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SNIPPETS OF
Scripture

Volume I



PAUL LAGASSE

SNIPPETS OF SCRIPTURE

VOLUME I

Paul Lagasse

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I affectionately inscribe this book to our Lord

Jesus Christ,

in grateful appreciation of the fact that I now have

eternal life with Him.

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Introduction

This book is a compilation of sermons given over the course of about two years. The Scriptures selected are from both the Old and New Testaments. There is a wide range of topics from Sin to Grace, from the Church to the Resurrection of Christ and Believers, from Humility to God's Power, and finally, the Continuing Debt to Love One Another.

We must remember that the spiritual foundation for any relationship is between a person and God. This foundation is made possible through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. He loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to this earth to die on the cross for our sins – to pay the penalty for our sins, since we cannot pay that penalty ourselves. In addition to sending His Son (Jesus Christ) to this earth, God the Father also imparts the Holy Spirit unto those of us who are Christians. In order to know how God's Word fits into our lives as we relate to God and others, we must understand the interpersonal relationships between God, Christians, and non-Christians. Figure 1 shows these relationships.

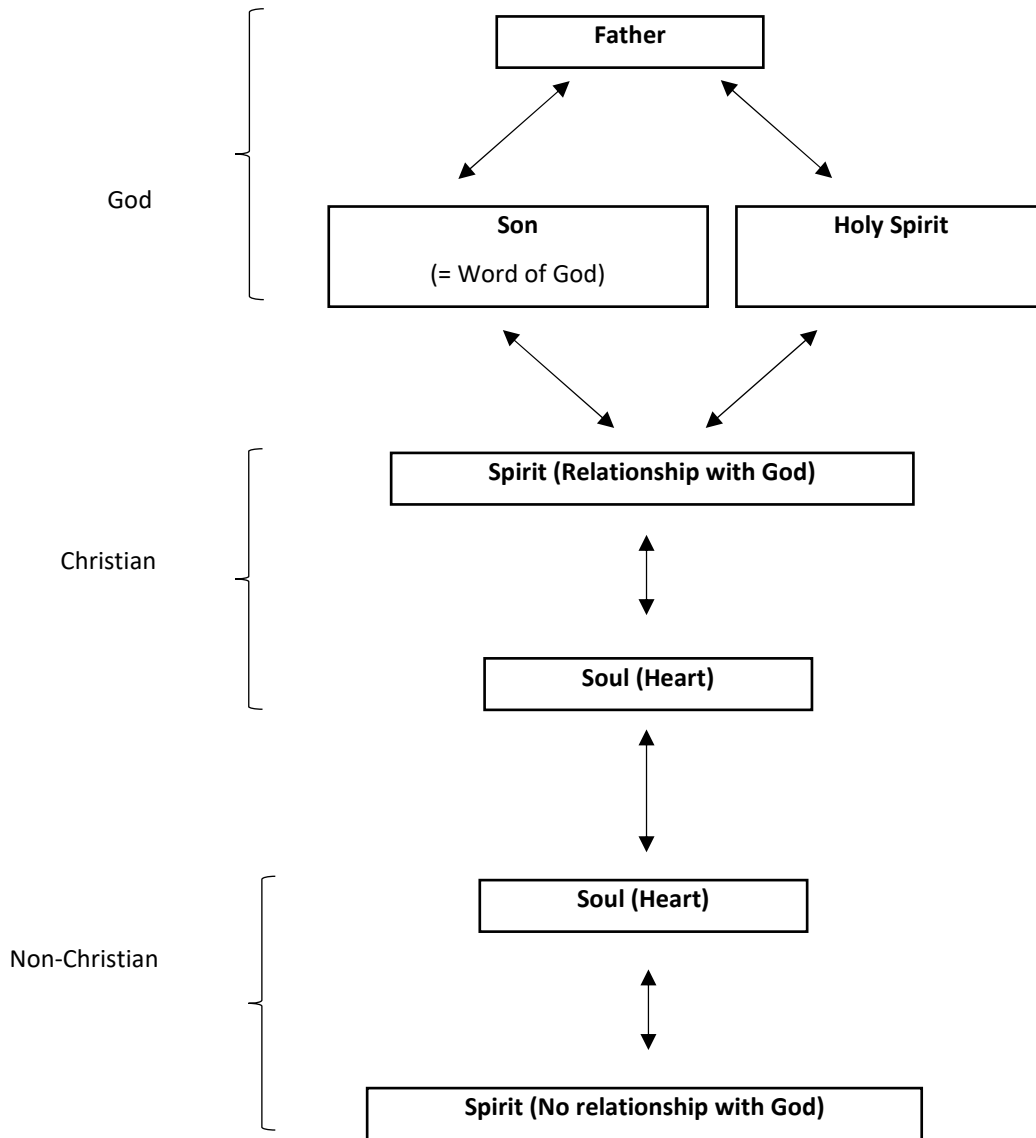


Figure 1 – Separation of Soul and Spirit

In this figure, God is shown as three persons but one God (sometimes referred to as the Trinity). Each representation of God has a specific function: (1) God, the Creator (Genesis 1:1), (2) the Son, Jesus Christ who sacrificed Himself for our sins so that we can have an eternal relationship with Him (Hebrews 7:27) and is equated with the Word of God (John 1:14), and (3) the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to follow God's will according to the Word of God (2 Timothy 1:14).

For a Christian, there are two components that allow us to function in the spiritual realm as shown in the figure: a person's spirit and their soul (Hebrews 4:12). A person's spirit is what allows them to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. This component of a person (whether they have a relationship with Christ or not) allows them to live after their physical body dies. For those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ, their spirit will live forever with Christ in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 22:12-14). For those who do not, they will exist in hell separated from God forever (Revelation 20:15). The soul, on the other hand, is what allows a person to function daily. We refer to this component as a person's cognitive and social abilities. The soul perishes along with the physical body when a person dies. It is impossible for us as humans to psychologically distinguish between the spirit and the soul. To us, it seems as one entity. But to God, they are separate (Hebrews 4:12).

We must also remember that there is one level higher than this and that is the relationship between believers known collectively as the Church, and also the relationship that believers have with non-believers which is commonly referred to as the world. The believer is active in both scenarios. The Church is the Body of Christ (Ephesians 2) and will collectively meet at the Marriage Supper in Heaven. And with respect to unbelievers, the believers are tasked with sharing God's Word with them (Matthew 28) so that they can receive forgiveness of their sin and eternal life.

Chapter 1

“Unrecognizable” Sin

The biggest concern we have as Christians is sin, and we want to deal with it properly to establish a firm foundation for our faith. There was a story of a boy named Elias who lived with his mother who had a large litter of kittens. His mother instructed him to stay away from the kittens. However, she discovered that he had been with them one day and asked Elias, “Have you been with the kittens?” The boy replied, “No, but the black one meowed!”

Such innocence shows us that even at a young age, one can sin (disobedience to a rule or standard) and perhaps not recognize it. Sin, whether it is recognized or not, still matters to God. Isaiah 59:2 tells us that sin separates us from God. It is such an important matter that 99.6% of God’s Word deals with sin.¹

Effect of Sin Presently

The apostle Paul spoke about sin in Romans 5:20-21: “The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Sin has its effect on both a person’s soul and their spirit. The separation of a person’s soul from their spirit was mentioned earlier in the Introduction (see Figure 1). In the latter part of the verses above, Christ brought our spirits unto eternal life: “Just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Our spirits,

¹ The advent of sin in God’s Word is in Genesis 2 when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. God finally removes sin once and for all in Revelation 20.

therefore, have eternal life with Christ and that cannot be taken away from us. However, our souls are exposed daily to the sinful nature of the world, Satan, and our own imperfections.

Knowledge of Sin

How do we know that we have sinned or have sin in our souls as a result of exposure to the world or Satan? Verse 20 above tells us that “The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase.” The Greek word for “law” is *nomos*, which means principle or rule and the Greek word for “trespass” is *paraptoma* which means error. The rule that we abide by is God’s Word and when we violate God’s Word then we have made an error.

When we have made an error, we are sometimes aware of it but sometimes we are not. We can call this “unrecognizable sin” when we are not aware of it. In the book of Leviticus, the Israelites were required to make sacrifices for their sins. Chapter 4 verse 2 mentions that even the unintentional sin must be atoned for. The Hebrew word for unintentional is *sagag* which means unknowingly or not aware of. When we sin, we are also accountable for even the sins that we are not aware of. We know this also to be true because people who do not confess their sins to Jesus Christ and trust Him as their Lord and God will be responsible for the sins that they are not aware of at the time of judgment in the next life (Revelation 20:11). Leviticus 5:17 tells us, “If anyone sins and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands, even though they do not know it, they are guilty and will be held responsible.” No one is exempt from sin, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). John Calvin once said, “Man does not know the one-one-hundredth of the sin that cleaves to his soul.”

Consequences of Sin

Sin has consequences. The primary consequence is that it hinders the work of the Holy Spirit in our souls. One analogy is that of a sink pipe. Over the course of time, a discharge pipe can build up sludge which reduces the flow of water. Naturally, we want to reduce the amount of sludge so that water can flow freely. That is how it is with the Holy Spirit with respect to our souls. If we allow unconfessed sin to build up in our souls (even sins that we are not aware of) then it restricts how God's Spirit can work inside us. Both sins that we are aware of and sins that we are not aware of should be confessed on a regular basis. Furthermore, unconfessed sin can have an impact on our interactions with others, especially our witness to them about Christ. Having a "clean" soul allows the Spirit to operate through us and minister to other people.

Chapter 2

Judah Carried into Exile

In the figure in the Introduction ([Figure 1](#)), we addressed our relationship with the triune God. Our relationship is comprised of our spirits which were born again. Our souls, however, can contract sin which is either recognizable or unrecognizable. The unintentional sin in Leviticus 4:2 comes from the Hebrew word, *sagag*, which means unrecognized or unaware of. We learned that it is necessary for our souls to repent of both the sins we are aware of and not aware of to maintain a strong relationship through the Spirit. (Recall the analogy of the clogged sink pipe.)

Now we want to consider the bottom of [Figure 1](#) where our souls come into contact with the souls of others. Note that a non-believer's spirit is not shown in this figure. That is because their spirit is dead at the moment. (This is because they do not as yet have a relationship with Jesus Christ). As a newborn believer, I was stationed in Okinawa. I can remember distinctly one night sitting out in a field away from the barracks. I worshipped God and prayed. I wondered why I was not taken up to heaven as soon as I repented. God told me that I was to be a witness to others. Consider Acts 2:17-18: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." Our souls are destined to come into contact with others as a witness to them, empowered by God. We should be alert to the impact we have on others, especially when it comes to seeking Christ for forgiveness of sin and trusting in Him as Lord.

Today, we consider the plight of the Israelis in light of the barbaric attack on their people which occurred on October 7, 2023. We live in an age where

terrorism propagates itself and attempts to destroy freedom-loving people. Democratic countries are rallying around Israel in this time. Of course we pray for the state of Israel. People wonder if the unrest in the Middle East is God's signal to a race which does not acknowledge Him. However, we can do our part by being a witness to even just one person. That witness will propagate to another person and so forth.

Backsliding Judah

Regarding a distressed situation between two countries, let's take a look at the people of Judah (the southern Kingdom of Israel) just prior to 586 B.C. The nation was backsliding and God allowed the Babylonians to take captive many of the people. God prophesied to the people as recorded in Jeremiah 13:15-22. God first called attention to the people: "Hear and pay attention, do not be arrogant, for the LORD has spoken" (verse 15). A person is to pay attention to what God is saying. The Hebrew word for attention is *azan* which means to turn to or obey. People do not hear God today. Consider Babel, the flood, terrorists or anyone. People must pay attention to God's Word and obey it.

The following verse (v. 16) indicates that people must give glory to God:

Give glory to the LORD your God
before he brings the darkness,
before your feet stumble
on the darkening hills.
You hope for light,
but he will turn it to utter darkness
and change it to deep gloom.

The Hebrew word for glory is *kabod*, which means honor and majesty. God's glory must not go to anyone or anything else. People must give honor and majesty to Christ. The people of Judah were not honoring God in 586 B.C. Similarly, many are not glorifying God today. Their attention and obeisance are

to someone or something else. This is not honoring God and how do you think He feels about that?

Consequences of Lack of Attention

There are consequences to our lack of attention to God, and He mentioned this in the first part of verse 17: “If you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride.” If we fail to listen then God will weep, which is an anthropomorphism. God does not actually weep like we do, but He is saddened. It is because of a person’s pride that they do not listen. The lusts of this world and the desires of a person will distract them from Christ. People must repent of their pride.

Finally, the consequences of Judah’s lack of attention are spoken here in verses 19 and 22: “All Judah will be carried into exile . . . it is because of your many sins.” God’s protection is not available to us if sin is present. Isaiah 59:2 tells us that “our sins have separated us from God.”

How can we as Christians respond to a world that does not recognize Jesus Christ? In this chapter of the world stage, and it will likely be a long and dangerous one, there is something we can do spiritually in addition to prayer. We are in the last days according to Acts 2 and God’s Spirit is upon us. Can we be a witness to another person even in other states which will eventually propagate to another person and then eventually around the world?

Chapter 3

Under Grace

The early 19th century was known for numerous explorations in the western U.S. Many were exploring for minerals, furs, gold, and other riches. However, there were some who were just explorers. These were rugged men who in many cases had irreverent lifestyles. One exception to this was Jedidiah Smith. He arrived in St. Louis in 1822 with a Bible. There were very few Christians in the mountains and soon Jedidiah found this out.

His party nearly perished crossing the Sierra Nevada mountains. They were with little water, cold, hungry, and exhausted. Smith wrote in his diary, “My horse freezing, my men discouraged, I then thought of the vanity of riches and of all those objects that lead men in the perilous paths of adventure.” Smith realized that when people face perils like these they often “make the true estimate of things.” Many of these men realized that “riches” were not more important than life itself.

However, after they crossed the mountains Smith wrote that his men quickly “forget the storm and embark again on the perilous ocean.” This reminds me of the time during 911 when I was working as an engineer. Our company was concerned about the mental well-being of its employees so they setup a few “prayer rooms” utilizing some of the conference rooms. A fellow worker whom I knew previously, I’ll call him Joe, showed up. He was visibly shaken by the events going on. We had prayer and then I talked with Joe. He was definitely interested in God and His Son Jesus Christ. Sometime later, I stopped by his cubicle to see how he was doing. I asked him if he would be interested in attending our lunchtime Bible study. He declined and I also found out from him that he was no longer interested in a relationship with God. This shows how fickle one’s emotions are but also signals a missed opportunity for

someone to come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Even as Christians, we might come across difficult times. I worked for an employer for two years that was arguably the most difficult time of my life. It was God's grace that sustained me in that time. From a spiritual perspective, I was not walking closely with God and I was vulnerable to the attacks of this world. That episode in my life brought me back into a closer relationship with God and I have maintained that ever since. This is a lesson of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.² It is an example of God's gift (grace – without remuneration) poured out and man being won over by God (faith).

God's Perspective

Whether we are Christians or not, are we willing to look at things from God's perspective when the going gets tough? And even more importantly, are we willing to stick with our decision to seek God when the perils have passed? What are the things that consume not only our time but also our *focus*. We should be focused on the Lord our God through His Son Jesus Christ before peril comes, during the peril, and then after the peril has passed.

Let's take a look at Ephesians 2:8-9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." The Greek word for grace is *charis*, which means endowment, ability, or gift without expectation of return. What gets us through perils is God's grace. Consider the words of the apostle Peter: "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (1 Peter 5:10). It may simply be a gift that He gives us to meet a situation. The first occurrence of God's grace in a Christian's life is when they

² R.P. Lightner, review of *Grace Unlimited*, by Clark H. Pinnock, ed., (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1975) in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Jul-Sep 1976), 258.

first come to Christ (see my eBook, *Understanding All About God* at the website, newtestamentevangelism.com). However, God's grace is still available to us after we become Christians. God's grace actually indwells in our souls.³ In the same verse, the Greek word for faith is *pistis*, which means God has won us over. It is like a relationship between spouses. Each spouse has effectively "won over" the other. That's what makes a relationship secure. It is the same in our relationship with God through Christ. Our faith means that God has won us over, so naturally, we are open to and thankful when His gift or grace comes our way. It is the same with spouses.

Perils of Humanity

Consider Paul's words to the Corinthians regarding his perils:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us . . . (2 Corinthians 1:8-10)

Sometimes we might feel the same type of distress that Paul did. Here is a list of some types of peril or stressors:

- Geo-political events
- Government
- Concern for the spirits and eternal destiny of others
- Family issues or the health of others
- Personal health
- Household or car repairs

³ John D. Hannah, review of *Standing in Grace*, by Jonathan Edwards, edited by Don Kistler, reprint, (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002) in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Jan-Mar 2004), 123.

- Sin

Sometimes these potential issues happen at once or they just keep on coming. It is normal for us to experience these things as a manner of course in life, but sometimes they exceed our stress level.

Arguably one of the most significant perils that we face is the aspect of sin. Sin bogs us down from receiving God's grace. Isaiah 59:2 says that "our sins have separated us from God." In order to receive God's grace we must absolve ourselves from all sin – the sin that we are aware of and unaware of.

God's Grace

The apostle Paul wrote these words to the church in Rome:

Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 5:13-14)

We now operate by God's grace – His grace to freely forgive us when we confess our sin. It is a free gift from God. The outpouring of God's grace via His Spirit is something that is unplanned from our perspective and can exceed our expectations. Lewis Chafer put it this way, "There are no limits to be placed on the possibility of the illumination of the mind by the Spirit."⁴ Zane Hodges said, "Unlike resources in this world, God's grace can never be exhausted."⁵ We participate in this act because of our faith indicating that God has won us over by His Son Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins. Consider these words to purify our souls by God's grace:

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace*, (Chicago, IL: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1933), 312.

⁵ Zane C. Hodges, "Grace after Grace – John 1:16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Jan-Mar 1978), 40.

If the simple object of the Gospel were to give us comfort, or to make us perfectly happy at once, these self-revelations which bring so much humiliation and distress would not be needful. But then there would be no chance for a thorough purification. And what is the real meaning of these trials? They are part of God's plan for our sanctification . . . He sees us in our folly still cleaving to the world, but yet with some sincere desire towards Him. He is determined that the desire shall not be disappointed, and, therefore, that the folly shall be utterly purged out; not a particle of it shall remain. It is sometimes a very long work, but not necessarily so, and it is always a sure one.⁶

Therefore, we continue in our relationship with Him through prayer and reading/studying His Word.

Remember that God is powerful enough to forgive us of our sin and to pour out His grace upon us. Once we receive His grace, we are able to help others. God is a God of *giving*. Recall that God the Father sent His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sin. And when He was physically alive, He always *gave* of Himself to others. God's gifts of grace are not for our own benefit and consumption but that of others.

⁶ William James, *Grace for Grace*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 27, Paternoster Row, 1875), 62-63.

Chapter 4

The Potter's House

Some 2700 years ago, the people in Judah were accustomed to using clay pots for collection and storage of many items. There were no metal or glass refineries at that time. Therefore, clay pots were common. If a pot was cracked or broken it could easily be replaced. In the book of Jeremiah, God spoke to reveal Himself in dealing with the people of Judah.

Human Pots

In Jeremiah 18:1-12, an analogy is made regarding God and the people of Judah. The potter is God and the pot are the people. God's purpose in this analogy is not to throw out or disregard the people, but to enhance them. Consider, for instance, verse 4: "But the pot he was *shaping* from the clay was *marred* in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, *shaping* it as seemed best to him." Arguably the most important word for this message, and we will be coming back to it, is *shaping*. But let us consider the word *marred*. Merriam-Webster defines this as "to ruin or diminish the perfection or wholeness of."⁷ The nation of Judah as a nation was marred around 600 B.C. They often rebelled against God's will to the extent that Jeremiah spoke these words: "Although our sins testify against us, do something, LORD, for the sake of our name. For we have often rebelled; we have sinned against you" (Jeremiah 14:7). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul declared to the Romans, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Whether it is a nation or an individual, all those born have sinned and therefore are marred. This not only refers to the time prior to a person repenting of their sin and

⁷ "Merriam-Webster Since 1828," Merriam-Webster, accessed January 26, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

coming to Christ, but also for Christians after they repent. Even though our spirits have been saved from eternal separation from God (Isaiah 59:2), our souls are still vulnerable to the sins of our flesh, the influence of the world, and Satan himself. This leaves a Christian's soul "marred."

Forming a New Pot

Having realized this, "the potter [God] formed it [the pot] into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him" (Jeremiah 18:4). An example of this is in the Old Testament when God changed the name of Abram to Abraham and made him the father of many nations (Genesis 17), subsequently shaping the nation into 12 tribes (Genesis 49). God loves the nation of Israel. They are His people.

The New Testament example of this "shaping" first and foremost is when Christ made our spirits a new creation: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come; The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). God continues to shape our souls with the spiritual gifts He has endowed us with. Many of these are in 1 Corinthians 12. In verse 4 of this passage, the phrase "different kinds of gifts" comes from the Greek word, *diairesis*, which means to divide or apportion certain gifts to certain people. God is still shaping us today with certain spiritual gifts, but these are not for our pleasure or prestige. Rather, they are for serving or taking care of others. This is how God's Church, the body of Christians, is maintained.

Maintaining the New Pot

We would be remiss if we did not cover the following section in Jeremiah 18:7-10. Our God is casuistic ("resolving a case through interpretation

of principle or religious doctrine”⁸. He uses “if-then” structures in dealing with His created beings). An example is given here in vv. 7-8: “If at any time I [God] announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.” Let’s consider Ezra’s plea to God in Ezra 10:10-11: “You [Judah] have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel’s guilt. Now honor the LORD, the God of your ancestors, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives.” Judah repented of their sin. The situation of marrying foreign wives was dealt with and Judah was allowed to resettle in their land according to the book of Nehemiah (primarily chapter 11).

An example of repentance in the New Testament is Romans 10:9: “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Because sin had separated us from God (Isaiah 59:2), our spirits were doomed to be isolated from God for eternity. By confessing our sins to Him and trusting Him as our Lord, we have been saved from this eternal separation from Him and will experience eternal happiness with Him in Heaven.

Let’s consider now a separate “if-then” clause in Jeremiah 18:9-10, “And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.” An example of this is when Judah was not following God’s Word around 600 B.C. God then allowed the Babylonians to make three attacks on Judah over the next fourteen years (Daniel 1; 2 Kings 24, and 2 Kings 25:11).

⁸ “Merriam-Webster Since 1828,” Merriam-Webster, accessed January 26, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

A New Testament example is in 1 Timothy 6:9-10 where some people who were eager for money had wandered from their faith. Falling away from God or ignoring His Word by placing something else as more important than Him can remove the protections that God gives us. Not only that, but others are watching us and see how we respond to issues in our lives. So it is important to remain focused on God.

Our focus on God is also important for us. Psalm 24:5-6 tells us, “They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their savior. Such is the generation of those who seek Him.” Other rewards for those who remain faithful to God are found in Matthew chapters 6 and 25 and 2 John 8.

Chapter 5

The Christian Church

There are a variety of institutions in our society today around the world. We need these institutions to function and manage order. For example, governments attempt to maintain some level of freedom and protection for its citizens. We also notice scores of countries in this world which maintain their geographical boundaries and conduct commerce. With this stage of technology, we recognize social media as a conglomerate of institutions which put forth their agenda. A couple of observations about these institutions: (1) they pertain to this world, and (2) they sometimes have divisions.

However, there is an institution which many people across many countries participate in, and that is the Christian Church.⁹ However, the Church is not an earthly institution – it is spiritual. It consists of the spirits of people who recognized sin in their lives, confessed that sin, and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness of their sins and for eternal life. The Church as an institution does have something in common with earthly institutions – it is prone to divisions, which will be discussed below.

The Word of God under consideration is **Ephesians 2:19-22** and consists of four topics of the Church: (1) the integrity of the Church, (2) the function of the Church, (3) defending the Church, and (4) building and maintaining the Church. This section of the Word demonstrates that God still cares about His created beings and wants a relationship with them. The best way to reach those who need Jesus Christ in their lives and shed His mercy and grace upon them is through the Church, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone.

⁹ The Christian Church as a reference throughout this book refers to the world-wide body of believers in Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins and their guarantee of eternal life in the same Christ. Keep in mind that there is a denomination of believers in Christ called the *Christian Church*, and this denomination is just a subset of the worldwide believers called the Christian Church, or simply the Church.

Integrity of the Church

The book of Ephesians was written by the apostle Paul to the Ephesians. Paul stopped at Ephesus (Asia Minor) during the course of two missionary journeys throughout the Middle East. After the last journey he felt compelled (and inspired by the Holy Spirit) to write a letter of encouragement to God's holy people (Ephesians 1:1). The word "holy" means set apart. These people were Christians set apart from the world in terms of their faith and devotion to Jesus Christ alone as their God.

The key concept throughout the verses in Ephesians 2:19-22 is the wholesomeness of the Church. Notice the words in these verses representing wholesomeness: fellow citizens, God's people, God's household, foundation, whole building, together, **holy temple**, and dwelling. God's plan for the Church is that it would be consolidated in its respect for other Christians. These Christians, based on the foundation of Jesus Christ, are set apart from secular society. In particular, notice the term *holy temple*. The temple in the Old Testament, or tent of meeting prior to the temple building (see the books of Leviticus and Numbers), was where God descended in a cloud to meet the people under Moses' leadership. Even though God created mankind and reigns on high in the heavens, He is just as much concerned and loves His people so much that He remains integrated with them. Thus, the holy temple was that meeting place between God and mankind. So, here in the New Testament God's meeting place with mankind is with the Church. Notice these words from the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2: "And in him [Christ Jesus] you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." God moves in the Church today just like He did during the time of the tent of meeting. God is active in the world, but He works through the Church.

Function of the Church

The function of the Church is based on God who lives in the Church by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). This function is based on two principles: worship and witness. Worshipping God is the expectation of all believers. In the New Testament, we think of Jesus' mother Mary who worshipped God after the angel announced that she would deliver the Messiah (Christ) in Luke 1:46-55. In the Old Testament, King Solomon was gifted in the writing of the Psalms which also glorified God: "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness" (Psalm 29:2).

But the worship experience and the nature of the Church itself in any setting, encompasses the proclamation of "God-inspired truth."¹⁰ We refer to this as the Word of God, or simply the Bible. The teaching, studying, and articulating of God's Word is always present in the Church because Jesus Christ is the Word (John 1:14). So the Word of God is naturally associated with the worship experience as well as the witness of the Church.

The witness of the Church begins with Christ's command at the end of the book of Matthew: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me [Christ]. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). This is a verse that is concerning to many local churches today. Robert Linthicum wrote:

Traditionally, the [local] church has been concerned about the mission of the church in other lands; to call it to be comprehensive, therefore, is not a startling new task. But the [local] church that is highly informed on the work of the [universal] church throughout the world, yet is not intensely involved in the life of its own community, is a dilettante playing with the gospel. It is the specific action of the local congregation in its community

¹⁰ William Ragsdale Cannon, *The Christian Church*, (New York, NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), 23.

which finally shows it to be a faithful church. Its involvement in the life of its community should be intentional, central to community reformulation, and ecumenical.¹¹

William Ragsdale Cannon wrote, “We must send missionaries out among ourselves and our own peoples as well as to the peoples of the so-called heathen lands.”¹² This reference points to the important aspect of witnessing to others (“go and make disciples”), but our impact on others transcends just going “door-to-door” sharing about Christ. There is nothing wrong with this concept if someone is called by God to do so. But how we behave with others equally sets a good witness for Christ. John Harris noted a number of areas where a person can be a witness to others:¹³

1. Knowledge – having sound biblical knowledge
2. Speech – using proper discretion according to God’s Word
3. Relationship – maintaining healthy communion
4. Property – willingness to share
5. Self-Denial – putting others first
6. Compassion – exhibiting concern for others
7. Perseverance – enduring circumstances
8. Prayer – spending regular time with Christ
9. Union – upholding the bond of the Church with other believers

Christians should work at maintaining the above characteristics in their life. People do not just listen to what we have to say if we are sharing Christ with them – they are watching how we live our lives. The apostle Paul also

¹¹ Robert C. Linthicum, *Christian Revolution for Church Renewal*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1972), 18.

¹² William Ragsdale Cannon, *The Christian Church*, (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press: New York, NY, 1945), 94.

¹³ John Harris, *The Great Commission*, (Boston, MA: Gould and Lincoln, 1951), 64-74.

mentioned this to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Since Christ paid the price on the cross for our sin, we owe it to Him to honor Him, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to be a witness to others.

Defending the Church

The church, headed by Jesus Christ, has been under constant attack. It first came under attack in Israel, causing Jude (the half-brother) of Christ to write a letter to the Christian believers in Israel. The focus of the letter is in verses 17-22. Jude actually mentioned what the apostle foretold: “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires” (verse 18). The word “ungodly” comes from the Greek, *asebeia*, which means neglect of duties. We need to contrast this with verse 22 which says, “Be merciful to those who doubt.” The Greek word for doubt is *diakrino*, which means divided in their minds. These are people who are confused. They are not leaders but common members. It is possible for some Christians, in their confusion, to begin attacking the principles of God’s Word whether they realize it or not. The recourse for these people is outlined in verse 23: “Save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” Our response to other members who are confused is to be merciful to them: continue to love them, accept them, and pray that God will guide them according to His Word.

Let’s contrast this with Romans 16:17-18 which speaks about what our attitude should be towards leaders who have strayed from God’s Word:

I urge you brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep

away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people.

One example of this is in the Methodist church. This denomination was prominent during the 2nd Great Awakening around 1850. There were numerous door-to-door evangelists who spread the gospel throughout the country. However, today there is a split in the denomination over gay ministers which voids God's Word in 1 Timothy 3:2 that leaders should be above reproach.

Another example is in the Old Testament in Numbers 16. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were of the family of the Levites but they were not of the sub-family of the Kohathites who were performing priestly duties. The non-priestly duties of the aforementioned men involved the care and transportation of the articles of the tent of meeting, which was actually the first "temple" of worship for the Israelites. These men were jealous of the priests and forced an uprising among the Israelites. God was swift in rounding them up, along with their families and tents, and opening up the ground to swallow them up. This was necessary to preserve the integrity of God's Word with its assignments as well as civil control for the people. Again, leaders must be above reproach when it comes to God's Word.

Building and Maintaining the Church

Let's return to Ephesians 2:22: "In Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." God's plan for the Church is that it not only remains wholesome, fully functional, and defended, but that it is continually being built. By this I mean that each of us has a spiritual gift – some more than others, and it is not usual for a Christian to have more than one gift. The building process in the Church involves each member, particularly leaders, to constantly be aware of who has what gift and to help them build up their gifts so that they can be of benefit to others.

God's Spirit sets up His dwelling [the Church] as we all come into a relationship with Him. In fact, according to verse 22, His Spirit now lives in us. We must learn His voice (impression on our hearts) as we spend time with Him in order to be effective in the Church. Here are some verses to help us in the building and maintaining process:

1. "A new command I give you: love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13: 34,35).
2. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 8:14).
3. "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).
4. "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us" (Eph. 5: 2).
5. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; ... Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:7,11).
6. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; for-bearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do you" (Col. 3: 12,18).
7. "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Pet. 4:8, 9).
8. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to **keep the unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace'" (Eph. 4:1-3).

9. “Let all **bitterness**, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be you kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4: 31, 32).
10. “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and **edify one another**, even as also you do” (1 Thes. 5:11).

Chapter 6

Resurrection of Christ and Believers

We are inextricably tied with Christ in His resurrection because we are inextricably tied with Him in His death. In order for there to be a resurrection there must first be a death. To realize this fully we must consider Christ's death. He experienced beatings and finally a crucifixion as He bore our sins. He alone paid the price for our sins. This is a level of torment that many of us have never received. Spiritually, Christ was separated from God at His final breath on the cross. This kind of pain was multiplied millions of times over since He bore the sins of all Christians. Christ still remembers all that pain even today and forevermore since He is not bounded by time.

We will consider the topics of death, resurrection, and eternity. There must be a death before there can be a resurrection and there must be a resurrection before there can be an eternity. The Scripture under consideration is **Isaiah 53:10-12**. The book of Isaiah was written about 700 years before the birth of Christ. Even though it is of the genre of Prophecy, it uses parallelism similar to that used in the genre of Poetry, namely the Psalms. In parallelism, the second phrase in a sentence is different than the first phrase but enhances the meaning of the first.

A Necessary Death

It was necessary for Christ to be bruised and die on the cross for our sins to alleviate the separation we had from God.¹⁴ From Isaiah 53:10 we find that it “pleased the LORD to bruise him [Christ]; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin” (KJV). First, we notice the parallelism in the first two phrases where the second phrase enhances the meaning of the first (bruise him -> put him to grief). Secondly, it seems inconsistent that someone

¹⁴ “Our sins have separated us from God” (Isaiah 59:2).

would be pleased to bruise someone else. But here the LORD was looking to the Church, His Bride. The LORD had to make a way of celebrating the Marriage Supper with the Church in heaven, so it pleased Him to bruise Christ.

In the second part of the sentence the LORD made Christ's soul an offering to sin. It's interesting here that the reference is made to Christ's soul and not His body which was brutalized leading up to and including His crucifixion. The offering of His soul for sin refers to the spiritual sacrifice of His soul for our sins. Even though Christ's body was sacrificed, it was His soul that actually made a propitiation for our sin.

A parallel verse exists at the end of verse 11: "... by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities." Christ's infinite knowledge and perfect character as one who justifies (Hebrew *sadaq* = to make right) many Christians because He bore our iniquities for us on His cross when He was crucified.

A Necessary Resurrection

In the second part of verse 10 we note that the God the Father would see Christ's offspring (a reference to all believers in Christ, no matter which country there are from). This implies that Christ would rise from the dead. Death could not hold Him down. Christ was victorious over death! This is the hope of all Christians – that we look forward to spending eternity with Christ our Savior.

From John 11:25-26 Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." Because of Christ's resurrection we who are believers in Him will experience not only a resurrection of our spirits but also eternal life with Him. Contrast this with Isaiah 26:19 which says, "But your dead will live, LORD, their bodies will rise." This verse refers to the resurrection all spirits, however, some will have eternal life with Christ and some will not. For those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ, "[Christ] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body"

(Philippians 3:21). This is why we celebrate Resurrection Sunday, also known as Easter!

A Necessary Eternity

In the second part of Isaiah 53:10 we note that God the Father will prolong Christ's days. This reflects an eternal state for both Christ and His followers. This is followed by: "... and the will of the Father will prosper in His hand." This is referring to the Kingdom implementation in eternity. The apostle Paul talks about Christ turning over the Kingdom to God the Father "after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power" on the earth (1 Corinthians 15:24). Revelation chapters 21 and 22 discuss eternity between God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and the Church (all those spirits, meaning ours, who believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and trust in Him).

Verse 11 indicates that after Christ has suffered (crucified), "he will see the light of life and be satisfied." This point to the final state in eternity as recorded in Revelation 21:22-22:5. These verses declare that the new heavenly Jerusalem will not have the sun or moon for light but "the glory of God gives it light." The city will not have anything impure in it. Those spirits who trust in Christ will enjoy communion with Him.

In the first part of verse 12 God declares that "he will give him [Christ] a portion among the great." Christ, in this state of eternity, will share the blessings of God with the "many" meaning all Christians (i.e. the Church). Revelation 21:6 says that "I [God] will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life." Parallelism is displayed in the second part of the verse: "and he will divide the spoils with the strong [Christians]."

Our death, resurrection, and eternity are inextricably tied to Christ because the Church is the Bride of Christ. God ensured that Christ's death, resurrection, and eternity are made on our behalf and He will not waver from this.

Scriptures for Encouragement

These Scriptures are for further study and reference:

1. The talents God has given us are to be used to help those in need. These talents can be physical or spiritual in nature: “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the **resurrection** of the righteous” (Luke 14:13-14).
2. This verse speaks of a Christian’s immortality: “But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the **resurrection** from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the **resurrection**” (Luke 20:35-36).
3. Witnessing or sharing the gospel is a natural trait for Christians: “The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the **resurrection** of the dead” (Acts 4:1-2).
4. This verse indicates that we identify with Christ: “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a **resurrection** like his” (Romans 6:5).
5. This verse speaks of a Christian’s immortality: “So will it be with the **resurrection** of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable” (1 Corinthians 15:42).

In conclusion, our resurrection is linked to Christ’s resurrection, which is of great comfort to us. Hear are the words of W.J. Sparrow Simpson: “The experiences of Christ and of the Christian are alike because Christ and the

Christian are one. The Christian is in Christ Jesus. There is a mystical union between them: most intimate, most profound.”¹⁵

¹⁵ W.J. Sparrow Simpson, *The Resurrection and the Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968), 305.

Chapter 7

One Body

This message is a continuation of the end of Ephesians 2 where the Church is given several terms for wholesome and unity (fellow citizens, household of God, foundation of the apostles and prophets – with Christ as the Cornerstone, framed together, and the habitation of God through the Spirit). This was necessary to prepare the Church as Christ’s bride for the Marriage Supper (Revelation 19:9).

The “Mystery” of the Church

In Ephesians 3:1-10, the apostle Paul declared that there is a “mystery” regarding the Church. The word mystery in the Greek (*mysterion*) means hidden, unrevealed. Verse six declares that the believing Gentiles are fellow-heirs with the believing Jews (confirmed in the Living translation). These Gentiles and Jews are both “partakers in Christ.” This means that they have recognized their sin and have asked Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sin and trust Him as their Lord and Savior. Verse 10: It is through the Church that the wisdom of God is made known to the evil forces who recognize that their work is being overturned in the Church. The Church is going to stand spiritually in preparation for the Marriage Supper.

In another Scripture (Acts 15:13-17), there was a meeting of the Council at Jerusalem met (comprised of the apostles). Simon Peter led the discussion, and all agreed, that the both the *believing* Jews and the *believing* Gentiles (non-Jews) are part of the Church. Even today, anyone in the world who has asked Christ for forgiveness for their sin and trust Him as their Savior are part of the Church (either a believing Jew or a believing non-Jew). Therefore, these members of the Church will participate in the Rapture as discussed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, where both the believing members of the Church who

are alive and those who are pre-deceased will meet in the air and be with the Lord Jesus Christ forever.

The Resurrection of the Nation of Israel

The discussion above covers the Jews who put their trust in Jesus Christ. But what about the Jews who more than a millennium before the time of Christ made grain and animal sacrifices at the Tabernacle for their sin (Leviticus 4)? Is there a path of salvation for them? Let's take a look at Daniel 12:1-2:

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. 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. (KJV)

This section occurs after the “end times” that were discussed in Chapter 11. At the end of time, God will judge everyone. Those who have sought forgiveness for their sin through God's commands in Leviticus 4 will have their part in heaven. Those who don't will reside in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:15).

Consider the passage in Ezekiel 37. This is a prophecy about the valley of bones again referring to the nation of Israel. God will put flesh on the bones and put His Spirit (note the Hebrew word for v.5, *ruah*, meaning breath or Spirit) into them to bring them alive. It is figurative narrative describing the resurrection of Jews as described in the previous paragraph. Also note in verse 23, where God will *save* them from their dwelling places. Again, a reference to the Jewish resurrection. God also spoke in verse 26 about an everlasting covenant that will be realized for *eternity*, the final state for believing Jewish spirits after the resurrection.

Challenges for the Church

A dichotomy exists today. Some Jews do not accept Christians because they have added the New Testament to the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (also called the Old Testament by the Christians). On the other hand, some Christians do not accept Jews. They believe that the Old Testament is a historical volume.

Furthermore, antisemitism is world-wide today. The media, demonstrators and even governments practice and promote antisemitic behavior. Even though they are the persecutors, they are the ones who need Christ.

Respect should be shown to the Jews. They carry the oracles (or the Word) of God. Starting with the book of Genesis in the Old Testament with the Creation story and all the way through the remaining 38 books, God's Word was given to the Jews. Someone had to be the recipient of God's initial Word, and that was the Jews. Perhaps these words from Deuteronomy 4:6 are fitting: "Keep therefore and do them [the oracles of God]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

Let us remember that those who believe in Jesus Christ for their salvation include both Jews and everyone else on the planet. In addition to this, the Jews who lived prior to Christ also have an opportunity for their spirits to abide in heaven if they abided by the tabernacle sacrifices for their sin as described in the Old Testament. This will be covered in the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Upcoming Events and Disposition of Spirits

A question came up recently about the timing of the Rapture, the 2nd Coming of Christ, and the Millennium. The figure below and the subsequent discussion should help answer this question.¹⁶

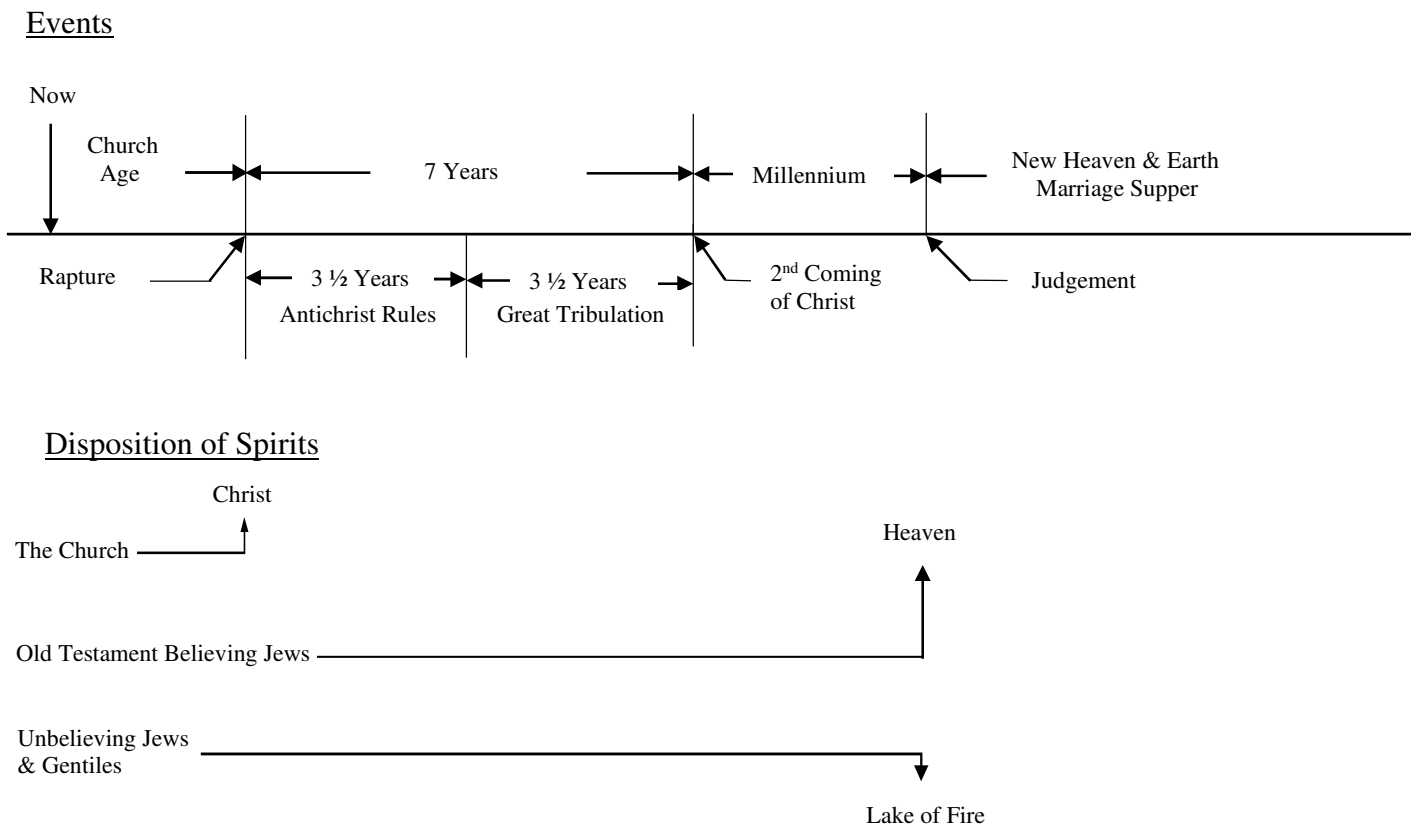


Figure 2 - Upcoming Events and Disposition of Spirits

¹⁶ This figure was checked against Alfred Thompson Eade's, *The Expanded Panorama Study Course*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell), 1961.

The Rapture

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, the apostle Paul etched these words:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The term rapture does not occur in God's Word, but has been associated with this Scripture since the root of this word in Latin (*raptus*) means being transported or carried away. All believers, whether dead or alive, will meet the Lord in the air. This is not an ideology, it is a reality. What is left to conjecture is how this transport will be carried out. Does it occur in both body and spirit form? From a metaphysical perspective, what will others see when this event occurs? Also, those spirits who rise from the dead refer to those who have previously confessed their sins and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, their spirits already reside with Christ because 2 Corinthians 5:8 tell us "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (KJV). Therefore, the mechanism of these transports escapes us but God knows how it will happen.

Coupled with that is the timing. As typical for future biblical events, the date is not given. It can happen at any moment. As shown in the figure, it occurs at the end of the Church Age where we are now and at the beginning of the 7-year period. Theologians differ on the timing of the rapture. Some believe it is at the beginning of the 7 years, some say the middle, and some say the end. Paul Blaising and John Walvoord (Dallas Theological Seminary) favor the beginning of the 7 years. I favor this as well. Ephesians 2:22 makes it clear that the "habitation of God through the Spirit" abides in the Church (the believers).

Once the Church is removed then, and only then, can the antichrist be allowed to rule the earth as described below during the 7 years.

The Seven Years

The next event in the figure is the so called “seven years.” Daniel 9:25 declares that the Jewish temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt, presumably on the original Temple Mount. Currently, there are two mosques on the Temple Mount. However, there is room between the mosques to allow a Jewish temple.

At the time of the building of the Jewish Temple, the antichrist (a human being empowered by Satan) will rule the world (Revelation 13). This will be a time of world peace (which is why the Jewish temple can exist on the same mount as the two mosques). However, in the middle of the seven years he will sit in the middle of the Jewish Temple and claim himself to be God (Daniel 9:27).

This abomination by the antichrist will result in God’s fury being poured out upon the earth. Revelation 14-19 describes this horror as never seen before. It will be the utter rejection by God of all the impurities caused by the antichrist.

As mentioned earlier, the 7 years will start once the rapture occurs. There is some speculation as to when the antichrist will come because believers then know that the rapture immediately precedes it. One possibility is that the antichrist will come from the World Economic Forum (weforum.com). This organization was started in 1972 by Klaus Schaub to moderate the economics of the world. Since then, it has branched into over 30 other elements of society (in essence, all of it) as noted on their home page. The members of the forum are largely comprised of billionaires paying \$500,000 for the initiation fee.

Recently, a phenomenon known as the Great Reset has been established by the forum. It seeks to maintain world-wide control of society. What is even more interesting is that the founder, Klaus Schaub, announced that he is

stepping down in 2025. The forum will then establish a council with a president. This council was announced well before Schaub announced his retirement. Could the president or some member of this council be the antichrist? It might bear well to monitor this council because if someone does arise from this council with regard to control of the society then the rapture could be near.

The Second Coming of Christ

At the end of the seven years, the earth will not only be corrupt, but antisemitism will be extreme. Countries from the north and east will drive against Israel with their armies and march south towards Jerusalem (Ezekiel 38). Before these armies get close to Jerusalem, Jesus Christ will appear in all His glory with His armies and defeat these invading armies. The antichrist will also be removed and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 19). Satan will be cast into the Abyss for 1000 years. This will usher in the Millennium.

The Millennium

Once Christ has returned to this earth (Second Coming), there will be a period of 1000 years where there will be peace on earth (Revelation 20). No wars, no contention anywhere. It is a time when Christ will reign on the earth.

The Judgment

The final judgment will ensue after the Millennium. This is when Satan will be released from the Abyss but sent to the lake of fire (Revelation 20). Christ will judge all spirits (those with him who previously passed, those living, and those in Hell). Those who have confessed their sins and trusted in Christ will abide in Heaven as Christ is the propitiation for their sins (Romans 1:16). Old Testament believers (who trusted in God's propitiation for their sins through animal sacrifices) will reside in Heaven (Luke 16:19-31; Daniel 12:2).

Old Testament and Gentile unbelievers will go to the lake of fire (Luke 16:19-31; Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:15).

New Heaven and Earth

The new Heaven and Earth is an eternal habitation for the believing spirits as discussed in the previous section. The Scripture reference for this is in Revelation 21-22. It is a place where pain and sin do not exist. The blessings from God will be given according to His will.

Also, the Marriage Supper (Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:9) will take place. It is a distinct time for the gathering of believers with Christ for fellowship and enjoyment.

Conclusion

The figure noted above answers the question regarding the Rapture, the Second Coming, and the Millennium. The timeline given should be a guideline for both Jews and Gentiles regarding their relationship with God. This should encourage us as believers in our faith and provide hope to others.

Chapter 9

Follow the LORD “Wholly”

Our innate thought every morning is to think about ourselves. We think about what “we” want to do each day. It is a self-perspective view that we have. God did not create us so that we could navigate life thinking about ourselves. He created us to honor Him, think about Him, and to consider Him (and others) as more important than ourselves. Are we “wholly” focused on Him or ourselves?

The Transjordan Tribes

Numbers 32:1-15 tells us about the tribes of Reuben and Gad. The Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land (Canaan) when the Reubenites and Gadites saw that the land of Jazer and Gilead (south and east of the Jordan river) looked great for grazing and growing crops. Their intention was to stay in this land, including the men eligible for fighting. However, Moses rebuked these tribes for their lack of committing their fighting men since the men from the other tribes were headed for battle. A deal was struck so that the families of the Reubenites and Gadites would stay in the land while their men went to battle with the other tribes. Once the fighting was completed, the men would return to their families.

In verses 8-13, Moses reminded the Reubenites and Gadites that their forefathers refused to enter Canaan based on reports that the men there were stronger. The LORD’s anger was aroused because they did not follow Him “wholly” (vv.10-13). The word “wholly” comes from the Hebrew, *male*, which means to fill or completely accomplish something that was void or empty. In other words, they must follow the commandments of the LORD *completely*. Therefore none of the forefathers (that entire generation) entered Canaan except for Joshua and Caleb. Moses warned the Reubenites and Gadites that if they

turned away from following the LORD then they would be left in the wilderness.

Follow God “wholly”

Another example of God’s requirement to follow Him “wholly” is in Deuteronomy 9. In this account, Moses reminded the 2nd generation of Israelites not to make the same mistake made by the 1st generation. Here Moses referred to the golden calf event. That is when Moses climbed Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God. He was on the mountain for forty days. Upon his return, he found the camp in complete disarray. They made a golden calf and worshipped it. They were dancing before this abomination that they had created, worshipping this idol rather than God Himself.

In verse 24, Moses told them they had been “rebellious.” The Hebrew word, *Marah*, means disobedient. The opposite of this, obedient, means to be “submissive to the restraint or command of authority: willing to obey.”¹⁷ The word, submissive, indicates wholly or completely (not partially). This is what God expected from the Israelites and what He still expects from us today. It is a way of life, one in which God has set forth guidelines but also meets the needs of His people.

A relationship where one seeks to honor God 100% of the time is similar to how spouses are to treat each other. Ephesians 5 encourages spouses to love each other. It is not a partial love or some of the time, but all of the time. When we learn the concept of “wholly” between ourselves and God, then we understand how we are to relate to our spouses.

Consider Deuteronomy 10:12-13:

¹⁷ Staff, “What is Obedience? What Does it Mean to Obey God?” Christianity.com, October 13, 2023, viewed August 16, 2024.

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

Notice that the verse says with “**all** your heart and with **all** your soul.” This indicates that we are to follow God “wholly” if we are to succeed in this life. God will then guide us in:

1. Our relationship with Him
2. Our relationship with others
3. Our approach to challenges
4. Our lot in life

Garry Friesen in his book, *Decision Making & the Will of God*, wrote “God requires **humble** submission to His will [bold font mine].”¹⁸ Sometimes we have to put aside what we want before we obey His will. Typically His will is revealed to us through His Word and through prayer. But it is the absolute emptying of our own desires to allow God's desires to be our desires. God does give us the ability to make choices, but when it comes to His Word, there is no choice needed. We must adhere to His Word “wholly.” That is why knowing God's Word is of utmost importance to the believer.

Jesus said in John 14:21, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. [KJV]” It is an implied conditional statement. If we have His Word and obey it, *then* we will be loved by Him and He will show Himself to us. This is a back-and-forth relationship where each party honors the other 100%.

¹⁸ Garry Friesen, *Decision Making & the Will of God*, (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), 213.

Questions

Here are some questions that you may be interested in pondering:

1. How can we know if we are disobedient unless we are constantly studying God's Word?
2. Is it possible that we do not know 100% of God's Word and, therefore, are disobedient sometimes even without knowing it? (i.e. sinning unaware according to Leviticus 4)
3. Note these words from Psalm 139:23-24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Are we ready to be *tried* by God? Are we ready to pray that verse?

Chapter 10

Humility

Richard Strauss was a famous composer and created a composition called “A Hero’s Life” in 1898. The composition was grand with a huge orchestra, with the sound intended to mimic a hero’s moment. Many thought that Strauss intended this composition for himself, based on other compositions. One critic even called it “a monstrous act of egotism.”

Strauss was not alone in focusing on himself. History is rife with examples of those who were prideful in their work. However, believers are taught that God hates pride (Proverbs 8:13). If we need a role model for humility then we should look to Christ who gave Himself up for us on the cross for our sins.

In this chapter we consider the first generation of Israelites whom God delivered from Egypt in a mass exodus. God had a plan for them to cross the Sinai Peninsula on their way to Canaan. However, they did not humble themselves to God’s Word, and as a result were not allowed to enter this Promised Land. Fast forward now to the second generation. Moses now instructed them to obey God’s Word wholly and not to fall short of His Word like their ancestors.

Obedience and Remembrance

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-10. In verse 1, God required the Israelites to observe His commandments *that* they would live, multiply, and possess the land. The “*that*” here is an implied conditional. God’s promises were conditioned on the Israelites obedience. This is why many people today, including believers, wonder why things are going awry in their lives. They should first consider their exposure to God’s Word (reading, studying, and

listening) and determine in their hearts if they are truly obeying His Word or not. There is no hiding from God. He knows whether we are obeying Him or if we have “personal” ideas on how to approach life and others. We cannot play any tricks with God.

To avert this, God humbled and proved (tested) the Israelites in the desert (verse 2). The Israelites were preparing to unseat 31 kings in the Promised Land, and therefore, they had to be in total sync with God. This is good advice for us. If we are about to enter a large venture in our life then we should humble ourselves before God. It is probably a good idea to humble ourselves now anyway, since we sometimes do not know when life is going to take a large turn.

Verse 3 describes the humbling process between God and the Israelites: “And he [God] humbled thee [the Israelites], and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna ... that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.” The purpose of this hunger was so that the Israelites would depend on God. This is humility. The second part of the verse is that the Israelites were not only to live by the manna (bread) that God provided, but by every word that God spoke. This is what makes the study of the Bible so important today. If we are to have a relationship with God and depend on Him to take care of our needs, we have to live by every word in the Bible. In fact, we should *depend* on every word in the Bible. This was the only way that the Israelites would defeat 31 kings, which they did. It was by the word of God.

One example of the humbling process is when my wife and I served several years together in a nursing home. We met one particular woman in the Sunday services. She was somewhat reserved but very observant and pleasant to talk with. One day, one of the other residents told us that she has cancer. My wife and I spent several Sundays after the services to visit her at her bedside. It

turned out that the cancer was both terminal and aggressive. As we visited with her, I noticed that she had a very calm disposition – the same disposition she had during the services. I did not know her background, but I determined that she was pre-conditioned to handle this life-changing event. Somewhere in her background, she was humbled by God so that she would develop a dependence on Him. This dependence allowed her to *accept* God’s will for her to contract this disease and soon after to be with Him.¹⁹ She did not deny her disease, rebel against it (or God), or fall into depression. Her pre-conditioning with God allowed her to bypass these moods and go straight to acceptance. What a wonderful story about God’s humbling to result in dependence and pre-conditioning!

Blessings

In Deuteronomy 8 we notice supernatural blessings that God provided the Israelites as they were humbled and depended on Him: (1) God fed them with manna (verse 3), (2) their clothes did not wear out (verse 4), and (3) their feet did not swell during the course of many voyages (verse 4). Blessings from God will vary. In the case of the woman in the nursing home, she would be home in Christ’s bosom relatively soon. We can expect blessings from God if we are humble before Him and obedient to His Word. Occasionally God disciplines believers to make sure they remain obedient and dependent on Him (verses 5 and 6). This leads to awe or reverence for God. This is a motivation for godly living. Note here the blessings from God’s Word: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:3, 5).

¹⁹ Clinical psychologists have identified four moods that someone facing a life-changing event may experience: (1) Denial, (2) Rebellion, (3) Depression, and (4) Acceptance.

We notice in verse 7 through 9 other blessings from God towards the Israelites upon entering the Promised Land. He provided wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, oil olive, and honey. The Israelites ate bread without scarceness. They did not lack anything.

Further Notes Regarding Humility

Moses was said to be “a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). With Egypt at his feet, he humbled himself with his fellow Hebrews. Then after being expelled from the kingdom, he had the help of the burning bush to get his attention and deliver the Hebrews. He listened to God’s command even though he was humbled during the experience in Egypt. This allowed him to be pre-conditioned or prepared to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt.

To further our humility, Brannon Diebert has this to say, “Humility with God is seeing ourselves as we truly are, fallen in sin and helpless without God.”²⁰ How can a Christian develop a strong relationship with God unless they feel a sense of remorse for their sin? Once a Christian is remorseful, then the Holy Spirit can establish a sense of humility. Humility is actually good because it unlocks God’s power in one’s soul.

According to Samuel Dresner, humility starts with being conscious about God’s presence:

If standing in God’s presence brings humility, it is a treasure that is ever within our grasp, for we move and live and carry out our existence in His presence. He has set His name over us, put His words in our mouth, and covered us with the shadow of His hand. **So long as we are conscious of His presence** [bold font mine], in the past as well as in the present, so long as we do not forget the image in which we were created, Him of Whose life we are a part, where we have come

²⁰ Brannon Diebert, ed., “What is Humility? Bible Meaning and Importance for Christians”, Christianity.com, July 21, 2023, accessed August 7, 2024.

from, whither we are going, and the holy task which has been entrusted to us – we may achieve humility.²¹

Like Moses in front of the burning bush, God’s presence is essential for humility. If we don’t sense his presence then we fall prey to our own devices. Not only do we lose an opportunity for humility, but we can fall into adverse situations.

Andrew Murray is a prominent author regarding the subject of humility. He has authored several books on the subject. He once wrote, ““Humility will cause you to die to self. Humility means giving up self and **coming to a place of complete nothingness before God** [bold font mine] ... If it had not been for His [Jesus’] infinite humility, considering Himself merely a servant to do God’s will and to suffer for it, He would never have embraced the cross.”²² Jesus had to give Himself up completely to the Father. Had He not, our salvation would have been in jeopardy. Coming to a complete place of nothingness before God means that we are spiritually naked before God. It is like Moses before the burning bush. Moses was so humbled that he took off his sandals and prostrated himself before God. He was such in a state of nothingness that he accepted God’s command to go and lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Are we ready to commune with Christ in a complete state of nothingness so that we can do His will?

J. Lanier Burns put this into contrast, “Humility is submissive dependence on the Lord on his terms ...”²³ This is difficult for us to accept coming from a Western society. We are used to our freedoms and exercise them on a daily basis. However, when it comes to God we are void of those freedoms. Our relationship with God is the only realm where we do not have freedoms. We are inextricably tied to His Word. This was a requirement for the Israelites

²¹ Samuel H. Dresner, *Three Paths of God and Man*, (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960), 91.

²² Andrew Murray, *Humility*, (New Delhi: General Press, 2019), 34.

²³ J. Lanier Burns, *Pride and Humility at War*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 15.

in Deuteronomy 8 before they entered Canaan. They were commanded on God's terms to enter the Promised Land.

Conclusion

Humility in this chapter speaks of a character trait that we must have between our souls and God rather than between our souls and other souls. It's a trait that recognizes that God in His Word knows better than us, that is, He knows better than we do. The net result is that we will live properly, multiply properly, and possess those things that God has for us. In my journey in this life, how can I expect God's leading (just like the Israelites when they approached Canaan) unless I am first humble? Some areas to help a person to be humble before God's Word:

- Proper devotions – like Moses before the burning bush, this requires spending regular sessions with God. Having a prayer journal can help a person stay focused during the prayer sessions.
- Proper relationship with spouse – Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. Wives are to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5).
- Others – consider others more important than myself (Philippians 2:3).

If I have some areas I need help with, then you probably do to. We are only human, completely dependent on Christ. Being pre-conditioned before life-changing events is paramount to a believer's life.

Chapter 11

Spiritual Gifts

This message is a continuation of Ephesians 2 where the Church was given several terms for wholesome, e.g. fellow-citizens with the saints, household of God, foundation of apostles and prophets, and Christ as the cornerstone. The main thrust is to prepare the Church herself ready as a Bride for Christ at the Marriage Supper. In Chapter 4, Paul now turns more specifically to the building up of the Body or the Church. The whole purpose of Christ's coming to the earth was to save the Church by His death and resurrection. The whole purpose of the Spirit amongst the Church (Ephesians 2:22) is to build her up and make her ready for Christ at the Marriage Supper. God puts the utmost precedence on the Church. That is why He "desired" for Christ to be crucified for her (Isaiah 53:20, KJV).

The Purpose of the Gifts

Consider the section in Ephesians 4:7-16. The apostle Paul taught the local church at Ephesus regarding spiritual gifts. In verse 7 we see that the gift from Christ is given to everyone. The word gift here comes from the Greek word, *dōma*, which means the character of the gift i.e. an intangible ability. Notice also that gifting is given to *everyone*. This means that all believers receive some kind of gift at some point in their lives. It is true that the seed of the gift is created before a person is born. Notice that Jeremiah 1:5 states that before Jeremiah was born, God knew him. Before Jeremiah was born God set him apart to be a prophet to the southern Kingdom of Judah to warn them of the impending destruction and conquering by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. So everyone is endowed with at least one spiritual gift before they were born. At

some point in their lives the gifts are instantiated and come to fruition to build up the Church as we will see below.

Verses 8-10 cover two ascensions by Jesus Christ. The first ascension was after He descended into Sheol to preach to those captives who would enter His Kingdom (see 1 Peter 3:19). The second ascension is in Acts 1 where Christ departed this earth and ascended into Heaven. At that time He gave the gift of the Holy Spirit as stated in verses 4-5 which is still true today. The gifting that we have available to us is manifested through the Holy Spirit.

In verse 11 Paul talks about some of the spiritual gifts. Interesting enough, the same gifts are not given to everyone and some may have more than one gift. The gifts here are not inclusive since there are other gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12. In fact, there may be more subtle gifts that one might possess, for example, hospitality, compassion, prayer, etc. According to verse 12, a gift is an intangible asset given by the Holy Spirit to strengthen the body of the Church. It builds up the saints (believers), it accomplishes the work of the ministry, and it edifies the Body of Christ (the Church).

Verse 13 talks about the spiritual gifts as being employed until the Body of Christ is consummated at the Marriage Supper (Revelation 19:9). At this point, all human nature will be removed (verse 14). All believers speaking the Truth in *love* will grow up into Him, the head, that is Christ (verse 15). Love is an important component in building up the Body of Christ as is discussed further below.

Finally, the apostle Paul mentioned that the whole Body is fitly joined together (verse 16). I attended formal physical therapy sessions. One of the phrases I learned from physical therapy is that “every part of the body is connected.” It makes sense. In order for us to walk there are numerous components of the body involved: the feet, tibia, femur, knees, hips, and all the associated muscles, ligaments, and tendons are involved. It is the same way with

the Body of Christ. Each of us has at least one spiritual gift and when all the gifts are utilized the Body is then fitly joined together, as stated by the same verse:

- “Compacted by that which every joint supplieth” (KJV) refers to all the spiritual gifts that believers have
- “Effectual working of every part” indicates the perseverance that each believer has in using their gift(s)

Regarding the Gifts

Let’s take a look at 1 Corinthians 12 for a further study into spiritual gifts. In verse 3, the apostle Paul made it clear that the Holy Spirit is responsible for the actuation of spiritual gifts in a believer. And verse 4 indicates that there is a diversity of gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit which is responsible for them. We saw [earlier](#) that every believer receives at least one gift. Verse 7 reiterates that fact.

Verses 8-10 talk about some of the gifts that are given. However, the gifts of prophecy and tongues are no longer used. The gift of prophecy was given by the Holy Spirit in the first century because the canon or 66 books of the Word of God were not yet formalized. This gift was an encouragement to the Church in advance of having the complete Word. Since we now have God’s Word, it is no longer instantiated by the Holy Spirit. The gift of tongues is also extinct, since it was only used when the Church first started. God’s Spirit was a marvel to Jews and Gentiles before they were incorporated into the Church. It was one of the gifts that helped establish the Church, but now that the Church is established, God does not give grace to that particular gift anymore.

Verses 12-27 speak about the Church as being the Body of Christ made up of many members. Verse 15 cautions against jealousy: “If the foot shall say,

Because I am not the hand (meaning spiritual gifts), I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" (KJV) We are all important to the Body of Christ, and there is no reason for us to feel less important. We must keep our eyes on edifying the Body of Christ rather than thinking about ourselves. In fact, verses 16-17 indicate that if we were all one part of the Body, then where are the other parts? Verse 18 further explains that God has set the members in the Body as He pleases. This means that we are all pre-ordained by God with a specific gift(s) to edify the Body. There is no room for jealousy because God orchestrates the gifts to serve the body as He pleases.

Verse 21 proclaims that no member can frown upon, look down upon, or discredit another member: "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (KJV). This is a warning to pastors and elders, as well as other leaders, that they regard each member in the Body as important. In fact, each member is just as important than any other. This may be hard to swallow for many leaders.

God's plan is that there be unity in the Body without schisms. Every member should care for one another (verses 25-26). This actually points to the next chapter (1 Corinthians 13). In verses 1-3 of chapter 13, the apostle Paul subscribes to love as being crucial when it comes to spiritual gifts. If a member of the body has a gift but does not love the others members, then their gift is ineffective in building up the Body. Notice what love (charity) is or is not in verses 4-7 (KJV):

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Conclusion

How does one know if they have a particular gift? Here are two qualifiers: (1) if they are happy using the gift and it is employed fairly easily, and (2) if it is effective in building up the Body of Christ. In some cases, members can reflect back to their early childhood for enjoyment with things like “I learned to ride a bike,” or “my brother and I built a treehouse in the backyard when I was seven.”²⁴ Hence sometimes our gifts were evident when we were younger. Although gifts may be apparent in our later years. Perhaps a church leader might recognize that a member has a propensity to build up the church body in a certain way.

A Gallup poll began tracking how well employees enjoy their jobs in 2000. They presented their results in 2012.²⁵ Seventy percent of people do not feel engaged in their work. Of those seventy, fifty-two percent feel “unengaged” meaning they are just working for pay and benefits. The other 18 percent fall into the category of “actively disengaged,” which means they hate their job. The inference here is that there may be a lot of people in churches who are doing jobs that don’t fit them. Something to consider.

This doesn’t mean we should be reluctant about our potential gift(s). Sam Storms suggested that members “step out and begin to love and serve others.”²⁶ If a member sees something that they may like to do, then they should try it out. The apostle Paul spoke, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). God has instituted this treasure (gifts) inside us, but we must recognize that it did not come from us. It came from God and is empowered by His Holy Spirit. Our attitude towards spiritual gifts is that they are provided for and

²⁴ Darrell L. Bock and Kymberli M. Cook, “The Table Briefing: Giftedness,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 179 (January-March 2022): 88.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 89.

²⁶ Sam Storms, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 36.

empowered by God on each occasion. But we then recognize that all glory and the gift itself belong to God. This points to humility when we use gifts.

Consider these words from Jesus to His disciples: “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” (Luke 17:10).

Chapter 12

God's Power

Sometimes we live each day of our lives in response to the environment around us. I feel that way myself until I enter a prayer session where God is present and is in control. Then I go back to living life according to the world around me. God has something better for us. He would like us to be filled with: (1) His presence with the knowledge that He is in charge and (2) His power which when He deems necessary, He can do anything for us and around us.

This message deals with the crossing of the Israelites into the Promised Land. Moses had died and now Joshua was empowered by God to lead the Israelites.

Preparing to Cross the Jordan River

In Joshua 3:1-13 we note that the Israelites were situated at the southeast corner of the Jordan river, about 10 miles north of the Dead Sea. God promised that the Israelites would enter and possess the land (Deuteronomy 1:6-8). With Joshua now the leader after the passing of Moses, the Israelites were commanded to follow the ark of the covenant in verse 3. This was not just to mean a physical following, but also a spiritual one. The ark of the covenant contained the Ten Commandments. Therefore, they were instructed to also follow God's commandments. This is a guideline for us today that we should follow God's Word.

In verse 5, the Israelites were also commanded to purify themselves. The Hebrew word for sanctify (*qadas*) means to be pure or devoted to God, set aside for God – not the world. We know this was necessary since: (1) Isaiah 59:2 tells

us that sin has separated us from God, and (2) purification is required so that God could perform a miracle among them.

God encouraged Joshua as a leader in verse 7. This is a recap of chapter 1 verses 1-9 where God first appointed Joshua to lead the Israelites after the passing of Moses. God told him that He would magnify him before Israel. As Joshua's first duty, he instructed the priests bearing the ark of the covenant to stop at the edge of the Jordan river. This was in preparation for the crossing. God then pronounced four prophecies through Joshua:

1. The Living God is among them
2. God will drive out the inhabitants of Canaan
3. The ark of the covenant will pass before them into the Jordan river
4. As soon as the souls of the feet of the 12 men from the tribes rested in the Jordan, the waters will be divided

Do we expect God to do miracles in our lives? Chapter 3:14-17 describes the miraculous separation of the waters of the Jordan river.

Crossing the River

This crossing took place about 10 miles north of the Dead Sea. The water was heaped up on the north side of the river so that water would not flow down into the sea. The priests along with the ark of the covenant stood in the middle of the river bed until all the Israelites crossed the river. After everyone crossed including the priests and the ark, the waters returned to their natural course (Joshua 4:15-19). What a marvelous display of God's power! Joshua 4:24 ascribes to the fact that the LORD is mighty!

Conclusion

We learn here not to mess with God because God has power. But we also learn that He has the power to take care of those He loves. The other point to others is do not mess with Israel when they are obeying God. The Israelites are God's people and there were more miracles to come in the Promised Land as long as Israel was obedient to God. God's power is further proclaimed here by A.W. Pink:

Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, no one can hinder Him. So His own Word expressly declares: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa 46:10); "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand" (Dan 4:35).²⁷

Pink further proclaims that God is a law unto Himself not giving an account to anyone:

The sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, infinite. When we say that God is sovereign we affirm His right to govern the universe, which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases . . . We affirm that He is under no rule or law outside of His own will and nature, that God is a law unto Himself, and that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any.²⁸

Finally, the psalmist put it this way, "But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3).

²⁷ A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, (Blacksburg, VA: Wilder Publications, LLC, 2008), 31.

²⁸ A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 21.

Chapter 13

New Year

As we enter 2025 God has provided a job for us to do. This is not only to build up the body of Christ as discussed in previous chapters, but it provides quality of life for ourselves. There are two primary areas that one should be concerned with according to **Romans 12**: (1) our attitudes, and (2) our talents. Paul provided these guidelines to the Christians in Rome as to how to live as Christians.

Our Attitudes

In Romans 12:2, the apostle Paul proclaims that we must be transformed by the “renewing” of our minds. Notice the “ing” in renewing. As we apply ourselves in reading God’s Word regularly and praying, we find ourselves renewing our minds. It is a constant process. If we are going to be involved in building up the body of Christ, we must be constantly renewed spiritually.

Verse 3 mentions that we must not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. In other words, we must be humble. Our model for this is the Lord Jesus Christ. He came into this world humbly as a baby and exited this world humbly as the sacrifice for our sins on the cross. Furthermore, we must be humble if the Holy Spirit is going to work through us. If we claim some kind of pride for something we have done or said, then that will hinder the Holy Spirit working through us. We must be humble for God to receive the glory in whatever we say or do.

Verse 9 indicates that one should love without “dissolution.” In this context, “dissolution” means to love without omission. There should not be any constraints or conditions tied to love. The following verse explains this by

saying to love “in honor preferring one another.” This reminds me of Philippians 2:3 which advises us to consider one another as more important than ourselves. Is that how we conduct our lives? Do we have to remind ourselves constantly to prefer others this way or have we trained ourselves so that it occurs naturally?

We are reminded in verse 11 not to be slothful in “business.” The word “business” actually refers to our talents or gifts which we will discuss below. Along with this we are to be serving the Lord with all fervency regarding our talents.

In verse 12, we receive encouragement when things are not going well and we are to rejoice in hope. When things are not going well our goal is to trust in the Lord meaning hope in Him. When we do experience hope in such circumstances then we rejoice. The verse concludes that we are to continue in spontaneous prayer.

We are reminded in verse 13 to specialize in hospitality. Christians should be willing to practice hospitality to all who might come into their homes. The verse further explains that we are to especially distribute to the necessity of other Christians.

Verse 14 is a difficult attitude for any human being including a Christian. We are to bless those who persecute us and not to curse them. Our natural instinct when we have been wronged is to retaliate. In one respect, we want to police them in letting them know they were wrong – perhaps an attempt to correct them. But the antithesis of this is to bless them when we are wronged. Why would Christ issue such a command? First of all, He blessed those who persecuted Him. Cursing was not His attitude. Secondly, since we have been bought with a price and now belong to Him, He expects us to act like Him.

We notice in verses 15 and 16 that we should be of the same mind as others. If they weep, we weep with them. If they rejoice, we rejoice with them.

Be of the same mind as others. We should liken ourselves to where others are at. In conversation we should discover their current point of view and then engage them on their terms. Even those who would be considered of “low esteem” are target audiences for us.

Verses 17 and 18 advise us not to return evil for evil. If someone has wronged us, we are not to wrong them back or recompense them the same way they treated us. If this occurs during a conversation then we should let the other party know that we are offended – giving them an opportunity to apologize (Matthew 18:15). Our goal is to live peaceably with everyone.

Verses 19-21 in a similar way remind us not to avenge ourselves. Vengeance belongs to God and Him alone.

Our Talents

In verses 4-8, Paul encourages the Christians regarding their talents (or gifts). It is not just our attitudes that are important, but also our talents in serving the body of Christ (why else are we still here on this earth?). Each Christian has a gift according to Ephesians 4:7. Paul made it clear that we are members of one body, that is the Body of Christ according to 1 Corinthians 13. Therefore, there should not be any discord in Christ’s body, and if there is, we should seek to remove it according to Matthew 18:15.

Romans 12:5 goes one step further in declaring that “we are members of one another.” This makes it clear that we should be serving one another and not ourselves. This is why the definition of a minister is a servant. But that is also true for all Christians.

Verses 6-8 continue with some of the talents in the Church. But there are many others. See [Chapter 11](#) for a discussion about spiritual gifts.

One of the things that has interested me in the course of forty-five years as a believer is that God uses people to bring other people into the Body of

Christ as fellow believers. If He wanted to, He could bring them in Himself. But instead, He chose to use each of us. To further this effort, He has equipped us with specific talents. One does not have to be equipped as an evangelist to serve this effort. Most if not all of us have friends, and over time, we might find an opportunity to share something about our trust in Jesus Christ. Sometimes just saying to a friend, “I’ll be praying for you,” is enough to encourage them to think about asking Christ for forgiveness for their sins and trusting Him as the Lord of their lives.

That brings me to another interesting point. God also uses people to encourage or build up the Body of Christ. According to Revelation 19:9, 17, all believers in Heaven will be present at the Marriage Supper. This is an event in Heaven reserved for believers after the final Judgment. The Body of Christ is the full group of believers who will be present. However, in the meantime, God is building up the Body of Christ (the current believers) in terms of their trust and faith in Him and their service to others.

Romans 12:11 tells us that we are to serve the Lord by using our talents (or gifts). God has specifically given these talents to us to build up and encourage the Body of Christ. This requires us to think about others above ourselves – to put others first. Consider these words that Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and **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” (bold font mine; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 KJV). Christ died on the cross for our sins, but when we repented of our sins and accepted Christ as our Savior and Lord we now belong to Him – we are not our own. The same is true in a master-slave relationship. We now belong to Him, and as such, we are tasked with the talents He has given us to build up and encourage other believers (the Body of Christ).

How does one know if they have a particular talent? They can look back in their life and consider what they enjoyed doing or what they were able to do fairly easily. These are called innate talents from birth. It is possible also for one to acquire a gift later in life. Perhaps a person found a particular course of study interesting. Prayer and pondering about these things will enable a person to discover their talents.

Once a person has realized their talents, they must determine when they will employ them. Time is important because once it has passed, it is gone. Scheduling time for our talents is very important. How do you schedule your time? Most iPhones now have a calendar app to record entries. I choose to write down important tasks from the phone on paper, giving them an asterisk as the most important tasks for the day. Our time is a gift from God to be used to build up the Body of Christ.

Lastly, a believer in Christ must recognize tithing. Leviticus 27:30 calls out for a tithe to be made to the LORD. It is essentially giving back to God some of the provisions He has given us as a part of worship. Deuteronomy 14:22 specifies giving one-tenth of all provisions or wages gained. In today's Church, the tithe is generally used to build up the Body of Christ. Some give to a local church, others to a 501c3 organization. A believer could even use it to maintain their own talent in building up the Body of Christ. For example, if one were to use their talent in teaching the Bible to boys and girls, they might use their tithe to purchase teaching aids.

Conclusion

The two-fold response that we learn from Romans 12 is that we should work on our attitude and our talents, time, and treasure to build up the Body of Christ. This is consistent with 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 2. It answers the question, "Why are we here on this earth?" When we are building up the body

of Christ, we enjoy quality of life knowing that we are fulfilling how God is working through us in accordance with His Word. Have you ever thought about which talents God has given you?

Chapter 14

Jericho

One of my favorite narratives in the Old Testament is the story of Jericho. It was a city situated several miles north of the Dead Sea on the western side of the Jordan River. When the Israelites approached the Promised Land, they crossed over from the eastern side of the river. The first city they encountered was Jericho. It was a walled city, 360 yards north to south and 180 yards east to west.

It was an imposing city with not one wall, but two: an inner wall and an outer one. The ground outside the inner wall sloped down to a smaller wall. When the archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon excavated the west side of the city, she discovered a heavy fill of red bricks on the front and the back of the outer wall, and an opening at the inner wall. The structure of the inner wall was red bricks. Clearly, there was some activity (miracle from the LORD!) that caused the red bricks from the inner wall to tumble down to the outer wall, making a ramp for outsiders to gain entrance to the city.

This message deals with the conquering of the first city in Canaan. Only the complete obedience to God's Word would allow the Israelites the ability to conquer the city.

Preparation to Raid Jericho

This narrative is found in the book of **Joshua 5:13-6:27**. In verse 13 we notice that Joshua was approached by someone who identified Himself as the Captain of the LORD. In verse 15 the Captain told Joshua "To loose the shoe from his foot." Recall that Moses was asked by God in a burning bush to remove his sandal because he was standing on holy ground (Exodus 3).

Therefore, the incident here in Joshua was either an angel sent by God or a theophany (a manifestation of God in human form). Joshua asked the Captain if He was on Jericho's side or his side. The Captain replied, "neither," but He was on God's side. The real question remained: whose side was Joshua on (the side of the Captain or Jericho).

In chapter 6:2, God through the Captain was still speaking to Joshua. God said, "I have given into thine hand Jericho." The word "given" here is a past participle meaning that it is a guaranteed fulfillment. God felt it necessary to encourage Joshua when he was facing a walled city.

Notice the use of the number 7. Seven priests were involved in the march around the walled city. They marched for seven days, marching seven times on the seventh day. God's Word normally uses the number 7 to mean completion (e.g. God's creation was completed in seven days). In this case, it refers to the complete destruction of Jericho. Marching around the city seven times on the seventh day was certainly possible since the aforementioned dimensions approximate the distance around a par-4 hole on a golf course.

The complete destruction of Jericho was necessary since the inhabitants behaved with a complete lack of morality. They performed child sacrifices and all kinds of sexual promiscuity. Verse 6:17 indicates that the city was "accursed." Also, God told Abraham that his descendants would come back to this place since the "sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" (Genesis 15:16). A similar situation was present for many cities in Canaan (the Promised Land) which is another reason why God replaced the Canaanites with the Israelites. Ironically, it was the Canaanites who attacked the Israelites – not the other way around. According to Joshua 11:20: "For it was the LORD Himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that He might destroy them totally." Compare this with the time the Israelites were in Egyptian bondage for 400 years. Moses delivered them by the hand of God only after

Pharaoh's heart was hardened 10 times during the plagues. Similarly, God induced the hardening of the hearts of the Canaanites so that they would attack the Israelites. Countries today, including our own, are subject to God's Judgment.

The Actual Raid of Jericho

In verse 20, we notice that the walls of the city came down when the people shouted on the seventh day and the priests blew the trumpets. This was a supernatural act by God in response to the faithfulness and obedience of the Israelites.

According to verses 17 and 22-23, the lives of Rahab and her family were spared. Why was this so? Deuteronomy 20:16 tells us that **she was faithful to God** in hiding the Israeli spies. Therefore, God had mercy on her family. The other reason is that God planned for this prostitute to be in the lineage of Jesus Christ. Rahab herself became an Israelite and married Salmon. She was the great-grandmother of King David who was in the direct lineage of Jesus Christ. God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. God uses whomever He wants to show His power and to receive glory.

Faithfulness to God's Word is important. The phrase, "Word of the LORD" is mentioned in the Old Testament 318 times; 19 times in the New Testament (in addition to Christ's words). The entire Bible, in effect, is the "Word of the LORD." Consider these verses: "The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold" (Psalm 119:71) and "If you remain in me [Jesus Christ] and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7). If a person wants an effective prayer life, then they should read God's Word more earnestly.

Chapter 15

Obedience to Authorities

We have entered a new administration in our country. People for centuries have endured those in authority. In fact, the book of Romans was written when the Gentiles and Israelites were faced with secular rule from the Romans and spiritual rule from the Pharisees and Sadducees (in the case of the Jewish Christians). Here in the book of Romans, the apostle Paul wanted to encourage all Christians that they should obey all authorities including Christ as the supreme authority over all.

Conduct as Believers

Romans 13:1 says that all powers are ordained by God. The word powers comes from the Greek word, *exousia*, which means rulers and authorities. The word ordained is from the Greek word, *tasso*, defined as appointed. Authorities are typically hierarchal, meaning that one authority reports to another. One example of this is the patriarchal hierarchy in the Old Testament. The first chapter of the book of Matthew traces the patriarchal hierarchy from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all the way to Jesus Christ. Someone has to take responsibilities for marriages and families and God determined that the husband/father is that person. Of course, there are other hierarchies when it comes to authorities (bosses, civil authorities, spiritual authorities, the Word of God, who is Jesus Christ according to John 1:14: “and the Word became flesh.”)

Let us take the authority of the husband. Ephesians 5:25 tells us, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle

or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (TNIV).” In a similar sense, the love that Jesus Christ has for the Church is phenomenal. He actually gave Himself up to be crucified on the cross for our sins so that we would have forgiveness and eternal life. This kind of selfless love, to this degree, is how a Christian husband is to love his wife. If he does so, then she is more able to submit to him as outlined in verse 22.

Everyone is subject to a higher power (Romans 13:1). Everyone has a father, so that means that all children are inclusive. Therefore, understanding the principle of submitting to those in authority applies to all of us. Keep in mind that resisting authorities is resisting the ordinance of God as indicated in verse 2. If one is respecting those in authority, they can actually receive praise from that authority.²⁹ However, those who resist authority can expect unfortunate circumstances (verse 3). Authority is the minister (Greek word, *diakonos* – meaning servant or agent) of God. Many local churches have deacons who derive their position from *diakonos* in 1 Timothy 3. They have the authority as servants of God to help manage the local church.

Hebrews 13:17 tells us to “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.” God expects us to respect and obey those who have been appointed to lead us. Spiritual benefits can be obtained by respecting our leaders: “By following the guidance and teachings of spiritual leaders, individuals can grow in their faith, maturity, understanding of God’s Word, and maintain unity.”³⁰ When it comes to civil affairs, believers must respect their leaders. However, when there is conflict with God’s Word, God is to be obeyed. Dale Goldsmith defines it this way: “In the major conflict – that between God’s will and state

²⁹ Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 1221.

³⁰ Bible Wisdom Hub, "What is Spiritual Authority According to the Bible?" Accessed February 14, 2025. <https://biblewisdomhub.org/what-is-spiritual-authority-according-to-the-bible>.

actions – the basic decision for Christians is clear: God is to be obeyed. This is not, however, a license to rebel against the state. Rather, it is to submit to whatever punishment the government wants to inflict on a person. The criteria for evaluating the justice of a government's actions come from God."³¹

Romans 13:5 tells us to bear witness to one's own moral conduct (conscience is from the Greek word, *syneidesis*). In our daily activities we must be mindful about what is the right thing to do in each situation, realizing that God is behind the existence of one's government.³² Keep in mind that defying authorities is defying God who ordained it. And according to Psalm 119:60 we should obey promptly: "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Finally, in verse 7 we are to pay tribute (Greek word, *phoros*, meaning tax or gift) to the authorities. Other items what we should give to our authorities are:

- Custom (Greek word, *telos*, meaning complete pay for services)
- Fear (Greek word, *phobos*, meaning reverence)
- Honor (Greek word, *time*, meaning respect)

The timing for obedience is very important. One should not ponder whether to obey or not but should act immediately. When driving, we naturally slow down the car and come to a stop for a stop sign. If an emergency vehicle is coming towards us, we naturally pull over to let it by. Obedience to God's Word as well as civil authorities is something we should act on right away. Psalm 119:60, KJV says, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Also in Proverbs 3:27-28, KJV: "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee."

³¹ Dale Goldsmith, *New Testament Ethics: An Introduction* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1988), 57.

³² Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 1766.

One should realize that there are rewards for obedience. God does recompense those who obey their authorities. This is not meant to be an exclusive list, but just examples:

- Long life
 - “Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:2-3, KJV).
 - “And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days” (1 Kings 3:14, KJV).
- Prosperity
 - “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land ...” (Isaiah 1:9, KJV).
 - “And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered” (2 Chronicles 31:20-21, KJV).
- Financial Success
 - “The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow” (Deuteronomy 28:12).

However, the consequences for disobedience are not attractive:

- Premature death
 - “But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it” (Deuteronomy 30:17-18, KJV).
- Afflictions
 - “The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me ...The Lord will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed” (Deuteronomy 28:20,27, KJV).
- Broken relationships
 - “Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof” (Deuteronomy 28:30, KJV).
- Losses
 - “Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it. Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms

shall eat them. Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit. Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity. All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume” (Deuteronomy 28:38-42, KJV).

- Financial *unsuccess*
 - “He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail” (Deuteronomy 28:44, KJV).

False Authorities

Sometimes spiritual authorities (pastors, elders, etc.) are not following God’s Word. In 1 Timothy 3:2 God tells us that these leaders must be above reproach. If these human leaders are harboring any kind of sin or a situation where they do not love others (see 1 Corinthians 13), then they do not meet the requirements of being a spiritual leader.

Read Romans 16:17-20. We are to watch out for those who cause division contrary to God’s Word (verse 17). Divisions are caused when one or more parties are not in tune with God’s Word (otherwise there would be unity). Recall 1 Corinthians 12 which tells us that believers are to use their gifts to edify others. Then the following chapter provides a lengthy definition of the word love (charity in the KJV). These false authorities should recall Philippians 2:3 which reminds us to consider others as more important than ourselves. Romans 16:17 tells us to avoid these false authorities. Such people are not following God but their own appetites (verse 18). They use smooth talk and flattery to deceive the minds of the naïve. Don’t allow them to shape your actions, attitudes, and beliefs. Consider Ephesians 5:6: “Let no one deceive you with empty words.”

Proper Authorities

Human authorities only have power for a relatively short time. We think of authorities such as: Saul, David, Nebuchadnezzar, Washington, Lincoln, Billy Graham, and Franklin Graham. God only appropriates a certain life span to each of them. However, their motto should be what is stated by King Solomon in 1 Kings 3:9: “So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to determine right from wrong; for who can govern this great people of your?”

The foundation for authority in the Bible lies in the belief that God has the ultimate authority over all creation. In the book of Genesis, God gave Adam and Eve authority over the earth, instructing them to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). Leaders are seen as accountable to God for the well-being of their “flock.” Believers, in turn, are accountable to their leaders, creating a system of mutual respect and responsibility and a stable society.

Chapter 16

Ai

In previous chapters we discussed the stain of both sins that we are aware of and [unaware of](#) (Leviticus 4). But now we are going to consider the effect of individual sin on others. Each of us has a tiny amount of physical DNA from Adam and Eve, but now we have a pronounced amount of spiritual DNA inherited from them known as sin, and its effect on everyone around us.

Israelites Defeated at Ai

Previously the Israeli conquest of [Jericho](#) was presented. It was a tremendous success for Israel, but unbeknown to Joshua the “accursed thing” was taken as we find here in Joshua 7:1. The “accursed thing” comes from the Hebrew word, *herem*, which means devoted unto divine service. The Israelites were told by God to not only defeat the people in Jericho completely, but to bring the silver and gold back into the Temple treasury. This disobedience, or sin, was done by Achan. Achan stole a Babylonian robe, silver, and gold and buried it underground in his tent.

God realized this sin and then caused a humiliating defeat on the part of the Israelites when they attempted to conquer the people at Ai (Joshua 7:1-26). The defeat resulted in the loss of about 36 soldiers not to mention the demotivation among the troops.

Joshua did the right thing by imploring God regarding this situation. God’s reply in Joshua 7:12 was that He would no longer be with Joshua and Israel unless they destroyed the “accursed thing.” Psalm 66:18 tells us: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me.” Unrepentant sin is a spiritual cancer. It cannot be hidden but will be found out. During the defeat of the inhabitants at [Jericho](#), Achan stole the “accursed thing” comprised of a

Babylonian robe and some silver and gold. God revealed Achan as the culprit using lots. Achan and his family were stoned and burned to root out sin from the camp.

Contamination of the Community

The event of Achan's sin was a prelude to another event in Israel's history. Read Joshua 22:9-34. After the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh settled on the opposite (east) side of the Jordan River, they built an imposing altar. The other 9 ½ tribes on the west side of the river found out about this altar. These tribes recalled what happened to Achan and his family. One concern was that they did not want to be associated with the "supposed" sin that the 2 ½ tribes may have committed by worshipping another God beside the LORD. The concern was that if this was truly a sin event, they did not want the effects of the sin to affect all 12 tribes.

The 2 ½ tribes assured the others that the altar was strictly a "replica" of the altar on the west side and that it was constructed as a witness to other tribes and generations. It was used to worship the LORD and not anyone or anything else.

The effect of unrepentant sin still exists today. It occurs in some marriages, families, extended families, cities, states, and countries. If left unconfessed the effect(s) of God's judgment will spread like a spiritual cancer.

Implement Accountability

Don't leave unrepentant sin an opportunity to fester in our relationships with others including the Church. Just as the LORD held Israel responsible for their individual sins, so has God held the Church responsible for their sin. Unrepentant sin from an individual can affect a local church.

What should we do? Confess our personal sins to Christ on a daily basis and ask Him for forgiveness. This will allow the Holy Spirit to work through us, especially with regard to our gifts which are used to build up the Church. Secondly, we should listen to our spouses and self-reflect on any unchecked sin. We can also meet with a trusted Christian brother or sister to do the same.

Remember, if sin was not that big of a deal, then it would not be necessary for Christ to personally handle it on the cross. Rather, God “desired” (Isaiah 53:10, KJV) to send Jesus Christ to die on the cross as a “total” sacrifice for our sin. Yes, individual unrepentant sin is that big of a deal!

Chapter 17

The Continuing Debt to Love One Another

Recently we discussed the aspects of [gifts](#) in the Church. However, our gifts do not amount to anything unless we have the overarching gift of love. Love is the grace of God that makes any gift effective. In fact, 1 Cor 13 says that even the most prominent gifts are a “tinkling symbol” without love. It is the glue that holds the Church together.

Love for a believer begins with **Romans 13**. Verse 8 tells us that we ought to love everyone else. The first consideration here is that we have a debt. As believers in Christ we have a continuing debt to love others until we either pass into the arms of Christ or are raptured into His arms. This debt will never cease in this world. We cannot say that we will love others if we feel like it. That is a worldly, human response. We must be spiritually disciplined to love others constantly.

The word love comes from the Greek, *agapao*, which means the following: to love, esteem, cherish, favor, honor, respect, accept, prize, and relish. The extended definition is to be devoted to or meeting the needs of others. A believer can say that they love others when they accomplish these traits all the time.

Years ago my wife and I hiked Mt. Washington while staying in the area for the weekend. On Sunday we decided to attend a small church in nearby Gorham. We met a woman after the service who expressed extreme feelings of love. She was very warm and uplifting, mentioning the word love constantly. I was surprised by her demeanor because I had never seen anything like that before. Perhaps she audibly expressed what we all should feel all the time.

Whenever we are in the presence of another person, we should have facial expressions, words, and a behavior that express love.

I am reminded of another example of a lawn I would drive by in the next town over. It simply posted a sign that had a picture of a heart with the word "Love." I always enjoyed passing by that lawn because it reminded me of what I must do all the time. The person that lives there obviously feels the same way. What an outward pleasant reminder of how we should respond to others!

Love also exhibits itself when we show mercy to others. Consider the parable of the king and his servants in Matthew 18:23-35. The king had a servant that owed him a sizable debt. When the king called on the servant, the servant begged him to relieve him of his debt for his family's sake. The king had mercy on his servant and erased his debt. Later, the servant had a fellow-servant who owed him a debt. The servant was not merciful to his fellow-servant and demanded payment otherwise the fellow-servant would be jailed. Other fellow-servants heard about this and told it to the king. The king then called in the servant: "Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" And his lord was "wroth," and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:23-35, KJV). The point of the parable is that God has given us His mercy, therefore, He expects us to do the same to others. If not, we may not experience the same blessings we had before like the unmerciful servant. Jesus said, "As I have loved you so you must love one another" (John 13:34). Just as we owe a debt to God by obeying His Word, so we owe a continuing debt to love others.

Sydney Barr wrote, "Love often necessitates putting aside every vestige of self-interest; it requires persistence in one's efforts for another even when there is no satisfying response; hardest of all, it demands that the Christian care

deeply for the unlovely.”³³ This quote parallels Philippians 2:3 which tells us that we ought to consider others as more important than ourselves. This is what Barr is referring to in the phrase, “putting aside every vestige of self-interest.” It is a lifestyle change that requires a habit-forming response. Love is something that we have to work at and incorporate into our lifestyle.

In the above reference to Barr, it is noted that love “requires persistence in one’s efforts for another even when there is no satisfying response.” There are some people we meet who do not respond to us even when we show them love. I can think of one golfer in my golf league who does not respond to positive gestures, even a “Good Morning.” I still persist in showing this person love, but Barr’s statement reminds us to continue this effort.

Barr finally stated that love “demands that the Christian care deeply for the unlovely.” This is a most difficult thing to do since most people would not even regard the unlovely. In fact, we live in a world which is filled with street demonstrations pointing to their hate for someone or something. Is that the way we are to act? What would Jesus do? We need to contemplate our love for any human being we come into contact with either on the phone, in person, or when driving. It is certainly something I am trying to improve on in my daily contacts with others.

Paul Tillich wrote that love is the “blood” of spiritual life.³⁴ An analogy is our circulatory system in our bodies. The blood in our bodies is the pathway for oxygen, enzymes, nutrients, etc. to pass between our organs. In a sense blood feeds our bodies. Tillich further wrote, “God’s love inside of us is the spiritual ‘blood’ that feeds the Church.”³⁵ Love is necessary to maintain

³³ O. Sydney Barr, *The Christian New Morality: A Biblical Study of Ethics*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1969), 65-66.

³⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 134.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

relationships among Christians. It also empowers us to use our talents or gifts to minister to one another (1 Corinthians 13), thereby sustaining the Church.

Accept the One Whose Faith is Weak

Consider the verses in Romans 14. Who are the weak? Verse one makes reference to the “weak in faith.” The word weak comes from the Greek, *astheneo*, which means spiritually weak. This is ascribed to Christians who are new believers or who are not well acquainted with the Word of God.

The apostle Paul in Romans wrote to the early (new) local churches in Italy. These believers were in the company of Jews who subscribed not only to the Torah (the first five books in the Old Testament), but also abided by the man-made Jewish law. This law had a number of restrictions about diet. The new Christians were confused as to whether or not they should obey the Jewish diet, or if they were free to eat whatever they wanted. Jewish leaders were therefore judgmental about what Christians were eating and this put a lot of stress upon both parties.

Paul sought to solve this dispute by indicating that a person’s diet was not about man’s law, but between a Christian believer and God. Notice in verses 6-8 that the phrases “unto the Lord” and “to the Lord” occur six times. This indicates that a believer should consider, in conjunction with God, what they should or should not eat. Diets, therefore, can be different even among Christian believers. Considering this, we should then extend grace to other believers since we are all accountable to God. Verses 10-12 can be summarized as, “Why judge someone if we are going to stand before God at the day of judgment at the second coming of Christ?”

In a similar fashion a believer ought to be able to wear, when attending a local church, what they feel comfortable between themselves and God. As long as they are clean what difference does it make? That is between themselves and

God. Believers should have a degree of freedom to make decisions as long as it does not violate God's Word. If it does, then another believer may speak gracefully to them. Barry Corey put it this way, "Christians should live with 'firm centers and soft edges,' standing firmly convicted of the truth of the gospel while being 'receivable' by those with whom they disagree."³⁶ When looking at another person we must be firmly rooted in God's Word. Then we are to use graceful words and actions if we are to address another person respectfully. If the issue at hand is not in God's Word, then let it go.

Bear With the Failings of the Weak

Consider the verses in Romans 15:1-7. Again, the word weak comes from the Greek, *astheneo*, which means spiritually weak. This is ascribed to Christians who are new believers or who are not well acquainted with the Word of God. Verse 1 declares that we are to bear or support them. This will require patience as verse 2 says to please them for their edification. We have seen this term before in [Ephesians 2](#) meaning that a person is edified to build up the Church. The key focus here is the Church. Therefore, we must build up or edify those who are spiritually weak. My outdoor lawn needs to be built up on occasion and then maintained regularly. It is the same with the Church, and those involved in the building and maintaining of the Church include the spiritually weak.

After all, Christ did not please Himself by sacrificing Himself on the cross. However, it did please God the Father to bruise Him (Isaiah 53:10, KJV). The Father was pleased because Christ's bruising meant the salvation of millions of souls, and this resulted in the building up and maintaining of the

³⁶ Andrew J. Cress, review of Barry H. Corey, *Love Kindness: Discover the Power of a Forgotten Christian Virtue*, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2016, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, (July-September 2018), 383-384.

Church. Christ's crucifixion therefore is the model, figuratively, for a believer's self-sacrificing attitude towards others.

Verse 4 tells us that these things were written for our learning to accomplish unity in the Church. We study and learn these verses (and remember them) so that we can build up the spiritually weak. We must then apply what we have learned to our daily living.

What helps us in ministering to the spiritually weak is that we strive to be likeminded with one another (v.5). The word likeminded comes from the Greek *phroneo*, which means to think the same thing. We must respect and love a person for who they are and where they are at. Next time you have the opportunity to relate to one who is spiritually weak, try to come to an agreement during the conversation. Take the other person's point of view. This is a challenging habit for me since I am always thinking of how I can contribute to the conversion either from my own experience or thinking. But focusing on the other person's position, and even asking questions, will bring us to a place of being likeminded. 1 Corinthians 12:26 tells us, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (KJV).

When we are of one mind and our words are in agreement, we glorify God since we are in unity (v.6). God actually receives glory when the members of His Church are in unity. How important it is to take this message to heart!

Finally in verse 7, we are to receive one another as Christ has received us. Christ has wholly received us when we came to Him for our salvation. We are to do the same to others. In this environment, there are no hindrances or grudges. When we receive and accept one another we glorify Christ and build up the Church.

Conclusion

The Word of God is one of the most intriguing works ever written. It is God's message to people regarding a number of topics, but surely the ones He wants us to be aware of. These sermons have sought to help a believer (or non-believer) with their relationship with God. This is one of the most important considerations in all of Christianity.

Another importance is the relationship of a believer with the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ, where the Holy Spirit resides, and is God's vehicle on this earth as well as for eternity. God has given us gifts to use to build up and maintain the Church and He fully expects us to use them.

We as believers are not like non-believers who live their existence here on earth as if it were their only existence. We have an existence with Christ for eternity. As such, we must recognize our humility before Christ so that we can rely on His Power, not our own infallibilities. It is only when we have arrived at this realization that we can live our lives for Him and His Kingdom, not for ourselves.

Finally, we must not lose sight of what holds believers in the Church together. It is the continuing debt to love one another. We can only accomplish this when we recognize Christ's love for us when He died on the cross for our sins. When we accept His forgiveness, we can then in turn love others (believers and non-believers).

If you have not yet experienced a relationship with Jesus Christ then I certainly hope you will confess your sins to Him and accept Him as the Lord of your life. If you have done this, then you should continue with a daily habit of reading God's Word and praying with Jesus Christ. You should also find a local Christian church where you can find mutual encouragement and fellowship. The journey starts now for the remainder of our physical lives and then onto eternity, so why not take advantage of it?

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