries, until Hezekiah got rid of it:

2 Kings 18:4

*He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.*

So Michael and the devil were disputing over Moses' tomb. Satan would love it to have been known, so he could set up a superstitious religion. But Michael stopped him.

But the point here is that in this dispute with the devil, Michael didn't even speak evil of Satan. Rather, he ***“durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.”*** In fact, there's a verse in Zechariah, where the Lord Himself says this:

Zechariah 3:2

*And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?*

We leave judgment for the Lord at the end of time. Even the judgment of Satan. Let the Lord judge justly. Yet these false teachers speak evil of supernatural beings, thinking themselves above all of them. But they don't know what they're talking about:

***[10] But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.***

They speak evil about supernatural things. That impresses people. It makes people think they know what they're talking about, that they've got some hidden knowledge nobody else has. So they get a following. But they don't know anything. The only way we can have any real knowledge of spiritual things, is if we're truly born again of the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2:12-14

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

But these men only have their natural minds, which can't understand spiritual things: ***“but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.”*** So if anyone claims knowledge of spiritual things, we look for fruit first. We must discern, as best we can, they're a real Christian. Then make sure their teaching is from the Bible.

5,6,7. The fifth, sixth and seventh references to Scripture all come in one verse:

***[11] Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.***

***“The way of Cain”*** Cain was the second son of Adam, after Abel. We read about them in Genesis 4.

Hebrews 11:4

*....Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous....*

So Cain killed him, and was cursed by God. He left his godly family and went far away to the land of Nod. None of his descendants ever came to know the Lord, and they were all eventually destroyed in the flood.

***“Ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward.”*** Balaam was a false prophet in Numbers 22-24. Balak king of Moab hired him to curse the Israelites. Balaam resisted at first because the Lord told him not to go. But he went anyway. Balak asked him three times to curse the Israelites, and he couldn't. God made the words that came out of

his mouth to be only a blessing. So Balak was angry, and sent him away without his reward.

Balaam disobeyed God because he was more interested to **“run greedily” “for reward.”** He wanted the reward so much, even though he couldn’t curse with his mouth, he tried everything he could to get them to stumble. The Lord writes to the church at Pergamos:

Revelation 2:14

*But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.*

This may be new information, but it seems to be alluded to in Numbers 31:

Numbers 31:16

*Behold, these [women] caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord.*

**“Perished in the gainsaying of Core.”** In Numbers 16, Korah led a rebellion against Moses in the wilderness. But God opened the earth and he and his followers were all swallowed up. The point is that false teachers are rebels, leading their own rebellion against the Lord.

1 Samuel 15:23

*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.*

To be a rebel, by definition, we must be within the organisation we’re rebelling against. Otherwise we’re not a rebel, we’re an external enemy. These false teachers are in the church, maybe in high places. They share our meals, including the communion table:

***[12] These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear:....***

The terrible thing is that it doesn’t bother them they’re doing this:

Romans 3:18

*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

Then we've various descriptions of them, that I won't go into, they speak for themselves:

*....clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; [13] Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars....*

*....to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.*

Just as fallen angels are (v.6) ***“reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day,”*** so false teachers are ***“reserved”*** for ***“the blackness of darkness for ever.”*** Note the eternity of it. We've had ***“eternal fire,” “everlasting chains,”*** now ***“the blackness of darkness for ever.”*** We like the phrase ***“eternal life,”*** reserved for all who repent and trust in Christ, but not so much the eternity of God's punishment. But it's just as real.

There are two popular, but totally unbiblical views of God's punishment. One view says people will be punished for a time, maybe a very long time, but in the end, everybody will be saved to eternal life because God is love. He couldn't be so cruel as to punish for ever.

The second view is even worse. Many Christians believe that those who put their trust in Christ will be saved to eternal life, those who don't will simply cease to exist. But that's exactly what the wicked want. No punishment. So many people today think they can do what they like and get away with it, because at any time, if things get so bad, they think they can just commit suicide and there'll be no judgment, they'll just get snuffed out. So:

1 Corinthians 15:32

*Let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.*

God's punishment is eternal, just as the life He offers in Christ is eternal. We can't escape.

8. The eighth reference to Scripture:

*[14] And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, [15] To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.*

Enoch appears in Genesis 5. All we read of him is:

Genesis 5:21-24

*And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.*

That's all we know. We're told twice he "walked with God." We're told he left this world very young, aged 365. That's about half the age most men lived to in those days. And we're also told specifically he didn't die. One day "he was not; for God took him." Enoch and Elijah are the only two men whom God translated, rather than died in the usual way.

And here, the Holy Spirit gives us extra information – one of Enoch's sermons. What does someone who "walked with God" do? He prophesies. He preaches. Prophecy is the greatest of the spiritual gifts. We should all desire to prophesy, if the Lord would grant it:

1 Corinthians 14:1

*Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.*

Enoch prophesied "of these." Even in his day there were false teachers. Since the fall, the world has never been any different. The same message Enoch preached, we preach now. There's going to be a judgment. The word "ungodly" appears 4 times here. Ungodliness condemns men. And it's manifest in "ungodly deeds" and "hard speeches" against God.

But they *know* there's a God in heaven. All men are without excuse:

Romans 1:20,21

*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

Even the worst of dictators knows there's a God. They just "hold down the truth in unrighteousness" so they can put themselves in place of God. That's what men do:

2 Thessalonians 2:4

*Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

But the laughable thing is, that they can do what they will, they can close down all the churches, but not one of the Lord's people will be lost:

Psalm 2:4

*He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.*

John 6:37

*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

***[16] These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.***

They're "murmurers, complainers." They're never satisfied with anything. But neither are Christians. This is a fallen world. But instead of complaining all the time, we look to God:

2 Peter 3:13

*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

But they don't want that. They want to continue in their sin for ever: ***"walking after their own lusts."*** They don't want a holy, righteous God looking down on them all the time. So they invent systems, like evolution, which fit in with their sin, and self being in charge.

***"Their mouth speaketh great swelling words."*** There is no God. Cofi Anan said, "When we all come together, we are the ultimate power." Where is he now? Gone to meet his maker.

***"Having men's persons in admiration because of advantage."*** Not believing in God puts man in charge. And they're all fighting to be top dog. They suck up to each other. They use their mouths, their powers of persuasion, their silver tongues to get whatever they want for themselves. Christians should be far from wanting advantage in this world.

1 Peter 5:6

*Humble yourselves .... under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*

9. And then the ninth and final reference to Scripture, this time from the New Testament:

***[17] But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;***

In Jude's day, the New Testament was still being written. But it's here given the same authority as the other Old Testament references. The New Testament is just as much Scripture. Soon after Jude wrote these words, the canon of Scripture would be closed for ever by the book of Revelation:

Revelation 22:18,19

*For I testify unto every man that beareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

Anything written after that cannot be accepted as Scripture. The canon is now closed.

***[18] How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.***

The closer to the end of the New Testament we get, the more warnings there are about this:

1 Timothy 4:1,2

*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....*

2 Timothy 3:1,2,5

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves .... Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

***[19] These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.***

The problem we've got today, is that false teachers are now in the majority in the church. They regard we who believe the Bible as the ones who have separated ourselves from them. But the fact is that they've separated themselves from ***“the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”***

The one true faith is in the Bible. It's not in what bishops say, in ecumenical councils, in papal decrees. It's in this book. This is the faith we're called to defend. If we're in the minority, it shouldn't bother us. God is with us. We've got the Holy Spirit to guide us. They are ***“sensual, having not the Spirit.”*** They see only this world, and can't see the next.

How did Jude prove his point? He gave nine references from the Bible. This is the truth. This is what we believe and follow. The world and everybody in it, have got it wrong.

Romans 12:2

*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*



## Jude 1:20-25. The Most Holy Faith

The purpose of Jude's letter was to exhort his readers to *"earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."* False teachers had crept into the church denying the truth of God and trying to change it, and they needed to be dealt with. Jude then gave nine references, all from Scripture, backing this all up.

We can't pretend there's nothing wrong with the church. From Cain's day onwards, it's always been the case that the visible church, the one we see with our eyes, is a mixture of true believers and false, those who truly know the Lord in their hearts and have a real relationship with Him, and those who don't. The true church of Jesus Christ is invisible to the human eye. Only God knows the heart, we can't see anybody's heart except our own. That means each of us as individuals is responsible to get our own hearts right with God:

Proverbs 4:23

*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*

The Lord's own people can be found mainly, although not exclusively, somewhere within the edifice of the visible church. But they'll always be a minority, a remnant. That's the way the Lord has ordered it. Jude's been showing that, through these nine Scripture references. So, given this is the situation, we must ask the question, How do we live our lives in the light of it? And this is the question Jude answers in the conclusion to his letter.

*[20] But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith,....*

*"But."* In contrast to these false teachers and their followers, *"Ye, beloved,"* those truly loved of the Lord. His true people. *"Build up yourselves on your most holy faith."* There's only one faith, and that's the *"faith which was once delivered unto the saints."* So we must learn about it. Read this book. Love this book. The more we become familiar with God's Word, the more we'll understand Him, how He works, what His plan of salvation is, and how He wants us to live. All that pertains to life and godliness is here.

Acts 20:32

*And now, brethren, I commend you to God, **and to the word of his grace**, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*

But it's not just about learning doctrine in our minds. Anybody can do that.

James 2:19

*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*

The devil believes in the Trinity. Now, before you think I've become a Jehovah's Witness, I have to say I believe in the Trinity too. But believing the Trinity as a doctrine in the head means nothing. The unbiblical ecumenical movement, which says all denominations should forget differences and just get on with one another, makes one distinction itself. It accepts any church that believe in the Trinity but rejects all others. So the devil can join it.

The Athanasian Creed, a standard creeds of mainstream Christendom begins this way:

*“Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;  
Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity....”*

It goes on to give a very good, detailed definition of the Trinity, followed by a definition of the two natures of Christ, all of which is correct, biblical truth. Then it concludes:

*“This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.”*

That's dreadful. The doctrines are correct. But we're not saved by believing them with the mind. We're saved by trusting wholly in Jesus Christ for our salvation, not in ourselves:

Acts 16:31

*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

And if we do really, genuinely stop trusting in ourselves, and put our trust in Him, He will change us inside. We'll get a new heart, new motivations for living, new desires:

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

This is the one true faith, **“the faith once delivered to the saints.”** The new birth is the most important doctrine of the Christian faith:

John 3:7

*....Ye must be born again.*

Colossians 1:27

*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

And we're called to **“build ourselves up”** in this **“most holy faith.”** Only those who have received this new birth in the first place can do this. Christians are called to:

2 Peter 3:18

*....grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

The Bible, together with the Holy Spirit that God puts within our new hearts guiding us, teaches us not only knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but also teaches us growth in grace. Practical godliness. Coming to an end of ourselves, and trusting wholly in God. Not just for salvation, we do that at the beginning, but for everything. Christ said:

John 15:5

*I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

So we trust in Christ to help us grow in the **“most holy faith.”** It’s a **“holy”** faith. Separate from the world’s ways. The world can’t help us, we can’t help ourselves, only Christ can.

*...praying in the Holy Ghost,*

The Holy Ghost is important. When we become Christians, He comes to dwell within us, to lead and guide us in the right way. He keeps us from being led astray by false teachers:

1 John 2:26,27

*These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*

And we’re called here to **“pray in the Holy Ghost.”** Prayer is our communion with God. All true believers have a real living relationship with God. And the way we communicate with Him is through prayer. It’s a living thing. It’s not going through the motions of a ritual. Prayer is not recital. We don’t read prayers, or recite prayers we’ve learned off by heart.

And prayer is not just asking for things either. Prayer is heartfelt communion with the living God. We pour out our hearts to Him, we make ourselves sensitive to His answers.

Psalm 62:8

*Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.*

1 Peter 5:7

*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*

Quite often, we don’t know what to ask the Lord for anyway. But that’s all right. We’ve got the Holy Spirit to help us, to pray for us:

Romans 8:26,27

*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

There are several texts in Scripture that seem to say we can pray for anything we want:

John 16:23

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.*

1 John 5:14,15

*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*

So does that mean that if I want a Rolls Royce, I can have it? If we're praying in the Holy Ghost, in Christ's name, we just wouldn't want anything like that. We want to be holy. We want to follow Him. The new heart gives new desires the world can't possibly understand.

### ***[21] Keep yourselves in the love of God,....***

Can we really do this? We're prone to wander, prone to stray. Surely, it must be God who keeps us. Yet there are many times when God asks us to do impossible things ourselves:

Ezekiel 18:31

*Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

1 Thessalonians 2:12

*That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.*

Acts 17:30

*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent...*

But I can't do any of these things. I can't even repent without the Lord doing it for me. So how can we **"keep ourselves in the love of God"**? The answer is here:

James 4:8

*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.*

How can we cleanse our hands, or purify our hearts? We can't by ourselves. The answer is, *"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you."* Recognising, admitting, our inability to perform what God asks us to do, is the key. Acknowledge we can't do it, and call on God in total reliance on Him to do it for us. God wants us to come to an end of ourselves.

Psalm 119:117

*Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*

Jeremiah 31:18

*Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.*

So we **"keep ourselves in the love of God"** by acknowledging our inability, and calling on Him to keep us. And He will. This is such a comfort to us, the millionth time we fall:

Romans 8:38,39

*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Many think, if we can never be lost, we can sin all we like and still get to heaven. But that's not true. With the new heart, we don't want to sin any more. We want to live for Christ, yet we know we can't. The apostle

Paul said, *“Wretched man that I am.”* That should be the view we have of ourselves. That’s how we can be kept in the love of God.

*....looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*

If we’re truly His, we’ve received mercy, and it can never be taken away from us.

John 6:37

*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

So what’s this about **“looking for”** it?

2 Corinthians 4:1,2

*Therefore.... as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

If we’ve truly received mercy, we’ll utterly renounce our past life, *“the hidden things of dishonesty.”* But until the day we die, the old heart is still going to be there, continually tempting us away from the things of God. There’s a spiritual warfare going on within us all the time. But it’s a condition the Lord knows how to keep us in. We need to keep on renouncing our old life, and, by God’s grace, make sure we’re led by His Spirit:

Romans 8:12-14

*Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

And this is something we need to keep on being aware of, and fighting against, until our dying day, **“unto eternal life.”** The battle doesn’t end until we die, or Christ comes again:

1 Thessalonians 3:12,13

*And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.*

And then we've got a rather strange verse:

***[22] And of some have compassion, making a difference:***

But shouldn't we have compassion on everybody? After all, God does:

Matthew 5:44,45

*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; 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.*

What's this about "**making a difference**"? And only having compassion on "**some**"?

Well, God is God. He can have compassion on everybody:

Psalm 145:9

*The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

We're limited. Even the Lord Jesus, when He was on earth, could only be in one place at one time. He came primarily, though not exclusively, to the lost sheep of Israel. He didn't go to the Chinese or Australian aborigines, although now, praise God, there are Christians among these people today. We're limited in where we can be or what we can do. And as we get older, we become even more limited, physically. We can't do everything. We can't change the world. We shouldn't stress ourselves out trying to do too much. Christ said:

Matthew 11:30

*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

So we need to understand the Lord's guidance. The Lord doesn't want us to be stressed out. He has a few jobs for us to do. We must realise what they are, do them well, and not try to do more than He tells us. But what about my family members? What about those poor living, bleeding, dying, sinners over there? Surely they need to hear the gospel? Well yes. But it may not be our calling to be the Lord's instrument for doing that.

Paul had this problem. He wanted to go to Asia, but the Holy Spirit told him not to go:

Acts 16:6-9

*Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.*

So he thought about going to Bythinia where they also hadn't heard the gospel, but again the "*Spirit suffered them not.*" The Holy Spirit was leading Paul to Macedonia, to take the gospel to Europe. Others would go to Asia and Bythinia. We're not to try to take the whole world on ourselves. Only where the Lord guides us. So, when we read Scriptures such as:

Matthew 7:6

*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*

Luke 9:59,60

*And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.*

It might sound cruel to just leave these people in their sins and walk off, but we must understand it in the light of the fact that God knows what He's doing. Our witness can be better used elsewhere. These poor wretches we leave with God. We can't do anything practically for them. We always pray for them, which is the best thing we can do anyway.

***[23] And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.***

So, on some we're to have compassion, and others we're to ***"save with fear."*** It seems to say that, those on whom we have compassion, it's fairly safe to get close to them, to help them in their Christian walk. But there are others we should be very careful with.

***"Pulling them out of the fire."*** These are playing with sin too much. They're so close to the judgment of eternal fire. They need saving from their sins. We might be the instrument God wants to use to do that, but we must be very careful. We must fear, lest we be dragged into the sinful practices they're indulging in. Yes, they need saving. Yes, we need to communicate with them in some way. But look out! We should be ***"hating even the garment spotted by the flesh,"*** in case we're contaminated in any way.

1 Corinthians 10:12

*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

We might think that those close to the fire must be particularly notorious sinners, like drug dealers or gang leaders or something. But that's not necessarily true. If we're called to be the instrument to save one of those, then, yes we should be careful. But the hardest ones to bring the gospel too, aren't those at all. The hardest are the self-righteous. Christ said:

Luke 5:32

*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

Luke 15:1,2

*Then drew near unto him [Christ] all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes [the self-righteous] murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*

So, when we're told to save them ***"with fear,"*** ***"hating even the garment spotted by the flesh,"*** it's not just talking about notorious sinners, but all sinners, including the self-righteous.

Then, to end the letter, we've got a doxology, a final statement giving all glory to God:

***[24] Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling,....***

He is able, and, if we're truly one of the Lord's people, He is also willing. We can't fall away altogether. That's because our salvation depends on Him, not on ourselves:

Philippians 1:6

*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

If left to ourselves, we'd be utterly lost. But it's not just a question of whether we fall away altogether or not. We often stumble. We so often let self get the better of us and stumble from our walk with God. But we're told here that He is able to keep us even from that. Every time we stumble, it's such a blessing to know we can get back up again and carry on, because the Lord is with us. If we didn't have Him, we'd despair of ourselves.

***....and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,....***

Are we fed up with this world yet? This world is full of sin. More to the point, we're full of sin. So it's good to know that the Lord has got somewhere far better lined up for us:

John 14:1-3

*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.*

2 Peter 3:13

*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

The glorious hope of the Christian is that in the next world, we won't sin any more. Sin will be completely gone from our lives. It certainly isn't gone here yet, and if we think it has, we need a clearer view of ourselves. The apostle Paul saw Himself the chief of sinners:

1 Timothy 1:15

*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I **am** chief.*

Notice still “*am*,” not “*was*.” There are three stages a Christian goes through. Before Paul became a Christian he says about himself:

1 Timothy 1:13

*Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*

There's mercy for the worst of sinners. Before Paul became a Christian, sin didn't bother him. He was a terrible man shouting, haling Christians to prison, approving the death of Stephen and so on. And he really thought he was doing God's work. He was, in unbelief, totally ignorant of his sin. And there'll be many like that:

John 16:2,3

*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*

And if these people never become Christians, they'll be like that to their dying day, and drop into hell fire in the end. But after Paul became a Christian, far from seeing less sin in himself, he saw so much more than ever before. And that's what happens to us. We don't see all of our sin straight away. We wouldn't be able to cope with it if we did. But gradually, as the Holy Spirit within us shines more light in our hearts, the more sin we'll see lurking in those dark corners of our soul. And we'll have to agree with Paul:

Romans 7:18-25

*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I*

*would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

That should be our view of ourselves. To our dying day, there'll always be this battle going on within us. But we have hope. One day, either when we die or when Christ comes again, we'll be presented ***“faultless before the presence of his glory.”*** That's our hope.

And it'll be ***“with exceeding joy.”*** It's going to be something to really look forward to. Our hearts have been changed from wallowing in sin, to hating sin and loving righteousness, wanting to be faultless. One day we will be. That's such a joyful thing to forward to.

But we can have a taste of that now. As a Christian, yes, we see our sin for what it really is, and we despair of ourselves, but we're also given just a glimpse, an earnest, of the Holy Spirit, and we can experience, now, just a little bit of that joy which is set before us:

1 Peter 1:8

*Whom having not seen [Christ], ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*

***[25] To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.***

All this we can have comes from God. It's not something we try to work up in ourselves. He gets all the glory. We're not in this to get any glory to ourselves. I met someone once who said, "I led three people to the Lord last week." We'll, I hope they did truly come to the Lord, but I just couldn't bring myself to say anything like that, even if it was true. If we knew how many people came to the Lord through our witness, it would fill us with pride. I'm glad I don't know of anybody who's come to the Lord through my witnessing. We need to be kept low, so that the Lord may be exalted. He is the only one worthy:

1 Peter 5:5,6

*God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*

May God get all the glory in our lives, because He is the only one worthy.

## Revelation 2:8-11. The Church in Smyrna

In Revelation chapters 2 and 3 we've got seven letters addressed from Jesus Christ Himself to the seven churches of Asia Minor. We find out in Revelation 1:19, that Christ tells his servant John to write them while he was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos.

The letters are given separately to each individual church, addressing that particular problems each one of them had. But we can also apply each letter to our own church situation today. And there are two reasons why I can say that: Firstly, the Lord has seen fit to put all these letters in Scripture. And we ought to know that the whole point of Holy Scripture is for our application. No part of it is useless to us:

2 Timothy 3:16,17

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

Secondly, although each letter addresses particular situations in particular churches, every letter concludes with the same phrase: "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,*" which suggests they can be applied to all churches.

Each of the seven letters has the same pattern. First, an introduction giving various descriptions of the author, Jesus Christ. Then the body of the letter, addressing what's good and what's bad in the church. Then there's a conclusion, what they're to do about it.

I want to look particularly here at just one of these churches, the church in Smyrna.

1. So, first of all the introduction:

***[8] And unto the angel [messenger] of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;***

Jesus Christ introduces Himself in two ways: "***The first and the last.***" and "***which was dead, and is alive.***"

**“These things saith the first and the last.”** The phrases “*The Alpha and the Omega,*” “*the beginning and the ending,*” and “*the first and the last,*” all occur in 1:8,11,17, and it is clear that they all refer to Jesus Christ. This is confirmed in chapter 22:

Revelation 22:12,13

*And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.*

And we find out clearly who’s speaking there in v.16:

Revelation 22:16

**I Jesus** have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.

So we’re in no doubt these phrases refer to Jesus Christ. He is “**the first and the last.**” In other words, He’s eternal. Only God can be eternal. Every other being, the angels, and us, had a beginning. We were created. But Christ was God from all eternity. Personified as wisdom, it is said of Christ:

Proverbs 8:22,23

*The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.*

So, Christ is called here “**The first and the last.**” This expression also occurs in Isaiah:

Isaiah 44:6

*Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.*

In my King James Bible, the word “LORD” is in capital letters, which is the personal name of God, “*Jehovah.*” So Jehovah is “**the first and the last.**” Jesus Christ is also “**the first and the last.**” So Jesus Christ must be Jehovah God. Next time a Jehovah’s Witness knocks on our door, it would be interesting to find out what they have to say about that, because they don’t believe Christ is God, they believe He’s a created being, just like us.

And it's also said of Christ: "***which was dead, and is alive.***" We've got an unique situation here. Jesus Christ, who is eternal, "***the first and the last,***" died. But death couldn't hold Him and He rose again from the dead. But if He is the eternal God, why would He ever want to leave the glory He always had with the Father to come to earth and die? Christians know the answer to that question:

John 3:17

*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

He died to save a people for Himself. All of us are born into this world with one big problem – a sinful, selfish nature. Every one of us without exception needs to change. But we can't. Try as much as we like, none of us can please God.

Romans 8:8

*They that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

We could simply ignore that fact, as so many people do, and live our entire lives as slaves to our selfish natures. What a life! If we do that, after we die, we'll end up being judged for all our own sins. Nobody will be able to stand the righteous judgment of God. But God sent His Son into the world as a Saviour. All those who put their trust in Him, can have their sins taken away and placed on Him instead. But to do that He had to die.

Romans 6:23

*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Either we have to die and take our own punishment, or He dies in our place, they're the only two options. Christ came so all those who trust in Him can have their sins placed on Him. At the same time, His perfect righteousness is accounted to them, so they can be set free from the judgment they deserve. That's why He died, to save people from their sins, to set them free. And that's the gospel, the good news, we've got to give the world.

2 Corinthians 5:21

*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

Maybe we know all that, but it'll become important later on. Just to say, the true gospel is the concept of God bringing salvation to sinners who can't save themselves.

**“And is alive.”** The resurrection is proof that God the Father accepted His sacrifice. Without it, we'd have no idea whether Christ's death had been successful in achieving its end or not. But because of the resurrection we can know **for sure** our sins are forgiven.

1 John 5:12,13

*He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*

2. Secondly, the body of the letter. In five of the seven churches there are internal problems. So Christ would normally begin by commending them for what's good (in the case of Laodicea, nothing), and then tells them what's bad. The church in Ephesus had left their first love. Other churches tolerated false teachers. And then Christ warns them to repent or He'll take their candlestick away, in other words, He'll close their church down altogether.

But two of the churches didn't have internal problems at all: this one, Smyrna, and Philadelphia. These are faithful churches. There's no “do this or else” in this letter. They're commended, encouraged and told to remain faithful. So we can learn what faithfulness is.

***[9] I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty,***

**“I know thy works.”** If we're using a modern translation, this **“thy works”** isn't in it. And that's because of a variation in the underlying text. You may disagree with me, but I personally believe that the text

underlying the King James Bible is correct, which is why I use it. There's not that much difference, it mainly boils down to bits missing like here. I was converted reading a Revised Standard Version, which is one of those more modern versions. I wouldn't use that now, but wherever truth is, even if it's not a complete text, God can use it.

Christ says **“I know thy works”** to all seven churches, whether they're good or bad. Nothing can be hid from Him. He knows the truth. He can see the heart. Who else can do that? Another proof He is God. We may be able to hide things from other people, but:

2 Corinthians 5:10

*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

And it's a good thing Christ knows everything. Because it means we'll be judged justly.

Then He says **“and tribulation.”** This church is undergoing severe trials. We don't know what these were, but it's bothering them. Christ comforts them by saying He knows.

**“and poverty.”** They're poor. Maybe there's just a few of them. They're troubled about their situation, because they're so limited. Christ again comforts them. Then He says something, as if, they're so full of their own problems, they're not aware of it:

**....(but thou art rich)....**

This can't mean financially rich, because we've just been told they're not. It must mean, spiritually rich. In their difficulties, they didn't actually realise they're spiritually very rich. They're doing everything right. They love the Lord. They've got the Holy Spirit in their hearts. They're producing fruit. They're faithful in everything they do. There's nothing wrong with this church. The problems they've got are external,

which they've got no control over. But they do know the one true living God who's in control over everything.

***....and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.***

I used to think this was something happening within the church – they were in danger of becoming a synagogue of Satan, but I don't think it is. This ***“synagogue of Satan”*** is external, otherwise Christ would have rebuked them for not getting rid of these people.

I don't think we should get too hung up over the fact that ***“Jews”*** and a ***“synagogue”*** are mentioned. In those days, Christianity was regarded as a sect of Judaism. They were still seen as one religion, the religion of Jehovah, the one true living God. I think the way we should apply this to ourselves today is to read it like this: *“I know the blasphemy of those who say they are believers in the one true God, and are not, but are a church of Satan.”*

I think we can imagine something along these lines: This good, faithful church of true believers in Smyrna, was a small group of poor folk who met in a run-down building in a back street somewhere. They didn't look outwardly great, they were struggling financially, and what's more, they were being persecuted. But they were faithful, and, more to the point, they had Jesus Christ. But next door, a group of people who *“say they are believers,”* but aren't, build a nice, comfortable church, which attracts lots of people to it. But they're teaching a false gospel, and nobody realises it. Christ is not with them.

There'd be a temptation for members of the small despised church to move to the other one. Maybe they could get financial help there, and no longer be persecuted. After all, these very nice people ***say*** they're believers. But they won't go. They'd rather be faithful to Christ, even though it meant poverty, trials and persecution.

We're not told what doctrines this false church taught, and that's good, because it means we can apply this to many different situations. All we need to know is, whatever they're teaching, it's wrong. People there, say they're believers, so they think they're in a true church, but they're not. They probably look down on the other church, but Christ is there.

We might think that the words “*blasphemy*” and “*synagogue of Satan*” are quite strong. But Satan is in anything that panders to human pride. The Bible speaks of him:

Job 41:34

*He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.*

On the other hand, the true gospel is utterly humbling. All we are, are sinners who can't save themselves. We can't do anything to impress God, we need Him to save us. God's primary task in this world is to destroy pride in man, so that He alone gets all the glory:

1 Corinthians 1:27,29

*But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty... That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

1 Peter 5:5

*For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

So whatever this “*synagogue of Satan*” was teaching, it's far more attractive to the world than the true gospel. And here's how we can tell if a church is a “*synagogue of Satan*” or not. A “*synagogue of Satan*” will always appeal to human pride. On the other hand, the gospel will always be offensive to the natural man. Because it tells him he's a sinner. No, we don't want to hear that, we want nice things, smooth things, things that make us feel good. Well, if a Saviour from our sins doesn't make us feel good, I don't know what will. But pride stops men from seeing themselves as they really are by nature.

This little church is being persecuted, and I can't help thinking the “*synagogue of Satan*” next door is leading the way in the persecution. Satan will always persecute the true church. And synagogues of Satan will always side with the world against the true church.

How was Jesus Christ treated by the religious leaders of His day? They put Him to death eventually. The Roman state wasn't too bothered by Him, as long as He paid His taxes, which He did. It was the religious leaders that hated Him, eventually persuading the state to put Him to death. We're told we can expect no better.

John 15:18,19

*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

The church in Smyrna had difficulties. Christ encouraged them by telling them they're spiritually rich. Keep going. But then, there's one thing He doesn't say. He doesn't tell them it's going to get better soon, because it's not. It's going to get a lot worse for them:

***[10] Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer....***

The fact Jesus Christ is with a struggling minority, rather than an outwardly successful church, blows the prosperity gospel out of the water. You know the sort of thing, twisting obscure Old Testament Scriptures to tell us God wants us rich, healthy and successful. God doesn't necessarily want that for us. Put it this way, that's not why we become Christians. We become Christians because we want to be saved from our sins. Then we trust in the Lord to keep us, whether we've got plenty or little, or are successful or not:

Philippians 4:11

*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

1 Timothy 6:6-8

*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*

So, what does Christ say is going to happen to this poor but faithful church in Smyrna?

***...behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison....***

Some of them will go to jail. It's the state that has power to cast people into prison. Why does it say "***the devil***" will cast them into prison? There could be two reasons, probably both are true. Firstly, it could be that the "***synagogue of Satan***" influenced the state to throw them in

jail. That's what happened to Christ, the religious leaders influenced the Romans. Secondly, it was of the devil because they hadn't done anything wrong. If they'd robbed a bank, or knocked a little old lady over the head and stolen her handbag, yes, put them in jail, that's what jail's for. But they hadn't done anything to warrant prison. It was all totally unfair. Christ tells us we're to expect such things, because that's what happened to Him:

1 Peter 3:17

*For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.*

1 Peter 4:15,16

*But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

But if God is in control of all things, and this is happening, there must be a purpose:

***....that ye may be tried....***

There's a purpose behind everything that happens. Otherwise we're saying God does some things for no purpose, which isn't true. The ultimate end of all things is God's glory. So these believers are being put in jail to try them, so the glory of God might be manifest in them. That's what God sometimes does to us. He gives us trials, to test our faith:

1 Peter 1:6,7

*.... though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ....*

And these Christians in Smyrna are told how long they'll be tried for:

***....and ye shall have tribulation ten days....***

Numbers in the Book of Revelation are always symbolic. So this doesn't mean that if they're imprisoned on a Monday, they'll be out a week on Thursday, that's not what it's saying. "**Ten days**" imply a fixed, but unknown, period of time. Many interpret prophecy as one day for one year. I'm not too sure though. Peter said one day is a thousand years:

2 Peter 3:8

*But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

I don't think we need to be too much of an expert on prophecy. All we need to know when we come to Scripture is: How can I apply this to me, now? How does it affect me? And here we've got persecution, but it will only be for a specific period of time and no longer. And the timing, just like everything else, is all under God's control. But things get worse:

***....be thou faithful unto death....***

Some of them are going to die. The world thinks death is the worst thing that can happen, because they don't think there's anything afterwards. But that's not true. We really need to understand this. Death is something we've all got to go through, unless Christ comes again first. But it shouldn't scare us, because Christ has conquered death. At death, we'll finally lay down this sinful flesh, and go to be with the Lord, which is, after all, far better.

Sometimes, the Lord brings death on a believer as relief, as with these Smyrna Christians:

Isaiah 57:1

*The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.*

None of us look for trials, persecution, and death. As long as we're alive, the Lord has got work for us to do, however easy or difficult the situation is that we're in. But one day, at a time we don't know, He'll get us to rest from our labours and bring us to Himself:

Revelation 14:13

*And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.*

That's something a Christian can look forward to. Those who don't know Christ are the ones with a problem. All they've got to look forward to is getting what their own sins deserve. Christians will be saved from the punishment they deserve, and get a reward:

*...and I will give thee a crown of life.*

2 Timothy 4:6-8

*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 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.*

The "**crown of life**" isn't a reward for our works, because salvation is all of grace, it's given to us. We do nothing to deserve it, it's all of God, so no man may boast. There are rewards in heaven, but that's another subject. This "**crown of life**," this "**crown of righteousness**" is what we receive after our life here. While we're on earth, even as Christians, we still have sin, which we'll hate. But at the same time we'll also know for sure we've got a Saviour, who's saved us from our sins. So we can be confident in Him:

Hebrews 13:5

*.... be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

At death, the great translation occurs. We'll finally cast aside this body and get a new one that won't be able to sin any more. That's the "**crown of life**," we long for down here:

2 Corinthians 5:4,6-9

*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.... 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. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.*

3. So, thirdly, the conclusion of the letter:

***[11] He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches....***

The phrase, **“He that hath an ear, let him hear,”** was used a lot by Christ during His ministry, especially in connection with His parables. We’ve got a similar situation here, except it’s the Spirit speaking to the churches. Christ doesn’t save churches as a whole. That might disappoint Roman Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses and others who’ve got far too high a view of the church. He saves individuals. The church is simply a useful device, ordained of God, for the good of His people. But it’s always a mixture of believers and unbelievers. And churches can always be taken away altogether, if the Lord so wishes. That can’t happen to an individual believer, the Lord will never forsake His people.

So the real call is always to believers as individuals, to *“have ears to hear.”*

***...He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.***

The call is to individuals to overcome. In other words to obey Christ’s commands. The call here is to not fear suffering, and to be faithful unto death. Could any of us honestly say “I’ll be faithful unto death”? Peter said that, and a few hours later denied Christ three times. We’ll never know if we’ll be able to be put to death for Christ’s sake, until we actually face that situation, which we pray we’ll never have to. That’ll be the ultimate test of faith, which God will give us the grace for at the time, and not before, if it’s His will:

Revelation 12:11

*And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

They “*shall not be hurt of the second death.*” What’s the “*second death*”?

We all die once.

Genesis 3:19

*Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*

That’s the first death, one we can’t avoid. The second death we definitely need to avoid:

Revelation 21:8

*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*

And it’s everlasting:

Matthew 25:41,46

*Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

But we can avoid this second death altogether. To do that, we’re told:

Revelation 20:6

*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*

There are different interpretations as to what “*the first resurrection*” refers to. The least we can say is that a “*resurrection*” is a rebirth. It’s no good saying we believe in Jesus, then carrying on as before, with absolutely no change in the heart. We must be born-again, completely renewed from the inside. And that can only take place by calling on and trusting in the one who “*was dead and is alive.*” “*The first and the last*” to do it for us.

John 6:40

*And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

## Revelation 2:18-29. The Church In Thyatira

1. At the beginning here, there's a threefold description of the author, Jesus Christ:

*[18] And unto the angel [messenger] of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;*

***“The Son of God.”***

The Scriptures call Christ ***“The Son of God.”*** So we can call Him that. Muslims would say, “God forbid that He should have a Son,” by which they mean that He should have a son by having carnal relations with a woman. But, it doesn't mean that. We call Christ the ***“The Son of God,”*** because He's God, but He also became a man. He came to redeem men. So, the fact that we are all human beings, puts us in a very privileged position. It means there's hope for us, because Christ came to save human beings from their sins.

John 1:14

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...*

But He didn't save everybody, in which case we don't need to think about Him any more. We must apply His salvation to ourselves individually by calling on Him, or it's ineffectual.

***“who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire and his feet are like fine brass.”*** This is also in 1:14,15. ***“Eyes like unto a flame of fire”*** show Christ's ability to ***“search the reins and the hearts,”*** (2:23). Feet ***“like fine brass”*** are for treading down His enemies. (2:26,27). So, He's God in the flesh, He knows everything, and He's ruling the world.

2. Now the body of the text. And first, the things that are commendable. And it's quite a list:

***[19] I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.***

***“I know thy works”***

He says this to all seven churches, whether good or bad. So, not only does He know what the churches are going through, and can sympathise with them, but He can judge justly.

***“and charity” or “love.”***

We’re called to love everybody, including enemies, but especially our brethren in Christ:

Galatians 6:10

*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*

Matthew 5:44,45

*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; 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.*

But is it easy to love people? Let’s change the question. Is it easy for people to love me? If we think the answer to that question is “Yes,” we’ve got far too high a view of ourselves.

Proverbs 16:18

*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*

The Bible tells us the opposite. The very nature of man is that we’re so unloveable:

Jeremiah 17:9

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

That’s what we’re all like by nature. In order to tell anybody the good news that there’s a Saviour in Jesus Christ, we’ve first of all got to tell people the truth about themselves, that they’re sinners. And they’re not going to want to hear that. It’s usually only through our own experience of ourselves that we find that out, when we find ourselves doing things, saying things we never thought ourselves capable of. We must

acknowledge we're all, by nature, unlovely. We don't fall a little bit short of God's standards, we're totally dead in sin.

Ephesians 2:2,3

*Wherein in time past [before we became Christians] ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

But despite what we're like by nature, God still loved us enough to send His Son into the world to die to save us from this condition. God loves the unloveable, and so should we:

Romans 5:8

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Now that's the standard of love we have to keep. Loving the unloveable, as God does. This church in Thyatira was commended for their love. That's a big challenge to us.

### ***“and service”***

To be a servant is a position of humility. The disciples on more than one occasion asked Christ which of them was the greatest. What a stupid thing to ask. But Christ answered:

Matthew 23:11,12

*But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

What about our service for God, in our daily life? Again, we're challenged by this church.

### ***“and faith”***

They had great faith. It doesn't seem like it, because there's something seriously wrong with this church, which we'll see in a minute. But they did have great faith. What is faith?

Hebrews 11:1

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

Faith is living by believing, not in what we see in this world, but in invisible things. “*Substance*,” and “*evidence*” are used to find truth in a court of law. They’re solid facts. We don’t base our beliefs on heresy, or what the majority thinks. We’ve solid “*substance*” and “*evidence*,” although we can’t actually see it. But we make all our decisions on it:

2 Corinthians 5:7

*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*

***“and thy patience”***

If there’s one thing we need above all else, it’s patience. We’re such impatient people.

James 5:7,8

*Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

But how can we nurture patience? I’m not so sure we’re going to like the answer:

James 1:2-4

*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

That’s why God brings trials into our life, to nurture patience. We don’t look for trials, we’d rather do without them. But if we’re just sitting back on a bed of cotton wool all the time, with no problems in our life, we’d never learn to get rid of our natural impatience.

***“and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.”***

In contrast to the church at Ephesus. Their works were not as they used to be at first:

Revelation 2:5

*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.*

But the good thing about the church in Thyatira was that their later works were better than the works they did at first. So they're commended. And that's what we ought to be like – continually improving. Put it this way, we shouldn't be going backwards:

Philippians 3:13,14

*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

So, this church in Thyatira had all those things going for it. It was loving, serving, faithful, patient and improving. Would to God we were like that. But there was a problem:

***[20] Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.***

***“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee,....”***

Christ says He had ***“a few things”*** against them, but then only mentions one thing, this woman Jezebel. So I suggest there were a number of things wrong, but the source of them all was this woman. Get rid of her and, like a bad tooth, everything would be solved.

***“....because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach....”***

The original Jezebel in the Scriptures, was the wicked wife of king Ahab. The king of Israel married a heathen princess, and brought the worship of her pagan idols into Israel:

1 Kings 16:31,32

*And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.*

This woman in Thyatira is called **“Jezebel.”** She can’t be calling herself after a particularly notorious woman. I think it’s Christ’s name for her here, to compare her with the original **“Jezebel,”** because she’s so similar. We’re told here she calls herself **“a prophetess.”**

True prophetesses do exist. In the Old Testament, there’s Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Isaiah’s wife. In the New Testament, there’s Anna, Philip’s 4 daughters, and an instruction:

1 Corinthians 11:5

*But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.*

A prophet or prophetess isn’t somebody who predicts the future. It’s someone who is particularly close to God. This **“Jezebel”** calls herself a prophetess, but she’s a false one.

**“....and to seduce my servants....”**

Like the original Jezebel, she’s a mistress of seduction. We expect unbelievers to be seduced, but it says God’s true people, **“my servants,”** are being seduced here. At some point in our lives, we’re all going to be led astray by some false teaching or other for a time, during which time we’ll be unfruitful for the Lord, but if we are God’s children, we can never be totally lost. The Lord always has His hand on His elect to lead them back.

Matthew 24:24

*For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

The fact that it says here, *“if it were possible,”* means it’s not possible. Christ said:

John 10:27,28

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

***“...to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”***

This is what Jezebel was teaching. And it's exactly the same heresy as in Pergamos:

Revelation 2:14

*But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.*

But why would people follow such an obvious false teacher? Because they're being seduced. It's attractive to the flesh. Here's a common teaching: We're saved by grace, our works don't count in the matter of salvation, right? Or course, we'd all agree with that.

Ephesians 2:8,9

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

So, therefore we can do what we want. We can sin, and sin, and we'll be saved in the end. God'll forgive us everything, all the time. That's what some people really believe we're teaching, and we're not. We're saved by grace, but at the same time, we're made new creatures in Christ. We now don't want to sin any more, we want to please the Lord. But unbelievers with no experience of the new birth, might be seduced by this teaching.

And even though we may have become new creatures in Christ, we've still got the old man lurking inside, who'll be tempted by such things. Like the original ***“Jezebel,”*** this woman makes the world alluring to our natural senses. Christians shouldn't follow the world any more. We should be separate from it, not allowing ourselves to be dragged back into it. Our witness for Christ isn't to be like others, but to be different from them:

John 17:16,17

*They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*

And it's the Holy Spirit working within us together with the Word of God, which is the only way we can truly be kept from sin, and from being dragged back into the world:

Psalm 119:11

*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

***[21] And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.***

God gave this woman time to repent. How gracious! Why didn't He throw her into hell-fire straight away? That would've solved the problem straight away. And we're surrounded daily by wicked men sinning their way through life. Why doesn't God get rid of them now?

2 Peter 3:9

*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

In His longsuffering, God works His purposes out in just the way He wants. That might include allowing heresies like this to exist for a time. Why? There's always a purpose:

1 Corinthians 11:19

*For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*

We also see wicked men becoming more and more wicked, and we wonder what God is doing. But He is in control. Every sin men commit, will abound to God's glory in the end. If the world continues on, it means He's still got some of His elect still to bring to salvation:

2 Peter 3:15

*And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.*

***[22] Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. [23] And I will kill her children with death....***

The metaphors of a bed, and committing adultery here are appropriate. Her followers commit spiritual adultery, whether fornication or worshipping idols, both are adultery from the Lord. We're told Jezebel's followers will be killed, but we're not told what's going to happen to her. And I can't help thinking a bed can also be a metaphor for sleep.

Jezebel's heresy wasn't original. It was in Pergamos. It was taught by Balaam. Through history, the same heresies rear their ugly head again and again. One may be prominent for a time, then go to sleep, in a bed as it were, several generations later coming back again.

Ecclesiastes 1:9

*The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.*

In His mercy, the Lord gave time for her followers to repent. First, He brought "***great tribulation***" on them. That should've woken them up. But those who carried on following this woman, would be killed "***with death.***" Not the first death we all go through, but the second death, the lake of fire. We can never say, "I know it's wrong, but I'll repent later."

Proverbs 27:1

*Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*

***...and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.***

***"and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts"***

God is longsuffering and slow to anger. But when His judgments do come, it ought to be a warning to the rest of us. Christ spoke of a tower which fell on people and killed them:

Luke 13:4,5

*Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

God's judgments are there to teach us to repent, because it's Jesus Christ to whom we will give account. He knows all about us, so He can judge justly. But didn't He say:

John 12:47

*And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.*

Jesus Christ came the first time as a Saviour. If we put our trust in Him now, we'll escape the judgment to come. But one day in the future, He's coming again as a judge. And the most important thing He's looking for is: What did we think of Him the first time He came?

***“and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.”***

We're saved by grace. We can't be saved by our works, they'll never be good enough. But we're not saved to do nothing, or carry on our old life as if we'd not been changed.

We're saved to a life of good works, that God has ordained beforehand for us to do:

Ephesians 2:10

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

If we're not beginning to produce these good works, we've not yet become a new creature, we're still in our sins. The call is to repent and call on Christ to change us.

***[24] But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.***

To those who haven't been seduced by this woman, the Lord puts on them no other burden apart from the injunction to keep away from her. But what about ***“the depths of Satan, as they speak”***? Who are the ***“they”***? It's not her followers. They thought she'd got some great hidden insight into the ***“deep things of God.”*** Those who weren't following her, were calling it the ***“depths of Satan.”*** Like Smyrna, it wasn't those in the ***“Synagogue of Satan”*** calling it that, they thought it was a true church. It was those outside who saw it for what it really was. We must be aware of anyone who claims to have hidden insight into the ***“deep things of God”*** that nobody else sees except them. We don't follow men. The Holy Spirit reveals the ***“deep things of God”*** to all His children:

1 Corinthians 2:9,10

*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

***[25] But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.***

Those who weren't following this woman are called to ***“hold fast till I come.”*** And that's what we should do. Jesus Christ is coming again soon enough.

3. And then the conclusion:

***[26] And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end....***

The call is to ***“he that overcometh,”*** to each individual in the church that overcomes, that doesn't get seduced by this woman. There's no mention of the church being removed, but Jezebel and her followers will be. The warning is to individuals to keep away from her.

***....to him will I give power over the nations: [27] And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.***

Jesus Christ has power over the nations. But His followers are promised this as well:

Psalm 2:8,9

*Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*

We're told that the saints will judge the world, and even angels:

1 Corinthians 6:2,3

*Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?*

This doesn't mean we're going to make the decisions, only Christ will do that. But we'll be there agreeing with His every judgment.

Revelation 16:7

*Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.*

Revelation 6:9-11

*And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*

***[28] And I will give him the morning star.***

What's the morning star? Jesus Christ Himself:

Revelation 22:16

*I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.*

We can have Jesus Christ living in our hearts now, if we simply call on Him to change us. We'll then have a guide to lead us through the vale of tears which is this life. And then, when we die, we go to be with Him, and we shall be like Him. Don't we want that?

1 John 3:2

*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

***[29] He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.***

In the first three letters, this comes before ***“to him that overcometh.”*** Here, and in the other three letters, it's at the end. Is that significant? I don't know, and you may say, it doesn't really matter. But this is the Word of God. Every word is in exactly the place God wants it. Everything God does has a purpose, so we can't say something doesn't matter. This is here just to remind us again as individuals to hear, to understand what the Holy Spirit is saying to us through this church in Thyatira.

What do we learn? It's a good church. But just one person persuading others they've got hidden knowledge, can ruin a church. Let's make sure we don't get seduced like that.



## Revelation 13.

### The Mark of the Beast. (Youth Meeting)

The Reformer John Calvin preached on nearly every book of the Bible, but he never preached on the book of Revelation, and I have to say, what a wise man.

Having said that, it is part of Holy Scripture, so it is there to be preached on. But, sadly, most of the time, preachers try to fit the text to their already preconceived, man-made theories. There are several of these about, such as amillennialism, preterism, historicism, dispensationalism and so on. That's not how we are to treat any Scripture, let alone the book of Revelation.

The book of Revelation is there to give us a small glimpse into heavenly things, spiritual things.

Revelation 4:1

*After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven....*

It is a small window for us to look through, to give us a glimpse, to give us a taste as to what is going on behind the scenes of this world, as it were. And we have to admit we know so very little about these things. So we're not to pretend that we understand every last detail of it. Far from it. How arrogant it is when men try to do that. But we can take major principles from it, and that's what I want to do today from this chapter.

This chapter speaks of three characters:

– the dragon. We find out in the previous chapter who this is:

Revelation 12:9

*And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world....*

Satan is the dragon, and he's behind everything that's going on here. That's important to understand. And he's got two henchmen:

– a beast which rises up from the sea, and which (v.3) “*all the world wondered after;*”

– and a beast which rises up from the earth which (v.12) “*causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast.*”

These are otherwise known in the book of Revelation as “*the beast*” and “*the false prophet.*” He’s a prophet because he doesn’t take worship for himself, he causes, incites, everybody to worship the first beast. And it is good to know that all three of these evil creatures will be cast into the lake of fire in the end. First the two henchmen:

Revelation 19:20

*And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.*

Then at the very end the devil himself:

Revelation 20:10

*And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

So, that’s the good news. They are all going to be destroyed. But while we are here in the world still, we need to know who exactly these two henchmen are, how they are connected to Satan and his evil schemes, and how they affect us.

### ***The Beast from the Sea***

***[1] And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.***

Horns are a symbol of power, crowns a symbol of authority. The sea in the Bible represents the mass of humanity. That’s where this beast is going to rise from. And at the end of time, in Revelation 21:1 we’re

told that there will be no more sea. This is a very powerful, authoritative creature, and upon his heads are the name of blasphemy. In other words he is absolutely opposed to the One true living God maker of heaven and earth.

***[2] And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.***

Now, I could give you an eloquent speech as to what the leopard, bear and lion all mean in prophecy. But I'm not going to. People who do that are just looking to impress their hearers how wonderful and knowledgeable they are. We'll be coming across such people later on. Just to notice it's the dragon, Satan, that gives this beast his power, his seat and his authority over men. Without Satan in control behind him, this beast would be nothing.

***[3] And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.***

What could this refer to? A head wounded to death, yet the deadly wound is healed. How strange. How can a **deadly** wound be healed? It's dead, yet it's healed. May I suggest that this refers to Adam. When God created Adam, the first man, he was made upright:

Genesis 1:27,31

*[27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.... [31] And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.*

Adam was created with the law written on his heart. He delighted to keep God's law. He loved God's law and to please Him. Nothing else gave him more joy and contentment. But he was given one external commandment by God. He was told not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

Genesis 2:16,17

*And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

Not knowing good and evil, would only have been for his good, as keeping all the Lord's commandments are for our good. But the fruit looked good for food and was pleasant to the eye. So, stupidly, egged on by his wife, he did eat of it. And by eating the fruit God had specifically told him not to eat, he fell. And when he fell, he died. He died physically many years later, but he died spiritually straight away. Something happened straight away which changed his very being. No longer was he good and upright in his heart. He was fundamentally changed from the inside. Now he became a slave to sin. A slave to his own selfish desires. And this act of his brought all mankind after him – all of us – into the same fallen state. Every one of us are now born self-centred, selfish creatures:

Westminster Shorter Catechism

*“All mankind, by their fall, lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself and to the pains of hell for ever”*

At the fall of Adam, man received a deadly wound. We are now all born sinners. Naturally from the womb we rebel against God:

Psalm 58:3

*The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.*

Ecclesiastes 7:29

*Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*

But men generally don't realise, or accept this version of events. So, in the minds of men, this deadly wound has been “healed.” Men don't believe the fall ever happened. In fact most believe Adam never happened, and that we all evolved from monkeys. But this is only in their own minds. Men have persuaded themselves to think that they don't need God and that they can live quite happily, advancing their

society for and by themselves. Cain built himself a city. After the flood, men tried to build a tower that reached unto heaven. It has to be said that none of them got very far, because behind everything, God is always in control, and He stopped them from doing any of these things.

So instead of worshipping God, we now worship man. We worship ourselves and pretend the fall never happened. We pretend we're worth something and that mankind can achieve so much. But who are we really worshipping now?

***[4] And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?***

Putting man in place of God is really worshipping the dragon, I.e. Satan.

Job 41:34

*He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.*

The dragon is the one who gives power to the beast. This beast has power and authority over men. This beast represents ***the exaltation of man***. Who is like into man? Who can oppose him? Cofi Anan used to be the Secretary General of the United Nations, and he once said, "*When we all come together, we are the ultimate power.*" What arrogance! Nothing of God, everything of man. Not so long after he said that, he dropped dead. God will not be mocked. Where is he now? Gone to meet his real maker. And I wouldn't like to have been in his shoes when he died.

***[5] And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.***

The beast speaks blasphemy. Putting man in place of God is blasphemy. This forty and two months mentioned here is found elsewhere in Scripture, otherwise known as 1360 days. What does this

refer to? It's a mysterious period of time on this earth. Some think of it as a literal three and a half years. Others think of it as the gospel age, but it's more than any of that, because this beast has exercised his power ever since the fall of Adam. And he'll continue to do so up until the return of Christ.

***[6] And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.***

And the beast blasphemes against God in three things: God's name, God's tabernacle and them that dwell in heaven. In other words he blasphemes God Himself, he blasphemes God's tabernacle, His church, His people on earth, and he blasphemes those that have already got to heaven and who are now totally out of his reach.

***[7] And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.***

But look here. Those in God's church on earth are the ones who are presently in the most trouble. The beast ***"makes war with the saints."*** He can't touch the ones already in heaven. He certainly can't touch God. So he goes for us, here, on earth, now. And indeed we are told that he will prevail over all the earth. The saints will lose any battle against him, because this power, this ***exaltation of man***, will spread throughout the whole world, ***and even the saints, those in the church, will be "overcome," and largely under his influence too.***

It's not just the world. Most churches exalt men too. When the pope of Rome visits anywhere, his followers are weeping in the streets as he goes past. And many churches exalt men. Go to any cathedral, and you'll find very little about God, certainly very few Bibles, if any, but you're pretty sure to find a complete list of bishops dating from whenever the church was founded.

Yes, men set themselves up as some great thing even in the church, even in the temple of God Himself. And Paul tells us of a “*man of sin*” who will come into the church itself:

2 Thessalonians 2:3,4

*Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God **sitteth in the temple of God**, shewing himself that he is God.*

We can refer this to the pope of Rome, or an antichrist at the end of time, or in fact we can refer it to quite a few people in the church, because John talks of “*many antichrists*”:

1 John 2:18

*Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.*

This beast, this personification of ***the exaltation of man***, takes over the whole world, even most of the church, and will be worshipped:

***[8] And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.***

The whole world will worship this beast. That’s what they are doing right now, ***exalting man***. But notice those whose names are written in the book of life, those God has saved to eternal life away from all this mess, are excepted. True believers in Jesus Christ will escape. They won’t be taken in by this beast. God will keep a people for Himself:

Psalms 4:3

*But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will bear when I call unto him.*

And notice their names have been written in the book of life from all eternity. They cannot lose their place, they cannot succumb to this beast. If we are a true Christian, our place in heaven is secure. And that’s because from the foundation of the world, long before any of us

existed, indeed long before Adam was created, let alone fell, God knew he would fall, and had already ordained a plan of redemption in Jesus Christ, ***“the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”*** We’ll come back to that later.

***[9] If any man have an ear, let him hear.***

Let’s take note of this wonderful news, that God indeed has always had a plan to save sinners, to save a people for Himself.

***[10] He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.***

Our patience and faith must be in this: That, if we are true Christians, we are saved from the wrath to come, and we won’t be taken captive or killed with the unbelievers, those who follow the beast and exalt man. Because the Lord has saved us from our sins. To Him be all the glory. Here is a beautiful piece of hope in the midst of some terrible events.

### ***The Beast from the Earth***

***[11] And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.***

Another beast appears, speaking like the dragon. But notice, it’s like a lamb. That’s interesting. We think of lambs as harmless creatures, and so they are. But this beast, which looks like a lamb, certainly isn’t. It must be that it deceive people into thinking it’s harmless, when really it isn’t. Christ warns us:

Matthew 7:15

*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

*[12] And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.*

This beast from the sea, otherwise known as the “*false prophet*,” doesn’t ask for worship for himself. He’s humble, albeit a false humility. He’s like a lamb, a harmless creature, at least outwardly. But rather he causes all the earth to worship the first beast. The first beast, remember, represents *the exaltation of man*. He had a deadly wound at the fall, which appears to men to have been healed. This second beast, the “*false prophet*” causes all on earth (except the people of God) to worship the first beast. He is a prophet, albeit a false one. So he is giving some kind of religious devotion to the first beast, so he represents *the worship of man*.

Men may say, “I don’t worship man, I worship...” and then they’ll name some other deity. But every god that men have invented, all have one thing in common. They all need to be placated, they all need something from their followers. And their followers really think they can placate them by doing some good work or religious duty. So really all these religions we have in the world, don’t involve worshipping a god or gods at all, because all these deities are figments of man’s imagination anyway. Rather, their devotees are really worshipping their own efforts to placate their fictitious god or gods. That’s really worshipping themselves. It’s worshipping man under another name, the name of religion.

On the other hand, nobody can placate the One true living God, because none of us are good enough. We are fallen in Adam. We are all born sinners:

Romans 3:23

*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God....*

We need His mercy. That’s what we need to come to realise. Our inability. That certainly will stop us from exalting man. Isaiah tells us:

Isaiah 2:22

*Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?*

***[13] And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,***

We have here “*great wonders*” and “*fire coming down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.*” Before we make a conjecture as to what these are, notice it is the second beast, the “*false prophet*” who is doing these wonders, in order to impress on men to worship the first beast. In other words to say, “Isn’t mankind wonderful! We must worship the beast.” So these “*wonders*” lead from *the exaltation of man to the worship of man.*

***[14] And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.***

And this deceives the world into thinking how wonderful mankind is. It is a new religion, a false religion, worshipping man, and not God. In fact this “*false prophet*” sets up an image to the first beast, which again represents *worship*. This reminds us of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3. He set up a grotesque image of himself and forced all his subjects to worship it. Daniel’s three friends didn’t and they got thrown into a fiery furnace. From which the Lord saved them.

And these “*great wonders*” are here called “*miracles.*” Whatever they are, they impress. Everyone becomes convinced how wonderful mankind is.

So the people of the world make an image of the first beast, at the false prophet’s command:

***[15] And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.***

The “*false prophet,*” represents *the worship of man.* He gives life to the man-made image that they have just created. It speaks. And it kills all those who will not worship it. That’s going to be us. And that would have included Daniel’s three friends, except God saved them. We are to

expect persecution in this world. But God will keep us and protect us. Christ said:

John 16:33

*....In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Matthew 10:22

*And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.*

***[16] And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: [17] And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.***

And all those who are deceived receive a mark. No man can buy or sell without either this mark, the name of the beast or the number of its name. We'll come to what these are in a minute.

### ***The Number of the Beast***

***[18] Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.***

We are told that we need wisdom and understanding to count the number of the beast.

It is not the number of a specific individual. We are not looking for “*a*” man in particular, an Antichrist who will maybe come sometime in the future. No, this is just generally the number of “*man*.” Of course it is. This is the whole subject we are dealing with, ***the exaltation and worship of man*** in place of God.

I don't really want to get too deep into biblical numerology. People who do that end up with many fanciful ideas. Just to say, the perfect number is seven. We read in the book of Revelation alone, of “seven

churches,” “seven candlesticks,” “seven stars,” “seven eyes,” “seven horns,” “seven lamps,” “seven spirits,” “seven seals,” “seven angels,” “seven trumpets,” you get the picture.

The number of man is one short of the perfect number seven. And 666 is a holy trinity of that number. So the number of the beast is simply the number of “*man*,” and this is what the whole world worships.

Now the interesting bit. In verse 13, we had “*great wonders*” and “*fire coming down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.*” And in verses 16 and 17, we’ve got the mark, or name, or number of the beast. What are these?

There are so many conspiracy theories out there. Once I tell you what I really, seriously think these things are, you’ll probably think here’s just another one. But here goes anyway.

“*fire coming down from heaven.*” What is this? Pylons. Electricity pylons. Electricity is a natural phenomenon which man has harnessed, and look what he’s done with it. Isn’t he marvellous? We have lights, heating, and we also have:

“*great wonders.*” Technology. Telephones, computers, CT scanners, wonderful, marvellous, useful inventions. Isn’t mankind wonderful. We have invented all these things. Who will not worship the beast?

And the mark of the beast? What does everybody have either in their right hand or in their forehead? “*forehead*” in Greek is *metopon*, a combination of *meta*, with or against (as in next to), and *ops*, “face.” Against or next to the face. What does everybody have either in their right hand or next to their face?

Mobile phones. Mobile phones are the mark of the beast.

And we can’t buy or sell without them. If we try to do a transaction online, more often than not the bank sends a security code to our phone first. No phone, we can’t complete the transaction. China is a far more advanced society than here. Everybody there pays by using their mobile phone. It’s very difficult for foreigners who don’t have a

Chinese bank account linked to their phone. I tried to pay cash on a bus once and they wouldn't accept it. My wife had to use her phone. Even beggars in the street have barcodes, so that if you feel like giving to them, they're ready for you, you can just go "ping" with your phone. I went to a restaurant once with no human interactions whatsoever. You walk in, and sit down at a table. The table has got a barcode on it, which you "ping" with your phone, and the menu come up on your phone. You choose what you want, press the button and five minutes later a robot trundles down the aisle, stops at your table and there's what you ordered. You then pay with your phone and walk out. But notice, you can't do anything without the phone. So if you lose it, it gets stolen or the battery goes flat, you've had it.

You may think I'm cracked. But no, I'm deadly serious. All these things, this advanced technology, make us believe how wonderful man is. All these things point towards *the exaltation and worship of man*. They make us forget God altogether.

Before I go any further, I need to look at a few verses in chapter 14 which are relevant to the subject, and are very terrifying:

Revelation 14:9-11

*And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man **worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand**, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who **worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name**.*

So, does this mean that if we use mobile phones we're done for? Should we renounce all this technology, including electricity, and live like the Amish?

Well, No is the answer. Although I have to say that if we did live like the Amish it wouldn't be a bad thing. I can't help thinking that most Amish people are a lot more Christian in their lives than all of us in this room put together. But, no, we don't actually have to give up our mobile phones, or any of this technology.

Technology in and of itself is not evil. It's *the exaltation and worship of man* that is evil. This could very well come *through* technology, the "great wonders" of the false prophet, but technology in and of itself is neutral. Much technology can be very useful. CT scanners for example. We should be thankful for all of these things. But there are certain stages that we can go through in our lives which can render all this very unhealthy.

Notice it is those who *worship the beast and receive* the mark who will go to hell. Just using technology is not in itself worshipping the beast or receiving the mark. Just as one occasional glass of wine doesn't make us an alcoholic. But if by using it we begin to *rely* on it, like having a glass of wine every day, then that's the first stage. But it's still not too bad, because if we do have to do without, we might get a bit irritable, but we can manage. Then after *reliance*, comes *dependence*. We suddenly find out that now we can't do without it. We become dependent on it like a drug. If we have to do without, we get withdrawal symptoms. That's dangerous. And after *dependence* comes *the exaltation of man*, we want the latest version, we avidly read the technology news to see what wonderful things men are inventing now. And after *the exaltation of man* comes *the worship of man*, and, lo and behold, we've just received the mark of the beast. Like any addiction, this is such an easy slippery slope.

I remember on one occasion, a teenager went to the pastor of his church after the service, and he was quite troubled. The pastor had been talking about heaven. His question was: "Will there be WiFi in heaven?" This teenager had spent his entire life not knowing anything else but having WiFi, and all the rest of modern technology, and he was really concerned that in heaven it wouldn't be there any more, because if it wasn't, he wouldn't know what to do with himself.

And that's the case with so many young people today. They've never known a time without these things. People who remember a time before the popular use of electricity have almost completely died out now. And what about computers, WiFi, mobile phones, social media? Yes, amazing as it may seem, we did live quite happily without them once. But, young people, I have to say that we really will have to do without them in heaven. We need to curtail our *reliance* on them here, now, before that reliance gets any worse.

There is an altogether different life we can lead. A completely different attitude we can have to these things. But we can't work it up for ourselves. Self-help never works. Like any addiction, if left to ourselves, we'd end up at the bottom of that slippery slope every time. We can't stop ourselves. We're slaves to our sinful, self-centred natures.

The alternative is to call on God to help us. But we have to be deadly serious about it. We can't just say, "Well, I'll give it a go," or be half-hearted about it. We have to be finished with self completely. Stop fancying ourselves, living for self, and live for God instead.

Love God, worship God, and don't *rely* on technology, or indeed men, for everything. The inventions of men will one day be done away with. A far better way is to see our inability to help ourselves, our need of God and to see the Saviour He has sent into the world to save His people from their sins. That's what we all need. And if we're deadly serious, this can break any addiction. Not just an addiction to technology.

We can call on Him at any time, anywhere. Repent of sin, and turn to Christ. And if we do that in genuine, real, heartfelt submission to Him, He really will change our life. Our *reliance* on man can be over. We can still use modern technology, and be thankful to God for it, we don't have to do without, but we need to get our minds right with God and put Him first in our lives. Not men any more. Be finished with men. God's overall plan for the world is to destroy the pride of man:

1 Corinthians 1:29

*That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

Isaiah saw that:

Isaiah 2:17

*And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.*

And even wicked king Nebuchadnezzar, the one who set up an image to himself and forced everyone to worship him, the one who threw Daniel's three friends into the fire, even he understood in the end that the work of God is to destroy pride in man and exalt God alone:

Daniel 4:37

*Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.*

If wicked king Nebuchadnezzar can have his pride broken and come to know the Lord for himself, then there's hope for every one of us.

## Revelation 22. I Come Quickly

The book of Revelation is about future events, shown from a heavenly perspective:

Revelation 4:1

*After this I looked, and, behold, **a door was opened in heaven**: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee **things which must be hereafter**.*

We can't understand heavenly things from down here. The Bible talks about us being seeds on earth, compared to the full-grown plant in heaven. How can a seed understand the full-grown plant? It can't. But Scripture does give us glimpses of heavenly things. As all Scripture is profitable, we must be able to discern something from it. It must mean something to us. So let's see what we can dig out from the last chapter of the Bible.

*[1] And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*

*"A pure river of water of life...."* We find this prophesied by Zechariah:

Zechariah 14:8,9

*And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.*

And Ezekiel had a vision of a new glorified temple:

Ezekiel 47:1

*Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward....*

*"Jerusalem," "the threshold of the house."* These are just types and symbols. Where does the living water really come from?

***“...proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.”***

Christ is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, and He said of Himself:

John 7:37-39

*If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)*

And it's ***“clear as crystal.”*** It's beautiful, it's refreshing. Far more than this life we live now.

John 10:10

*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

***[2] In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.***

How can one tree be ***“In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river...”*** at the same time? I don't know, but it is. How can a multicoloured rainbow be *“like unto an emerald”* (Revelation 4:3) which is green? I don't know. We'll know exactly how these things can be when we get there. Ezekiel's glorified temple, had similar characteristics:

Ezekiel 47:12

*And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.*

The tree of life was in the garden of Eden. It was one of two trees mentioned. Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so God had to stop access to the tree of life:

Genesis 3:22,23

*And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.*

Now, at the end of time, access is restored. Thanks to Christ, we can have access again.

***“which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month:...”*** ***“Twelve manner of fruit”*** implies twelve kinds of fruit, a different one each month. The NIV says *“twelve crops of fruit,”* which implies twelve harvests of the same fruit. We won’t know which is right till we get there. In heaven, we’re told *“there should be time no longer”* (Revelation 10:6), so what’s this about months anyway? We at least know there’ll be a continual supply.

***“....and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”*** Even the leaves are going to be of use, not just the fruit. When Christ cursed the fig tree, it had plenty of leaves but no fruit. That was a picture of Israel at the time, all leaves but no fruit, like many churches today. The leaves were useless, it was all show. It looked good from a distance. Here, the leaves are useful. They’re for the healing of the nations. True religion was never just for Jews. They had the Scriptures, but it was never just for them. It was always for all nations:

Romans 3:19

*Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

And in Ezekiel’s vision in 47:12, we have a similar description. The *“leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed,”* which again implies a continual supply.

***[3] And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:***

Access to the tree of life again, lifts the curse. Sin will be no more. But it won't be for everybody. Only some have access. ***“His servants shall serve him.”*** These are the only ones who'll have access to ***“the throne of God and of the Lamb.”*** This is the final resting place of the Christian. And it's an attitude of service. Serving God for evermore.

***[4] And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.***

***“And they shall see his face;...”*** At the moment, no man can see God, because of sin:

1 Corinthians 15:50

*...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God....*

***“and his name shall be in their foreheads.”*** Elsewhere we read about the mark of the beast:

Revelation 13:16,17

*And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.*

The Lord's people will also have a mark on their foreheads. All of us will have either one mark or the other:

Revelation 7:3

*Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.*

Believers are those who love Jesus Christ. So they'll lament over the state of the church:

Ezekiel 9:4

*And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.*

Do we lament the state of the visible church, with its false superstitions and unbelieving ministers? If we can't see there's major problems with the church, and think it's all right to have ecumenical relations with everybody who calls themselves Christian, then we're yet to see these abominations for ourselves. We must ask for our eyes to be opened.

***[5] And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.***

***“for ever and ever.”*** That's a long time. It puts our short time in this world into perspective. And if we miss out on this blessedness, there's a place of destruction of equal duration:

Matthew 25:46

*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

***“And there shall be no night there;....”*** Sin will finally be done away with. It's still with us here. We Christians have had our sin paid for by Christ, but now we've got a battle within us, the new life against the old one. We can have some victory over it, thanks to the new life Christ gives us. But only after we die, will our sinful nature be done away with for ever.

***“....and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light:...”*** Before we become a Christian, we're in darkness. But when Christ comes, it's like a light is switched on. Spiritual things become real. We think it's like the light of the sun, but it's just like a candle compared to the light we'll have in the next world. The Lord God Himself will be our light. We won't even need a Bible. It's a continual light for ever.

***[6] And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.***

And we're told, "*These sayings are faithful and true:...*" Some people have said the book of Revelation shouldn't be in the Bible. But it's verses like this that prove it's authority. We may not understand it, but we're told here it's part of the canon of Scripture.

***[7] Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.***

Jesus Christ is coming quickly. We're also told this in vv.12 and 20. This is to encourage us. Meanwhile we're to keep the sayings of the prophecy of this book. I suggest this applies to the whole of Scripture, not just the book of Revelation. We're now coming to a fitting conclusion to the whole Bible. We don't need further revelation beyond this point.

***[8] 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 shewed me these things.***

John was so overwhelmed by what he saw and heard that he tried to worship the messenger. If God's servants are so overwhelming to meet, what must it be like to come face to face with the glorified Christ Himself? When He was on earth before, that glory was hidden, although on one occasion John saw something of it even then. But, even when it was mainly hidden, He didn't stop anyone worshipping Him. He accepted it. Which proves He was God. Otherwise it would've been idolatry to worship a mere man.

***[9] Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.***

This angel describes himself as John's "*fellowservant,*" "*of thy brethren the prophets,*" and "*of them which keep the sayings of this book.*" So these descriptions apply to both men and angels. They all imply creaturehood. That's why John isn't to worship him, an angel is

still only a creature. So we're not to worship angels or saints, but God alone.

And notice again the instruction to angels and men to ***“keep the sayings of this book.”***

***[10] And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.***

This is the third time ***“the sayings of the prophecy of this book”*** have been mentioned, and they'll be mentioned twice more later. Again, this refers to the whole Bible, which is now coming to a definite conclusion. But we're told here these sayings are not to be sealed. But surely we're about to seal the book of Scripture for ever. What's this mean?

When anyone is told to seal up visions, it's usually because they're of heavenly things that are too wonderful for us to know yet. For example, earlier, John was told:

Revelation 10:4

*And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.*

Daniel was told to shut up visions, because they're ***“sealed till the time of the end”***:

Daniel 12:4,9

*But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.... And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.*

But John is told **not** to seal the sayings of the prophecies of this book because ***“the time is at hand.”*** And that's because they're prophesies. Daniel had visions of things we don't need to see until the end. But prophesies are meant to be known. The canon of Scripture is about to be closed, but its sayings, far from being sealed, are to be spread abroad.

***[11] He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.***

We call on all men everywhere to repent and turn to Christ for salvation. But if they don't, we don't force anyone to do anything. We must just leave them to themselves. Let them carry on being unjust and filthy. We carry on pursuing righteousness and holiness.

Should we force Christian standards on others, who don't agree with them? For example, should we campaign for a legal ban on same-sex marriage? I suggest not. We don't agree with same-sex marriages ourselves, but if others want them, let them. If the government then forces us to officiate at such marriages, when we don't believe in them, we must refuse, and take the unjust consequences. Otherwise, we let the filthy be filthy still.

That's why, when Paul asks us to pray for our rulers, it's not for their salvation, although we do pray for that, but that Christians can lead a quiet life, undisturbed by wicked laws:

1 Timothy 2:1,2

*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*

***[12] And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.***

At some point the voice has changed from the angel to Christ. He again encourages us He's coming quickly, because He knows life here will be full of tribulation:

John 16:33

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

And we who are His will receive our reward:

2 Timothy 4:8

*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.*

His reward is **“to give every man according as his work shall be.”** But surely we’re saved by grace, not works. Yes, but we shouldn’t think we can live how we want. A believer never thinks like that. We’re saved by grace **unto** good works. These are done in us by Christ, not by ourselves. We must allow Christ to work in us, not sit and do nothing:

Philippians 2:13

*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

***[13] I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.***

In v.16 we’re told this is Christ speaking: **“I, Jesus.”** But this phrase, **“the first and the last”** also occurs in Isaiah, and it applies to Jehovah, God the Father:

Isaiah 41:4

*Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.*

Isaiah 44:6

*Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.*

***[14] Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.***

Only those who **“do His commandments”** have right to the tree of life. These are God’s **“servants”** (v.3). So we need to become servants of God. That means we need to change, because we’re born servants of self. And when we have changed, we don’t just do nothing. We serve Him by doing His commandments. His servants will love His laws:

1 John 5:3

*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*

Psalm 119:97

*O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*

And those who do His commandments will **“enter in through the gates into the city.”** And the next verse tells us who won’t be entering the gates of the city:

***[15] For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.***

Who are the dogs, sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers, idolaters and liars? None of them will enter the city of the living God unless they repent and give up that lifestyle. God is holy, He won’t allow sin into His city. So, who are they who won’t get in? This list describes us by nature. Every one of us are born into that way of life:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*

We all need to be changed. We all need to be washed in the name of the Lord Jesus, by the Holy Spirit of God. We must give up living for ourselves and let Christ change us.

But who is Jesus Christ? He’s so much more than a teacher who lived a long time ago.

***[16] I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches....***

He has the authority to send angels to do His bidding. God alone has that authority:

Psalm 91:9-11

*Because thou hast made the LORD [Jehovah], which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.*

And then Christ gives titles to Himself:

***...I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.***

We know He's the "***offspring of David,***" because His genealogy is in the Bible, He's descended from King David. But He's also the "***root of David.***" David calls Him Lord:

Psalm 110:1

*The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*

David was known as a man after God's own heart. David's Lord is Jehovah God Himself.

And Christ calls Himself "***the bright and morning star.***" In modern Bibles, the "*day star*" or the "*morning star*" is found in Isaiah 14:12. But the Authorised Version uses the phrase "*light-bringer,*" translated it into Latin, and turns it into a proper name, "*Lucifer*":

Isaiah 14:12

*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!*

The verse speaks sarcastically of the king of Babylon, calling him the "*morning star*" or "*light-bringer.*" But He was cast into hell in the end. Satan set himself up above God and was cast down to hell, but that's where the similarity ends. I can't see for the life of me why Satan is popularly called "*Lucifer.*" It's done solely on the basis of a Latin word

that's made its way into the AV. Satan is not "*Lucifer*," the "*light-bringer*." Christ is "*Lucifer*." He's "***the bright and morning star***." He's the only "*light-bringer*" into this world:

John 8:12

*I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

How do we enter the city of God? We heed the call. There's a call to all men everywhere:

***[17] And the Spirit and the bride say, Come....***

Firstly, God Himself, through the Holy Spirit, is calling all men to repent and turn to Christ:

Acts 17:30,31

*God .... now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

Acts 2:38

*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

And when we do repent and turn to Christ, the Holy Spirit is given to us as a gift. He comes to change us from the inside. We need Him, because we can't change ourselves.

So, the Holy Spirit is calling us. But also the bride is calling too. The bride of Christ is all those who've experienced the Holy Spirit giving them this real, internal change:

Romans 7:4

*Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*

We, the bride of Christ, have such a desire in our hearts for everybody to experience the same change we've had. We're no better than anyone else. We were born in sins too. We're nothing special. This change is for everyone if they repent and call on Christ.

*....And let him that heareth say, Come....*

And ***“him that heareth”*** is also calling. Who's this? I think this is the church in general. Many people are happy to attach themselves to a church, and that's good. But they're not the bride. They haven't yet come to repent and know Christ for themselves. The church is a mixed multitude. And it's the job of the whole church to call others to come to Christ.

And who are the ones being called?

*....And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*

Are we spiritually thirsty? Have we a desire in our heart to change from what we are? The water of life is free. We don't have to do anything to receive it. The call is to just Come!

Isaiah 55:1,6,7

*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.... Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

And a final warning about the ***“prophecy of this book,”*** or the ***“book of this prophecy.”*** This is a fitting end to the whole of Scripture. No other revelation from God is necessary.

***[18] For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God***

*shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: [19] And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

There are severe warnings about adding to or taking away from the Bible. In v.19 it seems as though a true believer can lose his salvation, because his name is taken out of the book of life, and out of the holy city. But that can't happen. A true believer would never want to take away from Scripture, he loves it in his heart. Anyone who wants to add to or take away from Scripture can't be one of the Lord's people. Don't listen to them.

But how do we define Scripture? Many people think the church defined it, but that's nonsense. The councils of men don't decide what Scripture is. Scripture becomes Scripture when it comes off the pen of the writer, whether men recognise it or not:

2 Peter 1:21

*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

Believers instantly recognise Scripture when they read it, because it burns in their heart:

Luke 24:32

*And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*

*[20] He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

These are the last words of Christ. He assures us again He's coming quickly. We echo His words, "***Even so, come, Lord Jesus,***" because we're to expect nothing but sorrow here:

Matthew 24:9,21,22,25

*Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.... For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.... Behold, I have told you before.*

This world is a vale of tears. There's nothing here to put our trust in. Our only hope is to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Only then will we get to enter the holy city of God, be saved from the wrath to come, and be saved through the tribulation that is this world. We can't avoid this world, but we can be kept through it safely, and only Jesus Christ can help us. Salvation to eternal life is by His grace alone, we can't achieve it, we need Him.

***[21] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.***

---



## Sermons - Scripture Index

### Genesis

- 1. Psalm 136
- 1:1. Job 33:27-28
- 1:2,3. Psalm 136
- 1:27,31. Revelation 13
- 1:29. Genesis 4; Romans 14
- 2:7. Acts 17:16-34
- 2:16,17. Revelation 13
- 2:17. Genesis 4; Jude 1:5-19
- 2:24. Genesis 4
- 3:1,4-6. 2 Corinthians 11
- 3:1. Matthew 4:1-11
- 3:4,5. Philippians 2:5-11
- 3:17-19. 1 Thessalonians 1
- 3:19. Revelation 2:8-11
- 3:21. Genesis 4
- 3:22,23. Revelation 22
- 4. Genesis 4;** Jude 1:5-19
- 5. Genesis 4
- 5:21-24. Jude 1:5-19
- 6:2. Matthew 1:18-25
- 6:5. Philippians 4:6,7; Titus 2:11-14
- 8:22. Genesis 4
- 9:3. Genesis 4; Romans 14
- 9:6. Genesis 4
- 9:9,11. Jeremiah 31:31-34
- 11:1-8. John 12:23-26
- 16:13. Job 33:27-28
- 17:5. Matthew 1:1-17
- 17:7. Matthew 1:1-17; Matthew 3
- 17:19-21. Matthew 1:1-17
- 18,19. Jude 1:5-19
- 18:25. Psalm 73; Luke 16:19-31
- 19:11. Acts 5:12-42
- 22:18. Matthew 1:1-17
- 28:17. Acts 5:12-42
- 29:30,31. Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 14:25-35
- 32:10. Luke 7:1-10
- 38. Matthew 1:1-17
- 47:9. Luke 16:19-31
- 50:20. Matthew 4:1-11; John 6:26,27; Romans 8:31-39

### Exodus

- 4:10-12. 2 Kings 20

19:5,6. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
20:3. Matthew 2; Jude 1:1-4  
20:8. Acts 1:12-26  
20:12. Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 7:1-10  
20:18,19. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
20:19. 1 John 1  
33:11. Philippians 4:6,7  
33:20. 1 John 1  
34:6,7. Luke 16:19-31

### **Leviticus**

12:2-4. Luke 2:25-38  
20:10. Matthew 1:18-25

### **Numbers**

6:2. Matthew 2  
16. Jude 1:5-19  
21:6-9. John 3:1-21; Jude 1:5-19  
22-24. Jude 1:5-19  
23:19. Psalm 90  
31:16. Jude 1:5-19

### **Deuteronomy**

2:30-33. Psalm 136  
6:4,5. Jude 1:1-4  
6:13-15. Matthew 4:1-11  
6:16. Matthew 4:1-11  
7:7,8. Psalm 136  
8:3. Matthew 4:1-11  
10:20. Matthew 4:1-11  
12:10,11. 2 Kings 22  
18:10-12. Acts 8:1-25  
18:15-19. Acts 3  
18:15. Psalm 90  
**20. Deuteronomy 20**  
22:23,24. Matthew 1:18-25  
23:3. Matthew 1:1-17  
32. Psalm 90  
32:4. Jude 1:1-4  
34:5,6. Jude 1:5-19

### **Joshua**

10:12-14. 2 Kings 20

## **Judges**

13:22. 1 John 1  
14:1,2. Matthew 1:18-25  
14:3. Matthew 1:18-25  
20:26. Matthew 4:1-11  
21:21. Matthew 1:18-25

## **1 Samuel**

2:3. Matthew 5:1-12; John 6:26,27; Colossians 3:1-17  
15:22. Deuteronomy 20  
15:23. Jude 1:5-19  
15:24. Acts 1:12-26  
16:7. Luke 18:9-14; Colossians 3:1-17

## **2 Samuel**

7:12-16. Matthew 1:1-17  
7:18. Luke 7:1-10  
12:30. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10

## **1 Kings**

16:31,32. Revelation 2:18-29

## **2 Kings**

1:8. Matthew 3  
6:15-17. Deuteronomy 20  
6:17-20. Acts 5:12-42  
18:4. 2 Kings 20; Jude 1:5-19  
18:5,6. 2 Kings 20  
19:35. 2 Kings 20  
19:36,37. 2 Kings 20  
**20. 2 Kings 20**  
21:1-3. 2 Kings 20  
21:19-24. 2 Kings 22  
**22. 2 Kings 22**  
23:22. 2 Kings 22  
23:25,26. 2 Kings 22

## **1 Chronicles**

32. 2 Kings 20

## **2 Chronicles**

1:7-12. Ecclesiastes 2

29:3. 2 Kings 20  
30:26. 2 Kings 20  
32:7,8. Deuteronomy 20  
32:25. 2 Kings 20  
32:26. 2 Kings 20  
32:31. 2 Kings 20  
33:10-13. 2 Kings 22  
34:3. 2 Kings 22  
34:8. 2 Kings 22  
34:11. 2 Kings 22

## **Job**

1:1. Luke 18:9-14  
1:21. Luke 18:9-14  
1:22. Luke 18:9-14  
2:9. Luke 18:9-14  
2:10. Luke 18:9-14  
4:18,19. 1 John 1  
5:7. Luke 2:1-20; Luke 16:19-31  
19:25-27. Luke 18:9-14  
19:25,26. Acts 26  
23:3. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
32:1. Luke 18:9-14  
32:2. Luke 18:9-14  
33:26. Job 33:27-28  
**33:27,28. Job 33:27-28**  
33:29,30. Job 33:27-28  
38:1-5. Luke 18:9-14  
40:1-14. Luke 18:9-14  
40:3-5. Luke 18:9-14  
40:12. Luke 18:9-14  
41:34. Revelation 2:8-11; Revelation 13  
42:5,6. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 7:1-10

## **Psalms**

1:1,2. Jude 1:1-4  
2:2,3. 2 Kings 22  
2:4. Jude 1:5-19  
2:8,9. Revelation 2:18-29  
4:3. Revelation 13  
7:9. Job 33:27-28; Luke 16:19-31  
14:1. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
14:2,3. John 10:10(b)  
14:3. Matthew 16:13-28  
18:41. Acts 8:1-25  
19:1. Acts 3; Acts 17:16-34

19:7,8. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
19:7. John 6:26,27  
22. Luke 23:33-47  
22:1. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
22:6. Matthew 2  
22:18. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34); Luke 23:33-47  
23:4. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
25:14. Acts 5:12-42  
27:10. Matthew 10:34-39  
32:1,2. Luke 14:25-35  
34:19. 2 Corinthians 11  
35:13. Matthew 4:1-11  
36:1. Acts 5:12-42  
36:9. Job 33:27-28  
37:10,11. Matthew 5:1-12  
39:11. 2 Kings 22  
40:8. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
44:22. Romans 8:31-39  
49:15. Acts 26  
49:20. John 10:10(b)  
50:10,12. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
50:18-21. Psalm 136  
50:21. Psalm 90  
51:5. Matthew 2  
51:10. Matthew 5:1-12  
51:17. Matthew 5:1-12  
56:8,9. 2 Kings 20  
58:3. Revelation 13  
62:8. 2 Kings 20; Philippians 4:6,7; Jude 1:20-25  
69:8,9. Matthew 2  
69:10. Matthew 4:1-11  
69:25. Acts 1:12-26  
**73. Psalm 73**  
73:25,26. Matthew 4:12-25  
75:1. 2 Kings 20  
75:6,7. 2 Kings 22  
**90. Psalm 90**  
90:10. Ecclesiastes 2; Luke 16:19-31  
91:9-11. Revelation 22  
91:10-12. Matthew 4:1-11  
93:1,2. Matthew 4:1-11  
96:13. Titus 2:11-14  
103:8. Luke 16:19-31; Acts 8:1-25  
107:9. Matthew 4:12-25  
109:1-20. Acts 1:12-26  
109:8. Acts 1:12-26  
109:13. Acts 1:12-26  
110:1. Revelation 22

110:3. Matthew 4:12-25  
111:9,10. Ecclesiastes 2  
111:10. Psalm 90  
116:15. John 12:23-26  
119:11. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21; John 3:1-21; 1 John 1; Revelation 2:18-29  
119:71. Luke 2:1-20  
119:97. Jude 1:1-4; Revelation 22  
119:105. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
119:117. Jude 1:20-25  
119:130. John 6:26,27  
130:3. Luke 16:19-31; Titus 2:11-14  
130:4. Luke 16:19-31; John 3:1-21; Acts 1:12-26; Acts 5:12-42  
132:13,14. 2 Kings 22  
133. Deuteronomy 20  
133:1. Luke 2:25-38  
**136. Psalm 136**  
136:1. Philippians 4:6,7  
139:1,2. Acts 17:16-34  
139:7-10. Job 33:27-28  
139:14. Acts 17:16-34  
139:23,24. John 10:10(b)  
145:9. Psalm 136; Jude 1:20-25  
145:14-16. Philippians 4:6,7  
145:18. Acts 8:1-25; Titus 2:11-14  
148:8. John 6:26,27

### **Proverbs**

3:5,6. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
4:7. Matthew 2  
4:23. Jude 1:20-25  
8:1. Psalm 90  
8:11. Psalm 90; Ecclesiastes 2  
8:22,23. Philippians 2:5-11; Revelation 2:8-11  
8:23. 1 John 1  
9:10. Psalm 90; Matthew 2; Acts 5:12-42  
16:18. Acts 2:37-40; Revelation 2:18-29  
16:33. Acts 1:12-26  
27:1. 2 Kings 20; Revelation 2:18-29  
29:25. Deuteronomy 20

### **Ecclesiastes**

1:9. Revelation 2:18-29  
1:14. Matthew 16:13-28; Luke 2:25-38; Luke 14:25-35; John 10:10(b); Acts 17:16-34

### **2. Ecclesiastes 2**

2:1-11. Job 33:27-28  
3:1-8. Luke 2:1-20

3:10-14. Ecclesiastes 2  
3:16. Ecclesiastes 2  
4:1. Ecclesiastes 2  
4:8. Ecclesiastes 2  
5:1,2. Luke 18:9-14  
7:1-5. Matthew 5:1-12  
7:20. Luke 5:27-32; John 9  
7:29. Philippians 4:6,7; Revelation 13  
9:3. Philippians 4:6,7  
12:1. 2 Kings 20  
12:7. Acts 17:16-34  
12:13,14. Ecclesiastes 2

### **Isaiah**

2:17. Luke 18:9-14; Revelation 13  
2:22. Revelation 13  
5:20. Job 33:27-28  
6:5. Luke 2:1-20; Luke 7:1-10; 1 John 1  
8:13. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
9:6,7. Matthew 4:12-25  
11:1. Matthew 2  
14:12. Revelation 22  
24:15. Romans 8:31-39  
26:3. Philippians 4:6,7  
33:14. Luke 16:19-31  
40:8. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
41:4. Revelation 22  
42:3. Romans 14  
44:6. Revelation 2:8-11; Revelation 22  
44:28. 2 Kings 22  
49:22. Luke 2:25-38  
50:1. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
50:11. 1 John 1  
53. Luke 23:33-47  
53:2,3. Matthew 2  
53:5. Matthew 1:1-17  
53:6. Matthew 3; Luke 2:1-20; Philippians 2:5-11  
55:1,2. Matthew 5:1-12  
55:1,6,7. Acts 2:37-40; Revelation 22  
55:3. Matthew 1:1-17  
55:6,7. Genesis 4; Job 33:27-28; Matthew 5:1-12  
55:8,9. Acts 26  
55:8. Matthew 16:13-28  
55:11. Jeremiah 36 & 45; Philippians 4:6,7  
57:1. Revelation 2:8-11  
57:15. Matthew 5:1-12  
57:20,21. Matthew 2

58:3. Matthew 4:1-11  
64:6. 2 Kings 20; Psalm 90; Luke 18:9-14; John 3:1-21

## **Jeremiah**

12:1,2. Psalm 73  
12:5,6. Psalm 73  
13:23. Acts 2:37-40  
15:4. 2 Kings 20; 2 Kings 22  
16:1,2. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
17:9. 2 Kings 22; Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 5:27-32; Acts 2:37-40; Titus 2:11-14;  
Revelation 2:18-29  
20:9. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
22:18,19. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
23:5,6. Matthew 1:1-17  
26:16. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
29:13. 2 Kings 22; Luke 7:1-10; Colossians 3:1-17  
31:15. Matthew 2  
31:18. Jude 1:20-25  
31:33,34. Jude 1:1-4  
31:33. 1 John 1  
32:9-15. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
**36. Jeremiah 36 & 45**  
43:2,3. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
**45. Jeremiah 36 & 45**

## **Lamentations**

3:22. Philippians 4:6,7  
5:9. Ecclesiastes 2

## **Ezekiel**

3:18,19. Luke 16:19-31  
9:4. Deuteronomy 20; Revelation 22  
14:13,14. 2 Kings 22  
16:2. Luke 2:1-20  
16:4,5. Luke 2:1-20  
16:49,50. Jude 1:5-19  
18:31. Jude 1:20-25  
33:11. John 12:23-26  
34:23. Matthew 1:1-17  
36:26,27. Mark 9:14-29; John 10:10(b); Acts 8:1-25  
36:26. Titus 2:11-14; Jude 1:1-4  
47:1. Revelation 22  
47:12. Revelation 22

**Daniel**

1:8-16. Romans 14  
2:2. Matthew 2  
2:21. 2 Kings 22  
3. Revelation 13  
3:17,18. Acts 5:12-42  
4:37. Luke 18:9-14; John 6:26,27; Revelation 13  
5:11. Matthew 2  
9:24. Acts 9:1-31  
12:2. Titus 2:11-14  
12:4,9. Revelation 22

**Hosea**

3:5. Matthew 1:1-17  
6:6. Deuteronomy 20  
11:1. Matthew 2  
13:14. Acts 26

**Amos**

4:6. Psalm 136  
9:11. Matthew 1:1-17

**Micah**

5:2. Luke 2:1-20  
6:8. Job 33:27-28  
7:5-7. Matthew 10:34-39

**Habakkuk**

1:2-4. Psalm 73  
1:5,6. Psalm 73  
1:13. Matthew 1:18-25; Jude 1:5-19  
2:4. Psalm 73  
3:17,18. Psalm 73; John 6:26,27

**Zechariah**

3:2. Jude 1:5-19  
13:1. Matthew 1:1-17  
14:8,9. Revelation 22

**Malachi**

1:2,3. Matthew 1:1-17  
2:17. Job 33:27-28

4:5,6. Matthew 3

**Matthew**

**1:1-17. Matthew 1:1-17**

**1:18-25. Matthew 1:18-25**

1:19. Luke 2:25-38

1:21. Luke 23:33-47; John 10:10(b); Acts 5:12-42

**2. Matthew 2**

2:11. Luke 2:1-20

**3. Matthew 3**

3:11. Luke 7:1-10

3:17. Matthew 4:1-11

**4:1-11. Matthew 4:1-11**

**4:12-25. Matthew 4:12-25**

4:17. Jeremiah 36 & 45; Matthew 3; Matthew 5:1-12; Acts 1:12-26; Acts 8:1-25

**5:1-12. Matthew 5:1-12**

5:1,2. Luke 7:1-10

5:3-10. Matthew 3

5:5. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10

5:6. Luke 2:25-38

5:8. Psalm 73

5:13,14. Luke 14:25-35

5:14. Luke 14:25-35

5:16. Deuteronomy 20; Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10; John 12:23-26;  
Romans 8:31-39; Titus 2:11-14

5:17. Matthew 3

5:18. Matthew 4:1-11

5:20. Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 18:9-14

5:38-42. Luke 14:25-35

5:39-48. Luke 23:33-47

5:42. Acts 3

5:44,45. Luke 14:25-35; Jude 1:20-25; Revelation 2:18-29

5:44. 1 Thessalonians 1; 1 Peter 4:1-11

5:48. Mark 4:1-20

6:5. Luke 18:9-14

6:14,15. Matthew 5:1-12

6:19-21. Psalm 136; Matthew 16:13-28; Mark 4:1-20

6:24. Matthew 10:34-39; Mark 4:1-20; Acts 2:37-40; 2 Corinthians 11

6:33. Genesis 4

7:1. Mark 4:1-20; Romans 14

7:6. Jude 1:20-25

7:7,8. Matthew 16:13-28; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 7:1-10

7:7. Matthew 5:1-12; Philippians 4:6,7; 1 Peter 4:1-11

7:12. Genesis 4

7:13,14. Titus 2:11-14

7:14. Luke 14:25-35

7:15,16,21. Acts 8:1-25

7:15. Revelation 13  
7:16-20. Matthew 3  
7:18. Jude 1:1-4  
7:20. Mark 4:1-20; John 12:23-26; 1 Thessalonians 1; 1 John 1  
7:21. 2 Kings 22  
7:22,23. Mark 4:1-20; John 3:1-21  
7:28,29. Luke 7:1-10  
7:29. Luke 23:33-47; Jude 1:1-4  
8:11,12. Luke 7:1-10  
9:13. Luke 16:19-31  
10. Mark 9:14-29  
10:1,8. Mark 9:14-29; John 6:26,27  
10:1. Matthew 10:34-39  
10:4. Mark 9:14-29  
10:5,6. Matthew 10:34-39; Mark 9:14-29  
10:7,8. Matthew 10:34-39  
10:16,17. Matthew 10:34-39  
10:16. Matthew 2; Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 14:25-35; 2 Corinthians 11; 1 John 1  
10:21,22. Matthew 10:34-39  
10:22. Psalm 73; Revelation 13  
10:28. John 9; Romans 8:31-39  
10:29,30. Psalm 136; John 6:26,27; Acts 17:16-34; 1 Peter 4:1-11  
**10:34-39. Matthew 10:34-39**  
10:35,36. Acts 1:12-26  
10:37. Luke 14:25-35  
10:42. Matthew 5:1-12  
11:13,14. Matthew 3  
11:23,24. Matthew 4:12-25  
11:28-30. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 1:18-25  
11:28. John 10:10(b)  
11:29. Matthew 5:1-12; Mark 4:1-20; John 6:26,27  
11:30. Matthew 2; Jude 1:20-25  
12:30. Matthew 5:1-12; Matthew 10:34-39  
12:36. Genesis 4; Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10; Acts 5:12-42; 1 Peter 4:1-11  
12:43,44. Mark 9:14-29  
13:31,32. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
13:54-58. Matthew 10:34-39  
13:55,56. Acts 1:12-26  
13:55. Matthew 1:18-25  
13:57,58. Acts 9:1-31  
13:58. Matthew 4:12-25  
14:3. Matthew 4:12-25  
15:7-9. Mark 4:1-20  
15:9. Acts 1:12-26  
15:14. John 6:26,27  
15:19,20. Matthew 5:1-12; Titus 2:11-14  
15:24. Acts 8:1-25  
15:28. Luke 7:1-10

**16:13-28. Matthew 16:13-28**

16:18. Acts 17:16-34  
16:23. Matthew 4:1-11  
16:24. John 12:23-26  
17:5. John 6:26,27  
17:21. Matthew 4:1-11  
18:2-4. Philippians 2:5-11  
18:4. Matthew 5:1-12  
19:21,22. Luke 14:25-35  
19:26. Matthew 16:13-28; Luke 14:25-35  
20:18,19. John 12:23-26  
20:26-28. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
21:28-32. Luke 5:27-32  
22:11,12. Luke 18:9-14  
22:17. Luke 5:27-32  
22:21. Luke 5:27-32  
22:42. Matthew 3; Colossians 3:1-17  
23:1-3. Acts 5:12-42  
23:2-5. John 9  
23:3-5. Luke 18:9-14  
23:11,12. Philippians 2:5-11; Revelation 2:18-29  
23:23. Luke 18:9-14  
23:29,33. Acts 8:1-25  
23:34-36. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
23:38. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
24:4,5. John 6:26,27  
24:9,21,22,25. Revelation 22  
24:12. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
24:14. Matthew 10:34-39; Acts 2:37-40  
24:21,22. Psalm 90  
24:21. Psalm 73  
24:23,24. John 6:26,27  
24:24. Revelation 2:18-29  
24:27. 1 Thessalonians 1

**25:14-30. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10**

25:34-46. Luke 7:1-10  
25:34. Matthew 1:18-25  
25:37-40. Deuteronomy 20  
25:39. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
25:41,46. Revelation 2:8-11  
25:41. Job 33:27-28; Psalm 90; Matthew 1:18-25; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 16:19-31  
25:46. Titus 2:11-14; Revelation 22  
26:41. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
26:52-54. Luke 23:33-47  
26:53,54. Philippians 2:5-11  
26:56. Acts 1:12-26  
27:3-10. Acts 1:12-26  
27:3-5. Acts 2:37-40

27:20. Acts 3  
27:25. Acts 5:12-42  
**27:33-60. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)**  
27:42. Matthew 4:1-11  
27:44. Luke 23:33-47  
28:11-15. Acts 5:12-42  
28:12,13. Acts 26  
28:18. Matthew 4:1-11  
28:19,20. Acts 5:12-42

### **Mark**

1:4. Luke 5:27-32  
1:7. Matthew 3  
2:7. Acts 1:12-26; Acts 2:37-40; 1 John 1  
2:17. Matthew 3; 1 Peter 4:1-11  
3:14,15. Mark 9:14-29  
3:20. Luke 14:25-35  
**4:1-20. Mark 4:1-20**  
4:12. Luke 14:25-35  
4:18,19. Deuteronomy 20; John 12:23-26  
4:33,34. Mark 4:1-20  
4:34. Luke 14:25-35  
4:41. John 3:1-21  
5:1-20. Mark 9:14-29  
5:4,5,7. Mark 9:14-29  
5:12,13. Mark 9:14-29  
5:15. Mark 9:14-29  
5:25-29. Mark 9:14-29  
6:3. Matthew 1:18-25; Jude 1:1-4  
6:4. Matthew 4:12-25  
7:21-23. Luke 14:25-35  
8:22-25. John 6:26,27  
8:36. Job 33:27-28  
9:3. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
**9:14-29. Mark 9:14-29**  
9:23,24. Romans 8:31-39  
9:42. Deuteronomy 20  
9:43. Psalm 90  
10:24-27. Matthew 4:12-25  
10:29,30. Matthew 10:34-39  
10:42-45. Matthew 4:1-11  
12:30,31. Titus 2:11-14  
12:37. Luke 23:33-47  
12:38-40. Matthew 3  
13:7. Luke 2:1-20  
13:11. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
16:15. Matthew 10:34-39; Acts 2:37-40

16:17-20. Acts 3

## **Luke**

1:5. Matthew 1:1-17

1:6. Luke 2:25-38

1:30-35. Matthew 1:18-25

1:31-35. Luke 2:1-20

1:36. Matthew 1:1-17

1:38. Luke 2:25-38

1:46-48. Psalm 136

**2:1-20. Luke 2:1-20**

2:4,5. Matthew 1:1-17

2:10,11. Luke 2:25-38

2:11. Matthew 2

2:14. Matthew 10:34-39

**2:25-38. Luke 2:25-38**

2:37. Acts 3

2:39. Matthew 2

3:12,13. Luke 5:27-32

3:23. Matthew 1:1-17

4:6. Matthew 4:1-11

5:3. Mark 4:1-20

**5:27-32. Luke 5:27-32**

5:32. Jude 1:20-25

6:17-20. Luke 7:1-10

6:22,23. Romans 14

6:26. Romans 14

**7:1-10. Luke 7:1-10**

7:34. Matthew 2

8:12. Mark 4:1-20

9:1-10. Mark 9:14-29

**9:28-36. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21**

9:50. Matthew 5:1-12

9:52,53. Acts 8:1-25

9:59,60. Jude 1:20-25

10:1-20. Mark 9:14-29

10:1. Mark 9:14-29

10:17,20. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10

10:17. Mark 9:14-29

10:20. Mark 9:14-29

10:25-28. Job 33:27-28; Jeremiah 31:31-34

11:13. John 10:10(b)

11:24-26. Mark 9:14-29

11:28. Luke 16:19-31

12:4,5. Deuteronomy 20

12:6,7. Philippians 4:6,7

12:47,48. Jude 1:5-19

12:48. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
12:51. Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 2:1-20; Luke 2:25-38; John 9; Colossians 3:1-17  
12:52,53. Matthew 10:34-39  
13:4,5. Revelation 2:18-29  
13:5. Luke 16:19-31  
13:6-9. John 12:23-26  
14:8-10. Luke 18:9-14  
14:11. Philippians 2:5-11  
14:23. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
**14:25-35. Luke 14:25-35;** Acts 9:1-31  
14:26. Matthew 10:34-39  
15:1,2. Luke 5:27-32; Jude 1:20-25  
15:7. Luke 5:27-32  
15:10. Luke 5:27-32  
15:19. Luke 7:1-10  
15:32. Luke 5:27-32  
16:10,12. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
16:11. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
**16:19-31. Luke 16:19-31**  
16:26. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
16:31. Matthew 16:13-28; Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21; Acts 9:1-31  
17:3,4. Matthew 1:18-25  
**17:5-10. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10**  
17:10. 2 Kings 20  
17:20,21. Matthew 3  
**18:9-14. Luke 18:9-14**  
18:13. Luke 14:25-35; Acts 8:1-25  
18:40-43. John 6:26,27  
19:1-10. Luke 5:27-32  
19:11-27. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
19:14. Acts 2:37-40  
19:26. Ecclesiastes 2  
21:34-36. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
21:34,35. Deuteronomy 20  
22:25-27. Philippians 2:5-11  
22:43,44. Matthew 4:1-11  
**23:33-47. Luke 23:33-47**  
**23:34. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)**  
23:39-43. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
23:48. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
23:49. Acts 1:12-26  
24:32. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21; Revelation 22

## John

1:1-4. Matthew 1:1-17; Philippians 2:5-11  
1:1. 1 John 1  
1:10-13. John 3:1-21

1:11. Acts 3  
 1:14. Matthew 1:1-17; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20; Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21;  
     Acts 2:37-40; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 John 1; Revelation 2:18-29  
 1:18. Matthew 5:1-12  
 1:19. Matthew 4:12-25  
 1:29. Matthew 4:12-25  
 1:35. Matthew 4:12-25  
 1:43. Matthew 4:12-25  
 1:46. Matthew 1:1-17; Matthew 2; Luke 2:1-20  
 1:47. 2 Corinthians 11  
 2:1. Matthew 4:12-25  
 2:24,25. 1 John 1  
**3:1-21. John 3:1-21**  
 3:2. John 6:26,27  
 3:3. Matthew 5:1-12; Matthew 16:13-28; Luke 5:27-32; Acts 2:37-40; Acts 9:1-31;  
     Acts 26; Titus 2:11-14  
 3:7. Romans 14; Jude 1:20-25  
 3:16,17. Matthew 1:1-17  
 3:16. Jeremiah 36 & 45; Luke 16:19-31; Acts 2:37-40; Romans 8:31-39  
 3:17-19. Jude 1:5-19  
 3:17,18. Matthew 10:34-39; Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
 3:17. Luke 2:1-20; Luke 5:27-32; John 10:10(b); Acts 17:16-34; Romans 8:31-39;  
     Jude 1:1-4; Revelation 2:8-11  
 3:18. Titus 2:11-14  
 3:19. Job 33:27-28; Matthew 10:34-39; 1 John 1  
 3:23. Matthew 4:12-25  
 3:24. Matthew 4:12-25  
 3:30. Matthew 3; Matthew 4:12-25  
 3:35,36. Matthew 1:1-17; Philippians 4:6,7  
 3:36. Matthew 3; Luke 5:27-32; Luke 16:19-31  
 4:9. Acts 8:1-25  
 4:14. John 10:10(b)  
 4:21,23,24. Acts 17:16-34  
 4:23. Luke 2:25-38  
 4:35. Acts 8:1-25  
 4:39. Acts 8:1-25  
 5:1-9. Acts 5:12-42  
 5:14. Psalm 90  
 5:22,23. Matthew 3; Philippians 4:6,7  
 5:24. Matthew 4:1-11  
 5:25. John 9  
 5:45-47. John 9  
 6:1-27. John 6:26,27  
 6:2. John 6:26,27  
**6:26,27. John 3:1-21; John 6:26,27**  
 6:37. Matthew 4:12-25; Matthew 16:13-28; Luke 5:27-32; John 12:23-26; Acts 2:37-40;  
     Acts 8:1-25; Romans 8:31-39; Jude 1:5-19; Jude 1:20-25  
 6:39. Matthew 16:13-28

6:40. Revelation 2:8-11  
6:53. Luke 14:25-35; Acts 8:1-25  
6:60,66. Luke 14:25-35  
6:60. John 6:26,27  
6:66. John 6:26,27  
6:67,68. Luke 14:25-35  
6:68,69. Psalm 73  
7:5. Matthew 10:34-39; Acts 1:12-26; Jude 1:1-4  
7:7. Matthew 10:34-39; Matthew 16:13-28; Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34);  
Luke 23:33-47; 1 John 1  
7:31. John 6:26,27  
7:37-39. John 10:10(b); Revelation 22  
7:40-43. John 9  
7:41-43. Luke 2:1-20  
7:46. Acts 2:37-40  
7:48-52. John 3:1-21  
8:12. Job 33:27-28; Matthew 3; Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21; John 9; 1 John 1;  
Revelation 22  
8:31,32. Luke 7:1-10  
8:32. Psalm 90  
8:34-36. Acts 3  
8:34,36. Matthew 3  
8:36. Matthew 2; Luke 2:1-20; John 10:10(b); Acts 2:37-40  
8:39-42. Matthew 1:1-17  
8:39. Luke 7:1-10; Luke 16:19-31  
**9. John 9**  
9:6,7. John 6:26,27  
9:16. John 6:26,27  
9:25. Job 33:27-28  
9:32. Psalm 136; John 6:26,27  
10:1-10. John 10:10(b)  
10:10. Matthew 3; Luke 2:1-20; Romans 14; Jude 1:1-4; Revelation 22  
**10:10(b). John 10:10(b)**  
10:11-16. John 10:10(b)  
10:17,18. Luke 23:33-47  
10:27,28. Mark 4:1-20; Romans 8:31-39; Revelation 2:18-29  
10:28. Luke 14:25-35; John 3:1-21  
11:23,24. Colossians 3:1-17  
11:25,26. Matthew 3  
11:25. Colossians 3:1-17  
11:26. Colossians 3:1-17  
11:41,42. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
11:47,48. Luke 23:33-47; John 6:26,27  
11:53. Luke 23:33-47  
12:20-22. John 12:23-26  
**12:23-26. John 12:23-26**  
12:25. Acts 2:37-40; Acts 26  
12:42,43. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)

12:43. John 9  
12:46. Luke 14:25-35  
12:47. Titus 2:11-14; Revelation 2:18-29  
13:35. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
14:1-3. Jude 1:20-25  
14:2,3. John 12:23-26  
14:6. Job 33:27-28; Matthew 3; John 3:1-21; Acts 17:16-34  
14:15. Colossians 3:1-17; 1 Peter 4:1-11  
14:16,17. John 10:10(b)  
14:30. Matthew 4:1-11  
15:1,2. Matthew 3  
15:2. Deuteronomy 20; Mark 4:1-20  
15:5. Deuteronomy 20; Colossians 3:1-17; Jude 1:20-25  
15:8. John 12:23-26  
15:13. Luke 23:33-47; 1 Thessalonians 1  
15:14. Luke 23:33-47  
15:18,19. Matthew 5:1-12; Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 5:27-32; John 9; John 12:23-26;  
Romans 8:31-39; 1 Thessalonians 1; 1 Peter 4:1-11; Revelation 2:8-11  
15:19. Acts 9:1-31  
15:25. John 10:10(b)  
16:2,3. Jude 1:20-25  
16:2. Acts 9:1-31; Acts 26  
16:22. Acts 1:12-26  
16:23. Psalm 90; Jude 1:20-25  
16:33. Psalm 136; Matthew 5:1-12; Matthew 16:13-28; Luke 2:1-20; Luke 2:25-38;  
Luke 5:27-32; Luke 14:25-35; 1 Thessalonians 1; Revelation 13; Revelation 22  
17:3. Luke 14:25-35; 1 John 1  
17:16,17. Revelation 2:18-29  
17:17. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21; John 9  
17:20,21. Deuteronomy 20; Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
18:36. Matthew 3; Luke 23:33-47; Acts 3  
19:38-40. John 3:1-21  
19:38. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
19:39. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
20:22. Acts 8:1-25  
21:18,19. Romans 8:31-39  
21:22. Matthew 16:13-28

## **Acts**

1:1-11. Acts 1:12-26  
1:4. Acts 1:12-26  
1:5. Acts 2:37-40  
1:8. Mark 9:14-29; Acts 8:1-25  
**1:12-26. Acts 1:12-26**  
1:13. Jude 1:1-4  
1:14. Jude 1:1-4  
1:21,22. Matthew 4:12-25; Luke 5:27-32; 2 Corinthians 11

2:4. Acts 3; Acts 8:1-25  
 2:7. John 6:26,27  
 2:21. Ecclesiastes 2  
 2:23,24. John 6:26,27  
 2:23. Romans 8:31-39  
 2:36. Acts 2:37-40  
**2:37-40. Acts 2:37-40**  
 2:38. Acts 8:1-25; Jude 1:1-4; Revelation 22  
 2:43. Acts 3  
**3. Acts 3;** Acts 5:12-42  
 3:19. Acts 2:37-40  
 4:12. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34); John 3:1-21; Philippians 2:5-11; Philippians 4:6,7  
 4:18. Acts 5:12-42  
 4:19,20. Acts 5:12-42  
 4:31. Acts 8:1-25  
 4:36,37. Acts 9:1-31  
 5:1-11. Acts 5:12-42  
 5:11. Acts 5:12-42  
**5:12-42. Acts 5:12-42**  
 5:30,31. Luke 23:33-47  
 5:32. Acts 1:12-26; 1 John 1  
 5:37. Luke 2:1-20  
 6:2. Acts 1:12-26  
 6:5. Acts 8:1-25  
 6:7. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
 6:8. Luke 7:1-10; Acts 8:1-25  
 7:38,39. Jude 1:5-19  
**8:1-25. Acts 8:1-25**  
 8:3. Acts 9:1-31; 2 Corinthians 11  
 8:7. Mark 9:14-29  
**9:1-31. Acts 9:1-31**  
 9:20-25. 2 Corinthians 11  
 10:11-15. Romans 14  
 10:38. John 6:26,27  
 10:40,41. Acts 26  
 10:43. Jude 1:1-4  
 10:44. Acts 8:1-25  
 11:13-15. Acts 8:1-25  
 11:18. Matthew 1:18-25  
 11:24. Luke 7:1-10  
 12:2. Acts 5:12-42; Jude 1:1-4  
 14:15. John 10:10(b)  
 16:6-9. Jude 1:20-25  
 16:6-8. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
 16:16-18. Mark 9:14-29  
 16:31. John 3:1-21; Acts 1:12-26; 1 John 1; Jude 1:20-25  
 17:15. Acts 17:16-34  
**17:16-34. Acts 17:16-34**

17:24,26,27. Matthew 4:1-11  
17:26,27. 2 Kings 22  
17:30,31. Psalm 73; Acts 2:37-40; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Peter 4:1-11; Revelation 22  
17:30. Jude 1:20-25  
17:31. Titus 2:11-14  
19:2-5. Matthew 3  
19:13-17. Mark 9:14-29  
20:32. Jude 1:20-25  
21:6. Acts 8:1-25  
22:3. Acts 5:12-42; Acts 9:1-31  
22:6,9. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
22:9. Acts 9:1-31  
22:11. Acts 9:1-31  
22:18. Acts 26  
23:3-5. Acts 5:12-42  
23:8. Luke 18:9-14; Acts 5:12-42  
24:24,25. Acts 2:37-40  
25:18,19. Acts 26  
25:23. Acts 26  
**26. Acts 26**  
26:5. Luke 5:27-32  
26:10,11. Acts 9:1-31  
26:15-18. Acts 9:1-31  
26:18. Luke 2:25-38; Acts 3; Philippians 4:6,7  
26:20. Acts 2:37-40  
26:25. Romans 8:31-39  
28:3-5. Acts 3

## **Romans**

1:16. Luke 2:25-38; Acts 2:37-40; Acts 8:1-25  
1:17. Psalm 73  
1:20,21. Psalm 136; Acts 3; Jude 1:5-19  
1:20. Job 33:27-28; Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
1:21. Luke 16:19-31; Philippians 4:6,7  
1:24,25. Mark 9:14-29  
2:14,15. Acts 3  
2:28,29. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 3  
3:1,2. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21; Acts 3  
3:2. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
3:9-12. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
3:10-12. Ecclesiastes 2; Luke 5:27-32  
3:18. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21; Jude 1:5-19  
3:19. Job 33:27-28; Revelation 22  
3:23. Ecclesiastes 2; John 10:10(b); Philippians 2:5-11; Revelation 13  
3:24-26. Philippians 2:5-11  
3:26. Matthew 16:13-28  
3:28-30. Jeremiah 31:31-34

3:29,30. Acts 3  
 4:11. Matthew 1:1-17  
 4:20. Luke 7:1-10  
 5:1. 2 Kings 20; Luke 23:33-47; Philippians 4:6,7  
 5:3-5. 1 Thessalonians 1  
 5:8-11. John 12:23-26  
 5:8. Jeremiah 36 & 45; 1 Peter 4:1-11; Revelation 2:18-29  
 5:12,18,19. Matthew 1:1-17  
 5:12. Philippians 4:6,7; Jude 1:5-19  
 6:1,2,4. Luke 2:25-38  
 6:11,12. John 12:23-26  
 6:23. Psalm 90; Matthew 1:18-25; John 6:26,27; John 9; John 10:10(b);  
     Revelation 2:8-11  
 7:4. Revelation 22  
 7:6. Jude 1:1-4  
 7:12. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
 7:16,17. Matthew 5:1-12  
 7:18-25. Jude 1:20-25  
 7:19-25. Deuteronomy 20  
 7:22-25. Psalm 136; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Colossians 3:1-17  
 7:22. 1 John 1  
 7:24,25. Matthew 5:1-12; Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
 7:24. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21; John 12:23-26  
 7:25. John 12:23-26  
 8:1. John 10:10(b); Acts 3; Romans 8:31-39  
 8:7,8. Matthew 1:18-25; Romans 8:31-39  
 8:8. Matthew 5:1-12; Revelation 2:8-11  
 8:9,10. Romans 8:31-39  
 8:10-14. Colossians 3:1-17  
 8:12-14. John 12:23-26; Jude 1:20-25  
 8:13,14. John 10:10(b)  
 8:13. Matthew 16:13-28; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 4:1-11  
 8:18. Acts 9:1-31  
 8:24,25. 1 Thessalonians 1  
 8:26,27. Romans 8:31-39; Philippians 4:6,7; Jude 1:20-25  
 8:26. 2 Kings 20; John 10:10(b)  
 8:28. Matthew 2; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 2:1-20; John 6:26,27; Acts 17:16-34;  
     Romans 8:31-39; Philippians 4:6,7  
 8:30. Romans 8:31-39  
**8:31-39. Romans 8:31-39**  
 8:38,39. Mark 4:1-20; Mark 9:14-29; Romans 14; Jude 1:1-4; Jude 1:20-25  
 9:4,5. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
 10:13. Genesis 4; Acts 8:1-25  
 11:11. Acts 3  
 11:33-36. 2 Kings 20  
 12:2. Philippians 2:5-11; Jude 1:5-19  
 12:13. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
 12:18. Matthew 5:1-12

12:19-21. Luke 14:25-35; 1 Peter 4:1-11

12:21. Matthew 10:34-39

13:1,2. 2 Kings 22; Acts 5:12-42

13:10. Colossians 3:1-17; 1 Peter 4:1-11

#### **14. Romans 14**

14:12. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10; Titus 2:11-14

14:21. Deuteronomy 20

15:4. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Jude 1:1-4

15:13. Philippians 4:6,7

15:24. Acts 26

#### **1 Corinthians**

1:25. Acts 1:12-26

1:26-29. Psalm 136; Acts 1:12-26

1:27-29. Luke 2:1-20

1:27,29. Revelation 2:8-11

1:29. Luke 18:9-14; Revelation 13

1:30,31. Ecclesiastes 2

2:7,8. Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)

2:8. Acts 3

2:9,10. Revelation 2:18-29

2:12-14. Jude 1:5-19

2:14. John 3:1-21

3:6,7. Mark 4:1-20

3:11-15. Mark 4:1-20

4:7. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10

5:7. Jeremiah 31:31-34

6:2,3. Revelation 2:18-29

6:9-11. Revelation 22

6:11. Mark 4:1-20

6:19,20. Romans 14

7:22. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10

8-10. Romans 14

8. Romans 14

8:2. Matthew 16:13-28; Romans 14

9:14. 2 Corinthians 11

9:15-18. 2 Corinthians 11

10:1-4. Jeremiah 31:31-34

10:6-11. Deuteronomy 20

10:11. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Jude 1:5-19

10:12. Jude 1:20-25

10:13. Romans 8:31-39

10:31. John 10:10(b); Colossians 3:1-17

11:5. Revelation 2:18-29

11:19. Revelation 2:18-29

11:26. Luke 23:33-47

12. Mark 9:14-29

12:8-10. John 6:26,27  
13:1,2. 1 Thessalonians 1  
13:12. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
13:13. Colossians 3:1-17; 1 Thessalonians 1  
14. Mark 9:14-29  
14:1. Jude 1:5-19  
15:6. Acts 1:12-26  
15:8. Acts 26; 2 Corinthians 11  
15:17. Romans 8:31-39  
15:19. Ecclesiastes 2; Luke 23:33-47; John 10:10(b)  
15:22. Jude 1:5-19  
15:32. Psalm 90; Luke 16:19-31; 1 Peter 4:1-11; Jude 1:5-19  
15:50. Revelation 22  
15:58. Psalm 90; John 10:10(b)

## **2 Corinthians**

1:12. 2 Corinthians 11; Colossians 3:1-17  
2:16. Philippians 4:6,7  
3:6. Deuteronomy 20; Jude 1:1-4  
3:18. Luke 2:1-20  
4:1,2. Jude 1:20-25  
4:3,4. Acts 9:1-31  
4:4. Matthew 4:1-11  
4:6. Philippians 4:6,7  
4:7. Acts 8:1-25  
4:17,18. Psalm 73  
5:4,6-9. Revelation 2:8-11  
5:7. Psalm 73; Philippians 4:6,7; Revelation 2:18-29  
5:10. Genesis 4; Titus 2:11-14; Revelation 2:8-11  
5:17. Job 33:27-28; Matthew 10:34-39; John 3:1-21; John 9; John 12:23-26;  
Acts 2:37-40; Acts 5:12-42; Acts 9:1-31; Acts 26; 1 Thessalonians 1; Jude 1:1-4;  
Jude 1:20-25  
5:19. Matthew 5:1-12  
5:20,21. Luke 23:33-47  
5:20. Luke 7:1-10  
5:21. Jeremiah 36 & 45; Matthew 3; Matthew 5:1-12; Matthew 16:13-28; John 12:23-26;  
Titus 2:11-14; Revelation 2:8-11  
6:14-16. Deuteronomy 20  
6:14. Matthew 1:18-25  
7:10,11. Matthew 5:1-12  
8:14. Psalm 136  
10:3-5. Deuteronomy 20; 2 Corinthians 11  
10:10. 2 Corinthians 11  
10:17,18. 2 Corinthians 11  
**11. 2 Corinthians 11**  
11:4. Jude 1:1-4  
11:21-30. Acts 9:1-31

11:32,33. Acts 9:1-31  
12:7. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
12:9,10. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
12:9. Matthew 16:13-28; Luke 14:25-35; 2 Corinthians 11  
12:12. John 6:26,27; Acts 3; 2 Corinthians 11  
13:1. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21; 1 John 1  
13:5. Mark 4:1-20; Romans 8:31-39

### **Galatians**

1:6,7. Jude 1:1-4  
1:15-18. Acts 26  
1:15-17. Matthew 4:1-11  
1:15,16. Acts 9:1-31  
1:16-18. Acts 9:1-31  
1:18. Acts 9:1-31  
1:19. Jude 1:1-4  
1:21-2:1. Acts 9:1-31  
2:20. Matthew 1:18-25; Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 23:33-47; John 3:1-21; John 12:23-26  
3:7. Psalm 73  
3:8. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
3:11. Psalm 73  
3:16. Matthew 1:1-17  
3:21,22. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
3:24,25. Philippians 2:5-11  
4:4,5. Matthew 1:1-17; Matthew 4:12-25  
4:25. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
5:13. Matthew 4:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 1  
5:16-18. Deuteronomy 20  
5:22,23. Mark 4:1-20; John 12:23-26; Colossians 3:1-17; 1 John 1  
5:24. John 12:23-26  
6:3. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10; Luke 7:1-10  
6:10. Revelation 2:18-29  
6:14. Acts 1:12-26; 2 Corinthians 11  
6:16. Jeremiah 31:31-34

### **Ephesians**

1:4. Acts 9:1-31  
1:5,6. Acts 26  
1:13,14. Acts 8:1-25  
2:1-3. John 10:10(b)  
2:2,3. Revelation 2:18-29  
2:2. Matthew 4:1-11  
2:4-7. John 10:10(b)  
2:4-6. Colossians 3:1-17  
2:8,9. Matthew 1:18-25; Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10; Luke 18:9-14;  
Revelation 2:18-29

2:8. John 9  
2:10. Deuteronomy 20; Acts 2:37-40; Revelation 2:18-29  
2:12. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10; Mark 4:1-20  
2:18. Philippians 4:6,7  
3:8. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
3:20,21. John 10:10(b)  
4:4-6. Jude 1:1-4  
4:4,5. Romans 14  
4:19. Jude 1:5-19  
4:24. Colossians 3:1-17  
5:3,4. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
5:8-10. Luke 14:25-35  
5:8. John 9; 1 John 1  
5:9. John 12:23-26  
5:14. John 6:26,27; 1 John 1  
5:18,19. Acts 8:1-25  
6:1-4. Matthew 10:34-39  
6:11. Mark 9:14-29  
6:12,13. Romans 8:31-39  
6:12. Deuteronomy 20; Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 9:14-29; Philippians 4:6,7  
6:17. Matthew 4:1-11  
6:18. Acts 1:12-26

### **Philippians**

1:6. Romans 8:31-39; Jude 1:20-25  
1:21-24. Luke 2:25-38  
1:21-23. Luke 16:19-31  
1:21. Colossians 3:1-17  
**2:5-11. Philippians 2:5-11**  
2:5-8. Matthew 16:13-28  
2:6-8. Matthew 4:1-11  
2:7,8. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
2:9-11. Job 33:27-28  
2:10,11. Luke 16:19-31; Acts 26  
2:12,13. Romans 8:31-39  
2:13. 2 Kings 20; Revelation 22  
2:15. Luke 14:25-35  
3:5-7. Acts 26  
3:7,8. 2 Corinthians 11  
3:8-11. Matthew 10:34-39  
3:8. Luke 5:27-32  
3:10. Acts 5:12-42  
3:13,14. 2 Kings 22; Psalm 90; Revelation 2:18-29  
**4:6,7. Mark 4:1-20; Acts 1:12-26; Philippians 4:6,7**  
4:6. Psalm 90  
4:11. Mark 4:1-20; Revelation 2:8-11  
4:13. 1 Peter 4:1-11

4:22. Acts 26

### **Colossians**

1:15-17. Philippians 2:5-11

1:15. 1 John 1

1:18. Philippians 2:5-11

1:27. Jude 1:20-25

2:9. Philippians 2:5-11

2:13-15. Mark 9:14-29

2:15. Romans 8:31-39

2:16,17. Romans 14

2:23. Matthew 16:13-28

### **3:1-17. Colossians 3:1-17**

3:1-6. Psalm 73

3:9-11. Acts 2:37-40

### **1 Thessalonians**

#### **1. 1 Thessalonians 1**

1:9,10. Luke 2:25-38

2:12. Jude 1:20-25

3:12,13. Jude 1:20-25

5:5,6. 1 John 1

5:17. Acts 1:12-26

5:18. Philippians 4:6,7

### **2 Thessalonians**

1:4,5. 1 Thessalonians 1

1:7-9. Mark 4:1-20; Luke 16:19-31

1:9. Job 33:27-28

2:3,4. Psalm 73; Revelation 13

2:4. Jude 1:5-19

### **1 Timothy**

1:13. Acts 3; Jude 1:20-25

1:15. 2 Kings 22; Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10; Luke 5:27-32; Jude 1:1-4;  
Jude 1:20-25

2:1,2. 2 Kings 22; Revelation 22

2:5. Jude 1:1-4

3:2. 1 Peter 4:1-11

3:16. Matthew 1:18-25; Philippians 2:5-11

4:1,2. Jude 1:5-19

4:4,5. Romans 14

5:8. Matthew 10:34-39

6:3-5. Jude 1:1-4

6:3,4. 1 John 1  
6:6-8. Revelation 2:8-11  
6:10. Mark 4:1-20

## **2 Timothy**

1:9. Jude 1:1-4  
2:4. Deuteronomy 20  
3:1,2,5. Jude 1:5-19  
3:16,17. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21; Acts 1:12-26; Romans 14; Revelation 2:8-11  
3:16. Matthew 2  
4:6-8. Revelation 2:8-11  
4:8. Acts 3; Revelation 22  
4:20. Mark 9:14-29

## **Titus**

1:7-9. Jude 1:1-4  
1:8. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
2:1-3. 1 John 1  
2:1. Titus 2:11-14  
2:10. Titus 2:11-14  
**2:11-14. Titus 2:11-14**  
2:15. Titus 2:11-14

## **Hebrews**

1:1,2. 2 Kings 22; Acts 9:1-31  
1:14. Mark 9:14-29; Romans 8:31-39  
2:14-17. Matthew 1:18-25  
2:17. Philippians 2:5-11  
3:13. Jude 1:1-4  
4:2. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
4:12,13. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
4:12. 2 Kings 22; Matthew 2; Luke 16:19-31; John 6:26,27  
4:13. Job 33:27-28; Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10  
4:15. Luke 23:33-47; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Peter 4:1-11  
4:16. Luke 7:1-10; Philippians 4:6,7  
5:8,9. Matthew 4:1-11  
6:7,8. John 12:23-26  
7:24-27. Matthew 3  
7:25. Romans 8:31-39; Philippians 4:6,7  
7:26. Luke 23:33-47; Acts 1:12-26  
9:13,14. Philippians 2:5-11  
9:15. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
9:22. Genesis 4; Matthew 1:18-25; Matthew 4:1-11; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 John 1  
9:27. Psalm 73; Psalm 90; Luke 16:19-31; John 6:26,27; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 4:1-11  
10:1,4. Philippians 2:5-11

10:4. Genesis 4  
10:9. John 10:10(b)  
10:24,25. Deuteronomy 20; Psalm 136  
10:25. Luke 2:25-38  
10:27. 2 Kings 20  
10:31. 1 John 1  
10:38. Psalm 73  
11:1. Revelation 2:18-29  
11:4. Jude 1:5-19  
11:6. Matthew 5:1-12; Matthew 16:13-28  
11:10. Colossians 3:1-17  
11:12. Matthew 1:1-17  
11:13-16. Psalm 90; Psalm 136  
11:13,16. Matthew 1:1-17  
11:24-26. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
11:32-12:2. John 12:23-26  
11:37. Acts 3  
12:6. Mark 4:1-20  
12:17. Acts 2:37-40  
12:29. 1 John 1  
13:2. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
13:5. Matthew 2; Mark 4:1-20; Revelation 2:8-11  
13:13,14. John 9  
13:14. Psalm 90; Colossians 3:1-17

## **James**

1:2-4. Revelation 2:18-29  
1:5-8. Romans 14  
1:5. Ecclesiastes 2  
1:26. John 12:23-26; 1 John 1  
1:27. John 12:23-26  
2:13. Matthew 5:1-12  
2:14-17. 1 Thessalonians 1  
2:15,16. Philippians 4:6,7; Jude 1:1-4  
2:19. Jude 1:20-25  
3:18. Matthew 5:1-12  
4:3. Psalm 90; Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
4:6. Acts 2:37-40  
4:8. Jude 1:20-25  
4:14. Ecclesiastes 2  
4:15. Acts 26  
5:7,8. Revelation 2:18-29  
5:7. Acts 1:12-26  
5:16. Psalm 136; Mark 9:14-29

## 1 Peter

1:6,7. Revelation 2:8-11  
1:8,9. 1 John 1  
1:8. Philippians 4:6,7; Jude 1:20-25  
1:13. 2 Corinthians 11  
1:18,19. Titus 2:11-14  
1:24,25. Psalm 90  
2:9. 1 Thessalonians 1  
2:21-25. Matthew 4:1-11  
2:21-24. Matthew 5:1-12; John 12:23-26  
2:21-23. Matthew 16:13-28; 1 Peter 4:1-11  
2:21. Philippians 2:5-11  
2:22,23. Luke 23:33-47; Philippians 2:5-11  
2:24,25. Acts 3  
2:24. Luke 23:33-47; Titus 2:11-14; Jude 1:5-19  
3:1-4. Matthew 10:34-39; Colossians 3:1-17  
3:15. Luke 5:27-32; Acts 26  
3:17. Revelation 2:8-11  
3:18. Ecclesiastes 2; Jeremiah 36 & 45; Matthew 1:18-25; Matthew 16:13-28;  
    Luke 2:1-20; Luke 16:19-31; Luke 23:33-47; John 12:23-26; Philippians 2:5-11;  
    1 Peter 4:1-11  
3:19,20. 1 Peter 4:1-11  
**4:1-11. 1 Peter 4:1-11**  
4:4. John 9  
4:6. Jeremiah 31:31-34  
4:15,16. Revelation 2:8-11  
4:16. Romans 8:31-39  
5:2,3. Jude 1:1-4  
5:5,6. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10; Luke 18:9-14; John 6:26,27; Jude 1:20-25  
5:5. Acts 2:37-40; Revelation 2:8-11  
5:6. Jude 1:5-19  
5:7. Psalm 90; Mark 4:1-20; Mark 9:14-29; John 10:10(b); Acts 17:16-34;  
    Philippians 4:6,7; Jude 1:20-25  
5:8. Psalm 136  
5:16. Philippians 4:6,7

## 2 Peter

1:3. Romans 8:31-39  
1:5-8. Mark 4:1-20; Luke 14:25-35; John 12:23-26  
1:10. Romans 8:31-39  
**1:16-21. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21**  
1:21. Luke 2:1-20; Revelation 22  
2:4. Mark 9:14-29  
2:6. Jude 1:5-19  
2:22. Psalm 73  
3:2. Jude 1:1-4  
3:3,4. Genesis 4

3:8. Psalm 90; Revelation 2:8-11  
3:9. Psalm 90; Revelation 2:18-29  
3:10. Jeremiah 36 & 45  
3:13. Luke 2:1-20; Acts 3; Jude 1:5-19; Jude 1:20-25  
3:15. Revelation 2:18-29  
3:18. John 9; Romans 14; 1 John 1; Jude 1:20-25

## **1 John**

### **1. 1 John 1**

1:5. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21  
1:8,9. Romans 8:31-39  
1:9. Matthew 3  
2:1,2. John 12:23-26; Romans 8:31-39  
2:15-17. Colossians 3:1-17  
2:15,16. Luke 14:25-35  
2:15. Luke 16:19-31  
2:18. Revelation 13  
2:26,27. Jude 1:20-25  
3:1. Luke 2:25-38; Romans 8:31-39; Philippians 2:5-11  
3:2. John 12:23-26; Revelation 2:18-29  
3:4. Ecclesiastes 2  
3:5. Luke 23:33-47  
3:6. Romans 8:31-39  
3:8. Matthew 4:1-11  
3:13. John 9  
3:14. Matthew 1:18-25; Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34)  
4:4. Mark 9:14-29  
4:8. Psalm 90  
4:15. Matthew 16:13-28  
4:16. Psalm 90  
5:3. Revelation 22  
5:11,12. Matthew 3  
5:11. 1 John 1  
5:12,13. Revelation 2:8-11  
5:12. Matthew 16:13-28; 1 John 1  
5:14,15. Psalm 90; Matthew 27:33-60. (Luke 23:34); Jude 1:20-25  
5:19. Luke 2:25-38; Luke 14:25-35; 1 John 1

## **3 John**

1:9. Jude 1:1-4

## **Jude**

### **1:1-4. Jude 1:1-4**

1:3,4. Deuteronomy 20  
1:3. Romans 14

**1:5-19. Jude 1:5-19**

1:6. Mark 9:14-29

1:17. Jude 1:1-4

**1:20-25. Jude 1:20-25**

1:22,23. Matthew 5:1-12

**Revelation**

1:8,11,17 Revelation 2:8-11

1:14,15. Revelation 2:18-29

1:19. Revelation 2:8-11

2:5. Revelation 2:18-29

2:7. Romans 8:31-39

**2:8-11. Revelation 2:8-11**

2:14. Jude 1:5-19; Revelation 2:18-29

**2:18-29. Revelation 2:18-29**

2:20. Jude 1:1-4

4:1. Revelation 13; Revelation 22

4:3. Revelation 22

4:11. Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 7:1-10

5:12. Luke 7:1-10

6:9-11. Revelation 2:18-29

7:3. Revelation 22

10:4. Revelation 22

10:6. Revelation 22

12:7. Jude 1:5-19

12:9. Revelation 13

12:11. John 12:23-26; Revelation 2:8-11

**13. Revelation 13**

13:2. Matthew 4:1-11

13:16,17. Revelation 22

14:9-11. Revelation 13

14:13. Revelation 2:8-11

15:3. Psalm 90

16:7. Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 2:18-29

16:21. Matthew 25:14-30 & Luke 17:5-10

19:10. Matthew 2

19:20. Revelation 13

20:6. Revelation 2:8-11

20:10. Revelation 13

21:1. Revelation 13

21:2-4. 2 Kings 22

21:8. Matthew 2; Revelation 2:8-11

21:12,14. Acts 1:12-26

21:23. Luke 9:28-36 & 2 Peter 1:16-21

**22. Revelation 22**

22:3-5. 2 Kings 20

22:11. Job 33:27-28

22:12,13. Revelation 2:8-11

22:16. Revelation 2:8-11; Revelation 2:18-29

22:18,19. Jude 1:1-4; Jude 1:5-19

---



