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“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

1. Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration.

The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation.

The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.

(Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)

2. The Trinity

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons.

God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation.

God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.

(Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; John 3:16 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.)

3. God the Father

God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

The qualities and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also those of the Father.

(Gen. 1:1; Deut. 4:35; Ps. 110:1, 4; John 3:16; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:28; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 John 4:8; Rev. 4:11.)

4. God the Son (Jesus Christ)

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged.

Forever truly God, He became also truly human, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God.

By His miracles, He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven to minister in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf.

He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things.

(Isa. 53:4-6; Dan. 9:25-27; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-3, 14; 5:22; 10:30; 14:1-3, 9, 13; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; 2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17-19; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 2:9-18; 8:1, 2.)

5. God the Holy Spirit

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption.

He is as much a person as are the Father and the Son. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God.

Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth.

(Gen. 1:1, 2; 2 Sam. 23:2; Ps. 51:11; Isa. 61:1; Luke 1:35; 4:18; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7-13; Acts 1:8; 5:3; 10:38; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 12:7-11; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Peter 1:21.)

6. Creation

God has revealed in Scripture the authentic and historical account of His creative activity. He created the universe, and in a recent six-day creation the Lord made "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" and rested on the seventh day.

Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of the work He performed and completed during six literal days that together with the Sabbath constituted the same unit of time that we call a week today.

The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to

care for it. When the world was finished it was “very good,” declaring the glory of God.

(Gen. 1-2; 5; 11; Exod. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Isa. 45:12, 18; Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; r11:3; Rev. 10:6; 14:7.)

7. Nature of Humanity

Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else.

When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death.

Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment.

(Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 15; 3; Ps. 8:4-8; 51:5, 10; 58:3; Jer. 17:9; Acts 17:24-28; Rom. 5:12-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 3:4; 4:7, 8, 11, 20.)

8. The Great Controversy

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe.

This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God’s adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin.

This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the global flood, as presented in the historical account of Genesis 1-11.

Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.

(Gen. 3; 6-8; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:4; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Rev. 12:4-9.)

9. The Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ

In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life, and the whole creation may better understand the infinite and holy love of the Creator.

This perfect atonement vindicates the righteousness of God's law and the graciousness of His character; for it both condemns our sin and provides for our forgiveness.

The death of Christ is substitutionary and expiatory, reconciling and transforming. The bodily resurrection of Christ proclaims God's triumph over the forces of evil, and for those who accept the atonement, assures their final victory over sin and death. It declares the Lordship of Jesus Christ, before whom every knee in heaven and on earth will bow.

(Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:1; Isa. 53; John 3:16; 14:30; Rom. 1:4; 3:25; 4:25; 8:3, 4; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 20-22; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 19-21; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 2:15; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.)

10. The Experience of Salvation

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God.

Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, Substitute and Example. This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace.

Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life.

Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment.

(Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:1-4, 14-17; 5:6-10; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8.

11. Growing in Christ

By His death on the cross, Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom.

Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds.

No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church.

We are also called to follow Christ's example by compassionately ministering to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience.

(1 Chronicles 29:11; Psalm 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matthew 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Romans 8:38, 39; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil. 3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)

12. The Church

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to humanity, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel.

The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word revealed in the Scriptures. The church is God's family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant.

The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her.

At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all the ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish.

(Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:3-7; Matthew 16:13-20; 18:18; 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38-42; 7:38; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:22, 23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11; 5:23-27; Colossians, 18; 1 Peter 2:9.)

13. The Remnant and its Mission

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent.

This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness.

(Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4.)

14. Unity in the Body of Christ

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.

Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children.

(Ps. 133:1; Matt. 28:19, 20; John 17:20-23; Acts 17:26, 27; Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Gal. 3:27-29; Eph. 2:13-16; 4:3-6, 11-16; Col. 3:10-15.)

15. Baptism

By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior, become His people, and are received as members by His church.

Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit.

It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings.

(Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12, 13.)

16. The Lord's Supper (Communion)

The Lord's Supper is a participation in the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus as an expression of faith in Him, our Lord and Savior.

In this experience of communion Christ is present to meet and strengthen His people. As we partake, we joyfully proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again.

Preparation for the Supper includes self-examination, repentance, and confession. The Master ordained the service of foot-washing to signify renewed cleansing, to express a willingness to serve one another in Christlike humility, and to unite our hearts in love.

The communion service is open to all believing Christians.

(Matt. 26:17-30; John 6:48-63; 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:23-30; Rev. 3:20.)

17. Spiritual Gifts and Ministries

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts that each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity.

Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions.

According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people.

Some members are called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, and teaching ministries particularly needed to equip the members for service, to build up the church to spiritual maturity, and to foster unity of the faith and knowledge of God.

When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built up in faith and love.

(Acts 6:1-7; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27, 28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.)

18. The Gift of Prophecy

The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy.

This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church.

They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.

(Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9.)

19. The Law of God

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age.

These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Savior.

Salvation is all of grace and not of works, and its fruit is obedience to the Commandments.

This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow human beings. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness.

(Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 28:1-14; Ps. 19:7-14; 40:7, 8; Matt. 5:17-20; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:7-10; Rom. 8:3, 4; Eph. 2:8-10; Heb. 8:8-10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.)

20. The Sabbath

The gracious Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation.

The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom.

The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts.

(Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11; 31:13-17; Lev. 23:32; Deut. 5:12-15; Isa. 56:5, 6; 58:13, 14; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Matt. 12:1-12; Mark 1:32; Luke 4:16; Heb. 4:1-11.)

21. Stewardship

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use.

We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow human beings, and by returning tithe and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church.

Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. Stewards rejoice in the blessings that come to others as a result of their faithfulness.

(Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chron. 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Mal. 3:8-12; Matt. 23:23; Rom. 15:26, 27; 1 Cor. 9:9-14; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:7.)

22. Christian Behavior

We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life.

For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty.

While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit.

It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well.

Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness.

(Gen. 7:2; Exod. 20:15; Lev. 11:1-47; Ps. 106:3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 10:5; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 2:4; 4:8; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 John 2:6; 3 John 2.)

23. Marriage and the Family

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship.

For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church.

Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, a man and a woman who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ through marriage may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church.

God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message.

Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words, they are to teach them that Christ is a loving, tender,

and caring guide who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God which embraces both single and married persons.

(Gen. 2:18-25; Exod. 20:12; Deut. 6:5-9; Prov. 22:6; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:3-9, 12; Mark 10:11, 12; John 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 7:7, 10, 11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-4.)

24. Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up and not humans. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross.

At His ascension, He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the holy place of the earthly sanctuary.

In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary.

It is a work of investigative judgment, which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus.

The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection.

It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom.

This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the

kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent.

(Lev. 16; Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Heb. 1:3; 2:16, 17; 4:14-16; 8:1-5; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; Rev. 8:3-5; 11:19; 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:11, 12.)

25. The Second Coming of Christ

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel.

The Savior's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die.

The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is near. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times.

(Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21.)

26. Death and Resurrection

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed.

Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord.

The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later.

(Job 19:25-27; Ps. 146:3, 4; Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10; Dan. 12:2, 13; Isa. 25:8; John 5:28, 29; 11:11-14; Rom. 6:23; 16; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 20:1-10.)

27. The Millennium and the End of Sin

The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections.

During this time the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels.

At its close Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth. The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and with Satan and his angels will surround the city; but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth.

The universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever.

(Jer. 4:23-26; Ezek. 28:18, 19; Mal. 4:1; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Rev. 20; 21:1-5.)

28. The New Earth

On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away.

The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love; and He shall reign forever. Amen.

(Isa. 35; 65:17-25; Matt. 5:5; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 11:15; 21:1-7; 22:1-5.)



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #1 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD

Introduction

In this seminar we will focus mainly on what Jesus taught in the four Gospels and the book of Acts. Someone might object that Jesus was already in heaven when the events of Acts transpired. This is true, but we must remember that Jesus commanded His disciples to teach everything that He had commanded them (Matthew 28:18-20). It is inconceivable that in the book of Acts the apostles taught anything other than what Jesus had taught them. Even Paul was taught by Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6; 22:3-10; 26:6-10) and in the desert of Arabia (Galatians 1:15-17). In this class we will also take into account other Bible texts that touch upon the same subject in review.

In this, our first lesson, we will study what Jesus said about the Word of God. Our Lord highlighted the value of the Bible in the parable of the hidden treasure:

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”
Matthew 13:44*

In this parable, the **field** represents the Bible, the **hidden treasure** represents the gospel and the willingness to sell all to buy the field represents our

willingness to give our all to find God's treasures in our study of the Bible. The Bible field contains the most precious treasures on earth and yet it lies practically unexplored. Tragically, the masses inadvertently pass over the place where its treasure is buried and don't even realize that beneath the surface is an incalculable treasure.

The wise man exclaimed that God's instruction is more precious than silver and choice gold (Proverbs 8:10). He assured us:

"How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver." Proverbs 16:16

David exclaimed that:

"The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver." Psalm 119:72

These statements about the priceless value of wisdom above silver and gold reminds us that Jesus is represented as the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:30). The wise man even compares God's words, commands, wisdom, understanding and discernment to a hidden treasure:

*"My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, ² So that you incline your to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; ³ Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, ⁴ If you seek her [**wisdom**] as silver, and search for her as for **hidden treasures**; ⁵ Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." Proverbs 2:1-5*

The Bible is a diamond in the rough, yet everyone treats it like a rhinestone. It is more precious than our home, car, money in the bank, stocks, bonds, or any other possession. And yet there it sits on the shelf, gathering dust.

Jesus and the Authority of the Word

Jesus believed in the full inspiration, authority, and trustworthiness of the Holy Scriptures. He constantly quoted the Old Testament to authenticate His person, His ministry, and His mission (cf. Mark 15:28; Luke 4:21; John 19:24, 28, 36,

37). In fact, Jesus claimed that the entire Old Testament pointed forward to Him and was fulfilled to the very letter in His life and mission (cf. John 5:39, 45-47; Luke 24:25-27, 44, 45). Jesus fulfilled the feast of Passover, Unleavened Bread, First-fruits and Pentecost right on time.

The Purpose of the Word

The lone purpose for studying the Bible is to find Jesus and develop a personal relationship with Him (John 5:39). We do not come to the Bible to learn merely something, but to know someone. We do not search the Scriptures to be informed, but to be transformed. We do not go to the Bible to learn facts, but to get personally acquainted with the Person to whom those facts point. The purpose of Bible study is not to gain information, but to receive salvation. The purpose of Bible study is to know the WHO, not only the WHAT.

Jesus is the Word in person (John 1:1-3), but the Bible provides a description of Jesus in written form. We come to know Jesus in absentia, that is, through the love letters He has left us in His Word! Love letters are composed of words, but words reveal the writer's love. So, the Bible is composed of words, but the purpose of those words is for us to come to know and love the Person whom the words describe (cf. John 20:31). In a certain sense, words describe the heart (feelings, thoughts, emotions) of the person who wrote them. So, the words of the Bible reveal the heart of Jesus to us, His deepest feelings, thoughts, and emotions.

The Nature and Power of the Word

According to Jesus, the Word of God is powerful because it accomplishes what it promises. It enacts what it contains. God spoke and the world of chaos was filled and put in order (cf. Psalm 33:6-9). In the same way, the Word of God has within it the power to recreate and put our lives in order. Jesus spoke and He calmed a storm (Mark 4:39), He spoke and cast out demons (Matthew 8:16), He spoke and healed the sick (Matthew 8:16), and He even commanded the dead to rise (John 11:43). When God speaks, His Word does what it says (see Isaiah

55:10,11). When God promises something, you can take Him at His Word (Matthew 8:8-13; Luke 4:32, 36; John 4:36-43).

The Word of God gives a person power to **overcome temptation**. That is to say, Scripture gives a person power of attorney. Jesus overcame Satan's temptations by quoting the Word of God (Matthew 4:3-11). But beware, Satan is able to quote Scripture as well, but he takes it out of context, adds to it, or subtracts from it!

Jesus taught that the Word of God is like a **seed** (Luke 8:11). When a seed falls into fallow ground, receives sunshine and rain, it germinates and produces fruit. In the same way, when God plants the Word in the heart and showers it with the rain of His Holy Spirit and the sunshine of Jesus, it germinates and produces the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives (see Luke 8:15, Galatians 5:22, 23). When the Word is planted in our heart we are able to overcome sin (Psalm 119:9-11).

Jesus taught that the Word of God is **food** (Matthew 4:3,4). As physical food gives us temporal, physical health and life, so spiritual food gives us eternal health and spiritual life (see John 6:35, 48-56, 63). Food on a plate may look good and smell good, but unless you put it in your mouth, chew it and swallow it, it will do you no good. Physically, we are composed of what we eat, and spiritually this is true also.

The Word is compared to a sword that penetrates, discerns sin and cuts it out (Hebrews 4:12, 13). This reminds us of Jesus who said that He had come not to bring peace, but a sword (Matthew 10:34-37). The speaking of the Word of God causes two opposite reactions in the listeners, it either softens the heart or hardens it.

Jesus spoke with authority because He always quoted the written Word as we can see from the following examples:

- ✓ Matthew 4:3-10: The **temptations**
- ✓ Luke 4:21: The **beginning** of His ministry
- ✓ John 5:45-47: **Moses** wrote about Him

- ✓ Mark 7: The issue over Corban
- ✓ Luke 10:26: The greatest commandment in the law
- ✓ John 8:17, 18: The need for two witnesses to confirm a statement
- ✓ Matthew 12:3-5: Conflict over the Sabbath
- ✓ Matthew 19:4-6: The issue of marriage and divorce
- ✓ Matthew 21:16: The children singing in the triumphal entry
- ✓ Matthew 21:13: The cleansing of the temple
- ✓ Matthew 21:33-46: The parable of the vineyard workers
- ✓ Mark 12:24-27: Dispute over the resurrection
- ✓ Matthew 22:41-45: Who is the Son of David?
- ✓ Luke 24:25-27: On the road to Emmaus
- ✓ Luke 24:44-47: In the Upper Room with the disciples

The rabbis were constantly wondering and asking where Jesus got His authority because He had not studied in their schools (Matthew 13:53-57; John 7:15; 21-24; 44, 45). The authority of Jesus resided in His use of Scripture to settle every conflict. On the other hand, the rabbis depended on the traditions that had been handed down from generation to generation (Matthew 7:28, 29; cf. Mark 7:1-13). In conclusion, Jesus never quoted the religious leaders of His day. In fact, Jesus condemned human traditions and opinions which contradicted the Word of God (see Mark 7:7).

The apostles understood the power of the Word in their missionary task. The Word appears 40 times in the book of Acts with expressions such as, “they gladly received the word”, “they heard the word and believed”, “with all boldness they spoke the word,” “the ministry of the word”, “the word of God increased” and “they preached the word”. Clearly, the apostles had learned from Jesus the importance of studying and preaching the Word.

Four Kinds of Responses to the Word

In the parable of the sower, Jesus described four kinds of hearts upon which the Word of God falls. Here is the symbolism and its meaning:

- ✓ The field: Represents the world (Matthew 13:38)

- ✓ The **Sower**: Jesus (Matthew 13:37)
- ✓ The **good seed**: The Word of God (Luke 8:11; 1 Peter 1:23)
- ✓ Four kinds of **soil**: Four different responses to the Word (Mark 4:15)
- ✓ By the **wayside** [Luke 8:12; Acts 24:25 (Felix); 26:27, 28 (Agrippa); 7:54, 57 (Jewish leadership); 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 (the end-time, wicked generation)]
- ✓ In **stony** ground (Luke 8:6; Matthew 13:5, 6; Matthew 13:21; Matthew 10:34-39; Mark 10:28-31)
- ✓ Among the **thorns** (Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14: four dangers; Matthew 6:25: The cares of this world; Matthew 19:16-21; 1 Timothy 6:9, 10: The deceitfulness of riches; 1 John 2:15-17: The pleasures of this life)
- ✓ In **good soil** (Luke 8:15; Galatians 5:22, 23; John 14:23); James 1:22-24; Acts 10:33)
- ✓ The **doers** of the Word will be saved (cf. Revelation 1:3; 22:7).
- ✓ The soil of the heart **can be changed** by the power of God (Acts 26:9-11; Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Principles for the Study of God's Word

We must come to the Bible with the heart of a child, that is, willing and eager to learn. We must set aside all of our pre-conceived biases and ideas and be willing to be taught (see John 7:17).

We must **search** for the truth of God in the Scriptures with all diligence. When we have found the truth, we must be willing to **give up all** to embrace it (Matthew 13:44).

We must secure the **aid of the Holy Spirit** in the study of God's Word (John 14:26). Many times we come to wrong conclusions in our Bible study because we do not ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Bible was given by the Holy Spirit and **only He can explain it** (1 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Timothy 3:16). Spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). To be physically strong, we not only need food, but also water. The food represents the Bible and the water represents the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

Finally, we must be willing to **obey** the Word of God as soon as we hear and understand it. Notice the words of Jesus in Luke 11:28: *"blessed is he who hears the Word of God and does it"*. (Read carefully what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-26; cf. Revelation 1:3; 22:7). It is not enough to say, 'Lord, Lord' but we must **do** the will of the Father. And what is the Father's will? It is sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). And how are we sanctified? Jesus said that we are sanctified by the truth and the truth is in God's Word (John 17:17).

Conclusion and Final Story

Are there storms in our lives which threaten to tear us down? Is it maybe divorce, family strife, job problems, drugs, alcohol, stress, depression, or disease? If we are willing to hear and obey the Word of God, our lives will be built on the rock and nothing shall destroy our faith!

A number of years ago a wealthy Englishman grew sick and died. When the day came for the reading of his will and the distribution of the fortune that he had left, his favorite daughter was bitterly disappointed. The father had designated in the will that she was to receive "My Bible and **all that it contains**". Knowing that her father was an ardent student of the Bible and that this Book was near and dear to his heart, she hid it away in an old trunk and went on living as before.

As time passed, adversity seemed to dog her steps. Ill health and difficulty reduced her to poverty. Broken in health and spirit, in desperation she sought a solution to her problems. After trying every other means available to her, she turned to her father's Bible seeking the answer to her difficulties. Imagine her surprise as she leafed through that long-forgotten book to find that between many of the pages of the Bible her father had secreted large Bank of England notes. She had been wealthy all of the time and had been unaware of her good fortune because she had failed to realize what her father had meant when he had given her "My Bible and all that it contains".

Our heavenly Father has left us a great treasure in the pages of this wonderful Book. We may not be able to find bank notes between the pages of the Bible,

but we can find peace, joy, hope, faith, and eternal life by studying the Book. Priceless treasures! Forgotten riches! What greater treasure can a man hope for? Many a millionaire would exchange his fortune for these valuables.



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #2 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE OF GOD

Introduction

Jesus taught the great truths of life by using everyday stories. These stories are called parables. In parables, each character is important to determine the meaning of the story. Luke 15 contains three parables of Jesus (Luke 15:1-32) and each illustrates a different kind of lost person and how to win them to Jesus. Each of these parables illustrates the relentless pursuit of God to save them.

The first parable is the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7). The sheep knew that it was lost but did not know how to find its way back to the fold. For this reason, the shepherd had to risk his own safety, leaving the fold to seek the sheep. When the shepherd found the lost sheep, he returned home, inviting neighbors and friends to the celebratory welcome.

In this story, the fold represents the numberless worlds that are safe because they have never fallen. The lost sheep represents this world that has gone astray. The shepherd leaving the fold represents Jesus who left the safety of heaven at his own risk to rescue the lost world. The celebration upon returning home represents the joy in heaven when this lost world is finally returned safe and sound to the fold. At the center of the story is Jesus who relentlessly pursues the lost sheep until He finds it. What love!

The second parable is the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). The coin is lost, but it does not know that it is lost and therefore it must be sought. In the parable, the woman who searches for the coin represents the church, the body of Christ. The coin represents those who are lost in the world and don't know it. They must be sought. The lamp represents the Bible (Psalm 109:105) that must be used to find those who are lost.

The third parable, by far the longest of the three, is the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11-32), known as the parable of the Prodigal Son. We will dedicate most of our time in this lesson to this third parable. The parable illustrates three kinds of sinners:

- ✓ The unrighteous type (when the son leaves home)
- ✓ The self-righteous type (the older brother)
- ✓ The repentant, righteous type (when the lost son returns home)

The Context of the Parable

The historical context of this parable is in Luke 15:1, 2 (cf. Mark 2:15-17; Luke 7:34, 37-39):

*"Then all the **tax collectors** and the **sinner**s drew near to Him to **hear Him**.² And the **Pharisees and scribes** complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'"*

When the Pharisees said: "*He eats with publicans and sinners*", they were really not-so-subliminally hinting that Jesus should have eaten with righteous people like them and not with the unrighteous.

It is more than ironic that Jesus, who was holy, blameless, undefiled, and separated from sinners (Hebrews 7:26), attracted to Himself the vilest and most unrighteous of sinners. So to speak, the 'scum of the earth' loved to hang out with the purest being in the universe, while those who were undefiled in their own opinion felt uncomfortable in His presence.

The lesson is clear. The closer we come to Jesus, the more the 'scum of the earth' will feel comfortable in our presence. The further we are from Jesus, the more righteous we will feel and the further we will separate ourselves from the undesirables. However, the closer we come to Jesus, the more we will discern our own sinfulness and our need of Him.

Jesus had words of encouragement for publicans and sinners but words of rebuke for the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Matthew 23:23-28). He lifted up the down-hearted and brought low those who were puffed up.

The Pharisees and scribes knew that they had sin inside but tried to cover it up on the outside. This is why they felt uncomfortable in the presence of Jesus. They knew He could read them like a book. The sinners knew that they were sinners and had nothing to hide from Jesus so they felt comfortable with Him.

The Symbols of the Parable

There are several symbols in this parable. The **father** represents God the Father, the **house** represents the family of God, the church; the **younger son** away from home represents the unrighteous sinner. The **rules** of the household represent the law of God, the **elder son** represents the self-righteous sinner, and the **returned son** represents the repentant sinner covered with the robe of the Father's righteousness. The **joy of the household** represents the rejoicing of the church when a repentant sinner returns to the family.

The Unrighteous Sinner

The younger son grew tired of the rules and regulations of his father's household. He looked upon these rules as restrictive of his freedom. He considered his father a taskmaster and himself a slave. He looked at his father as condemnatory, stern, and severe. He wanted his freedom, his independence! He desired to live his own life free from the restraints of the household.

The younger son was more concerned with His present enjoyment than his future inheritance. His focus was on the here and now, not on the sweet by and

by. His attitude was: “who cares about the future, which might never come. I want to have fun now!” His selfishness was manifest when he said to his father, “**Give me** my inheritance now” (verse 12).

The younger departed for a **far country** (verse 13). He wanted to be as far as possible from the father's rules and regulations and from his sight. We can only imagine the father attempting to explain the long-range consequences of his choices, but he did not listen. At this point in the story the father **could not reason** with his son because the son claimed to know it all!

For a while, the ‘passing pleasures of sin’ led to seeming enjoyment. Yes, sin can be pleasurable for a season. The son had ‘fun’ partying, playing around, and according to his brother, even sleeping with harlots. He had loads of friends. He felt free, unrestricted to do his own thing. Finally, no rules, no regulations! His attitude was “I can do what I want!” Sadly, many times when things seem to go well, we feel no need of God.

For a while, the pleasures of sin filled his life with ‘joy’. Yes, sin can be pleasurable and exhilarating, but the pleasure lasts only for a season (Hebrews 11:24-26). Ironically however, in the course of time, his freedom became slavery. The Bible teaches that when we proclaim our independence from God, we become slaves of sin (John 8:34-36). The son overtly broke two commandments, the fifth, “*honor your father and your mother,*” and the seventh, “*thou shall not commit adultery.*” As Ephesians 2:12, 13 says, the son was “dead in trespasses and sins” (cf. Luke 15:32). It would have done no good for the father to seek him and attempt to reason with him at this stage of the story! He was having too good a time!

However, his so-called freedom soon became a nightmare. He who wanted to live for the pleasures of the here and now without the restraints of the father's law, came upon hard times. When we separate ourselves from God and from His family (the church), we lose our freedom and dignity and become slaves. If you think that life in church is too restrictive and that a worldly life is better, think again. This is exactly what Satan wants you to think.

The young man wasted all his money and lost his 'friends'. His bondage is described by an expression we find in Luke 15:15: 'he joined himself'. In the Greek language, this expression means, 'he was glued together'. In other words, he was bound and became the slave of another. The citizen that he was glued to represents Satan.

The Righteous Sinner

For a Jew, it was unthinkable to even touch a swine, and this young boy not only touched them but competed with them for food (verses 15, 16). In the sanctuary service, only clean animals were offered because they represented Christ who was pure. Unclean animals are a symbols of Satan and his angels (Revelation 18:2,3). In other words, this son was abiding among Satan and his angels (see Mark 5:13).

When the kid hit rock bottom, the memory of the father and home wooed him. It is notable that the father did not seek him; he sought the father. The young man 'came to himself' (Luke 15:17). That is, he regained his senses, he began thinking straight again. While he was in the world he was not himself because he was under the control of another. He was out of it! The son now discerned how terrible his sin had been and was sorry that he had left home and dishonored his father. He was ashamed of his behavior, not merely the consequences of it. This is what the Bible calls repentance—sorrow for sin and a turning away from it.

The story tells us that the memory of the goodness of His father and home drew him. He knew that his father was good, loving, and kind. He now realized that the rules of the household were for his good and happiness. But even at this point, his concept of the father was partial and incomplete. He thought that his father might accept him as a servant. However, he would soon discover that the father would do far more for him than he could ever imagine (cf. Ephesians 3:20). Romans 2:4 tells us that the goodness of God draws us and leads us to repentance. As a well-known writer has expressed it: "We do not repent in order that God may love us, but He reveals to us His love in order that we might repent." Ellen White, *Christ Object Lessons*, p. 189.

The young man carefully prepared his speech of confession upon his return (verses 18, 19). He will confess that he has sinned, that he is not worthy to be called his father's son and will beg him to receive him as a servant. When he left home, he said to his father, '**give me**' my inheritance and when he returned he said '**make me**' a servant. Quite a change!

He was right. By leaving home, he had sinned against heaven and his father. So his problem was sin, which is transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4). Was it true that he was not worthy to be called his father's son? Yes! Was it true that he deserved to be hired as a servant rather than a son because of his behavior? Again, yes. We have all sinned against our heavenly Father (cf. Romans 3:20) and therefore are not worthy to be called His children. In fact, the Bible tells us that we are children of wrath by nature (cf. Ephesians 2:3).

The son comes to his father, whose love has drawn him. To his surprise, the father was anxiously waiting for him and ran out to meet him, embracing him and kissing him (verse 20). The son began his prepared speech, but the father did not allow him to finish it (verse 21). The father did not lecture him, rebuke him, taunt him, conditionally accept him or put him on probation. He accepted him fully and completely.

For his **hunger**, the father had the fatted calf killed, for his **tired feet**, the father provided new sandals, for his **ragged hands**, the father provided his signet ring, and to replace his filthy, smelly garments he supplied the **best robe** (cf. Isa. 64:6). The signet ring gave the son his father's authority and the robe, his father's righteousness (Genesis 3:21; Isaiah 61:10; 22:21).

In the sanctuary service, fatted calves were offered for sin. The sacrifice in this story represents the sacrifice of Christ. In the sight of the father, the past was buried, forgotten, blotted out. The dead son experienced a spiritual resurrection from the dead and was now alive (cf. Colossians 2:13). At this point, the younger son became a **righteous sinner** because he was a repentant sinner covered with his father's righteousness. As Luther expressed it, *simul iustus, simul peccator* ("at the same time a sinner and righteous"). The reason

he could be both is because he was *simul poenitentia* (“at the same time penitent or repentant”).

Though he deserved to be a servant, he was restored by the father with full status as a son. If the father had given him what he deserved, he would have made him a slave. The acceptance of the son by the father was an **unmerited gift**. This was grace, pure and simple (cf. Romans 6:23). The son did not get what he deserved. The forgiveness and acceptance of the father was complete.

The return of the son brought joy to the father and his household. The father called out the **symphony** and the **choir** (verses 23-25, 29, 32—the words *xóros* and *sumphonía*). The Pharisees had a refrain, “there is joy in heaven for one sinner who is destroyed”. How different was the attitude of the father! His son had passed from death to life. Do you think the son would be tempted to leave home again? Of course not. From this point on the son will find it a joy to serve his father. There will be no more running away from home. The goodness, mercy and love of the father have made the son an obedient son!

The Self-Righteous Sinner

However, there is another son in the story that we do not usually highlight, even though this son is the central focus of the introductory scene (verses 1, 2) and of the story itself.

While the younger son was lost away from home, the older son was lost **at home**. He was an **obedient** son, but he served his father for **reward**. He was a son with a servant's mentality. He thought that he deserved the inheritance because of his hard work—after all, his hard work had earned it! His service was not joyful, but forced. He has served his father—not because he loved him, but because he wanted his father's approval, recognition, and reward. He wanted to earn his father's favor. Like all self-righteous people, instead of embracing his brother, he became critical of him. This is the ‘holier than thou’ son. The Pharisee is characterized by two things: he considers himself righteous and holy, and he always compares his righteousness with that of others.

We are told that the older son would not so much as go into the house to talk with his father or brother. He referred to his father as 'you' and to his brother as 'this son of yours'. In his mind, he could not socialize with such a sinner as his brother. And, how could he condone his father's attitude toward such a sinner? The older son was the lost at home son, and his father came out of the house to seek him and reason with him (Luke 15:26-28).

Interestingly, the story does not tell us how the older son responded to his father's reasoning. The story of the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees was still being written at his point. Not until they plotted to kill Christ, did the story come to its conclusion. The older son did not heed the reasoning of his father!

Like the rich young ruler, the older son believed that he was a law keeper—the good son! Like the workers in the vineyard, he felt that he deserved a greater reward than his brother (cf. Matthew 20:1-16). His attitude was that of the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:10-14). Like the Pharisees and the scribes, he was outwardly a model son, but he did not have the mentality of a son, but of a servant (cf. Matthew 23:23-28). He complained that the father had killed the fatted calf for his sinful brother but had not so much as killed a young goat for a righteous person such as himself! In other words, he was saying to his father, "You have done the maximum to reward a sinner, but you have not even done the minimum to reward a righteous person like me!"

The father dedicated much interest and attention to his sinful son while he appeared to ignore and take for granted his older son. Likewise, Jesus dedicated the bulk of His time and effort to the publicans and sinners while he appeared to ignore to a great degree the scribes and Pharisees. The publicans and sinners felt their need, but the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees were rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing. Jesus said that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over one who needs no repentance. Yes, the story is a warning to the self-righteous Laodicea!

Conclusion

I have often heard people say, “I would rather be a sinner in the world than a hypocrite in church.” Actually, I would rather not be either because both are lost. I would rather be a repentant sinner in church.

When we leave our heavenly Father and church, we are lost and dead, but when we repent and confess our sins and come home, we are found and are alive again.



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #3 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE GODHEAD

Introduction

Virtually all pagan religions in biblical times believed in multiple gods. In contrast, Judaism, especially after the Babylonian captivity, was staunchly monotheistic. The *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4) became the mantra in every synagogue to this very day.

When Christianity was born, its adherents had the difficult task of explaining to the monotheistic Jews how the Father and the Son are two persons, yet equally God. The problem was compounded when Christians taught that the Holy Spirit was also God. If the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, are there not three Gods? Would this not be a blasphemy of the highest order? Would this not be the epitome of paganism?

The early church struggled with this problem. In the early centuries, multiple heretical movements arose, each seeking to explain how there can be three persons but only one God. The Ebionites taught that Jesus was born a mere human being and at His baptism, He was adopted as a member of the Godhead. This concept created greater difficulties than it solved, because Jesus was then an honorary “god” rather than God in the fullest sense of the word.

Another heresy, known as Modalism or Sabellianism, taught that the Godhead consisted of a single person who manifests Himself in three different forms or modes. Modalists taught that God manifested himself as Father in the Old Testament, as Son in the Gospels, and as the Holy Spirit during the Church Age.

Then there was Arianism. According to the enemies of Arius, he taught that Jesus was the first being created by the Father. Thus, Jesus is not eternal God in the fullest sense of the word, but rather ‘a god’ such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses teach (cf. John 1:1, 2 NWT). This view also creates greater problems than it solves. If Jesus is a god, then there is a greater God and a lesser ‘god’. The Jehovah’s Witnesses are heirs of this teaching.

Islam and Judaism are staunchly monotheistic religions. Christianity also claims to be monotheistic but has a different understanding of what monotheism means. So, the critical question is this: Is it not mathematical nonsense to say that there are three persons, but only one God? How can three equal one? Some **Seventh-day Adventists** in recent years have concluded that we must abandon the doctrine of the trinity because it is **pagan** and seeped in **Roman Catholic theology**.

From the start I want to say that I do not personally like the word ‘trinity’. I prefer the biblical word ‘Godhead’. Not that the word ‘trinity’ in itself is a bad word. The word actually means ‘tri-unity’, or three persons in unity. I prefer not to use the word for the same reason that we do not use the word **bishop** (‘overseer’) for our pastors and **Eucharist** (‘to give thanks’) for the Lord’s Supper. These are good biblical words, but we usually associate them with Roman Catholic theology, so we keep away from them. It would be best to simply stick by the biblical terminology. Jesus’ view of the Godhead is deeply rooted in the Old Testament, so it is absolutely necessary to examine the Old Testament roots of His view.

Texts that Emphasize the Oneness of God

There are numerous texts in the Old and New Testaments that underline the oneness of God. Let’s examine some of them. The *Shema* is the central

confession of Judaism. Every synagogue service begins with a recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4: *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!"*

The book of Isaiah makes several references to the oneness of God. However, the purpose of these texts in Isaiah, is to underline that there is only one true God **in contrast** to the many gods of the surrounding nations:

"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God....⁸ Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed, there is no other Rock; I know not one.'" Isaiah 44:6, 8

"Tell and bring forth your case; yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me.²² "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! for I am God, and there is no other." Isaiah 45:21, 22

Jesus agreed with the oneness of God in the Old Testament. When a rabbi asked Him which is the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: *"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'" The rabbi then agreed with Jesus, saying, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He." Mark 12:29, 32.*

Referring to Himself, Jesus made a revolutionary statement that infuriated the Jews: *"I and My Father are one."* (John 10:30)—not one numerically, but relationally!

In the following text, Jesus left the impression that He and His Father are one and the same. However, the emphasis falls on relationship rather than math:

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.¹¹ Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves." John 14:10, 11

Texts that Describe a Plurality of Persons in the Godhead

While Scripture portrays the oneness of God, it also, paradoxically, describes a **plurality of persons** in the Godhead. Let's examine first several texts from the Old Testament.

*"Then God said, **Let Us** make man in **Our** image, according to **Our** likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* Genesis 1:24

*"Come, **let Us** go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Genesis 11:7*

*"Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of **Us**, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—²³ therefore the **LORD God [YHWH Elohim]** sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken." Genesis 3:22, 23*

The prophet Isaiah described three persons in the Godhead and Jesus quoted the words at the beginning of His ministry in Nazareth:

*"The **[#1] Spirit** of the **[#2] Lord GOD** is upon **[#3] Me**, because the **LORD** has anointed **Me** to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." Isaiah 61:1*

Two other texts from Isaiah describe three persons in the Godhead:

*"Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there. And now the **[#1] Lord GOD** and **[#2] His Spirit** have sent **[#3] Me**." Isaiah 48:16*

*"In all their affliction **[#1] He [God the Father]** was afflicted, and the **[#2] Angel of His Presence** saved them; in His love and in His pity, He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. ¹⁰ But they rebelled and grieved*

*[#3] **His Holy Spirit**; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them.” Isaiah 63:9, 10*

Who is the ‘Angel of God’s Presence’ in Isaiah 63:9, 10? There are several texts in the Old Testament that indicate that the Angel of the Lord or His presence, is God:

- The Angel of the Lord at the **burning bush** was YHWH (Exodus 3:2-14).
- The Commander of the Lord’s Hosts was God (Joshua 5:13-15; Daniel 8:11).
- The Angel who encountered **Manoah** was God (Judges 13:1-24; verse 22 is the key verse of the passage. The Angel of the Lord was God!).
- The Angel delivered the three **Hebrew worthies**, but the Angel was the Son of God (Daniel 3:25, 28).
- Psalm 34:7 with Daniel 12:1: The Angel of the Lord or Michael is the **Defender of Israel** and should be feared.
- The Angel that wrestled all night with Jacob at **Peniel** was God (Genesis 32; Hosea 12:4, 5).
- Michael who **resurrected Moses** was Jesus Christ (Jude 9).

A passage in **Exodus 23** strongly hints that the Angel of the Lord is Jesus. God the Father warned Israel to obey the Angel that bore His own name:

*“Behold, I send an **Angel** before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. ²¹ Beware of Him and obey **His voice**; do not provoke **Him**, for **He** will not pardon your transgressions; for **My name is in Him**. ²² However, if you indeed obey **His** voice and do all that **I** speak, then **I** will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. ²³ For **My Angel** will go before you and **bring you** in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and **I** will cut them off.” Exodus 23:20-23*

Now let’s turn to the New Testament where once again we find a plurality of persons in the Godhead. At the baptism of Jesus, three persons were present:

*“When He had been baptized, **[#1] Jesus** came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the **[#2] Spirit of God***

descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly **[#3] a voice came from heaven**, saying, "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16, 17

Jesus promised the disciples that He would pray for the Father to send another Comforter:

"And **I** will pray the **Father**, and He will give you **another** **[not one of a different kind indicated by the Greek word *éteros* (as in heterosexual) but rather one of the same kind indicated by the word *állos*]** **Helper**, that He may abide with you forever." John 14:16

The following texts clearly indicate that there are three persons in the Godhead:

"But when the **[#1] Helper** comes, whom **[#2] I shall send** to you from the **[#3] Father**, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of **Me**." John 15:26

"And because you are sons, **[#1] God** has **sent** forth the **[#2] Spirit** of His **[#3] Son** into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Galatians 4:6

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the **name** **[one name and three persons]** of the **[#1] Father** and of the **[#2] Son** and of the **[#3] Holy Spirit**, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19, 20

"The grace of the **[#1] Lord Jesus Christ**, and the love of **[#2] God**, and the communion of the **[#3] Holy Spirit** be with you all. Amen." 2 Corinthians 13:14

"There are diversities of gifts, but the **[#1] same Spirit**. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the **[#2] same Lord**. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the **[#3] same God** who works all in all." 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² elect according to the foreknowledge of **[#1] God the Father**, in sanctification of the **[#2] Spirit**, for obedience and

sprinkling of the **[#3] blood of Jesus** Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied." 1 Peter 1:1, 2

"John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from **[#1] Him who is and who was and who is to come**, and from the **[#2] seven Spirits** who are before His throne, 5 and from **[#3] Jesus Christ**, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth." Revelation 1:4, 5

"For through **[#1] Him** we both have access by one **[#2] Spirit** to the **[#3] Father**." Ephesians 2:18

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was **with God**, and the Word **was God**.² He was in the beginning **with God**.³ All things were made **through Him**, and without Him nothing was made that was made." John 1:1-3

"Not that anyone has seen the **Father**, except **He** who is from God; He has seen the Father." John 6:46

"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an **Advocate** with the **Father**, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John 2:1

Obviously Jesus is not pleading before Himself; He cannot be at the right hand of God and be the same person.

"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes **intercession for us**." Romans 8:34

Explanation of How 1+1+1=1

How is it possible for 1+1+1 to equal 1? Mathematically it is impossible, but not relationally. The word 'one' with regards to the Godhead must be understood as three persons in perfect unity. The Bible does use the word 'one' in this sense many times.

When God officiated the first marriage he stated that they were one flesh. Jesus even went so far as to say that they were no longer two, but one:

*“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be **joined** to his wife, and they shall become **one** flesh.” Genesis 2:24 (cf. Matthew 19:6)*

The builders of the Tower of Babel were many, but they are described as one:

*“And the LORD said, “Indeed the people **are one [in unity]** and they all have **one language, [on the same page]** and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. ⁷ Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.” Genesis 11:6, 7*

The idea in the following verse is not oneness of identity, but of **unity**:

*“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is **one**!” Deuteronomy 6:4 (cf. Mark 12:39-42)*

In the following verse, Jesus used the word ‘one’ **relationally** rather than mathematically:

*“And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become **one flesh**?' ⁶ So then, they are **no longer two** but **one flesh**. Therefore, what God has **joined together [unity]**, let not man separate.” Matthew 19:4-6*

Believers in Christ are many, from many nations, but all are one relationally:

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are **all one** in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28*

The apostle Paul even went so far as to say that the members of the body of Christ (who are many) are metaphorically the flesh and bones of Jesus:

*“For we are members of His body, of **His flesh and of His bones**. ³¹ “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become **one flesh**.” Ephesians 5:30, 31*

*“But now indeed there are **many** members, yet **one body**.” 1 Corinthians 12:20.*

In His prayer on the way to Gethsemane, Jesus pleaded with His Father that His disciples might be one even as He and the Father are one. Obviously, not numerically, but rather relationally!

*“And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that **they may be one as We are....** ²⁰ “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they **all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You;** that they also **may be one in Us,** that the world may believe that You sent Me.” John 17:10, 11, 20, 21*

The old song captures the relational meaning of the word ‘one’: “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord”.

Jesus described the intimate relationship between Him and His Father as the Father being in Him and He being in the Father. Obviously, they did not merge into a single person:

*“Do you not believe that **I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?** The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. ¹¹ Believe Me that **I am in the Father and the Father in Me,** or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.” John 14:10, 11*

*“At that day you will know that **I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.**” John 14:20*

*“Abide in **Me, and I in you.** As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides **in Me, and I in him,** bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and **My words** abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” John 15:4-7*

Conclusions

Instead of referring to the Godhead as a Trinity, it would be better to refer to the doctrine as the doctrine of the **Tri-unity**. They are one and equally God in thought, power, character, work, objectives, purpose and plans but not one in person. They are **distinguishable** but not **separable**. They are **three of a kind** and **only three** of a kind. They are all members of the same family and their **last name is "God"** just as my family has four persons but one last name.

Several analogies have been given to explain how three persons can be one God. However, all of these analogies are inadequate:

- A **tree** has root, branches and fruit. However, the root, branches and fruit are only part of a tree while each member of the Godhead is completely God.
- An **egg** has shell, yolk and white. Once again, the shell, yolk and white are only parts of the egg.
- The **sun** has light, heat and brightness. However, once again, light, heat and brightness are only parts of the sun
- **Man** has body, soul and spirit, but each is only part of man.

In contrast, the fullness of God dwells in each member of the Godhead.



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #4 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT WHO HE IS

Introduction

Jesus once asked His disciples the greatest question that was ever asked: *“Who do you say that I am?”* (read Matthew 16:13-17). Peter immediately answered, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,”* and Jesus agreed that Peter had answered the question correctly. In our lesson today we will study about the self-identity of Jesus.

Ten Great Facts of Jesus’ Self-Identity

Fact #1: Jesus pre-existed His coming to this earth:

There are two significant Old Testament prophecies that refer to Jesus as the *“everlasting Father”* (Isaiah 9:6) and as one *“whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting”* (Micah 5:2).

Jesus was sent by the Father and came down from heaven, so He must have existed in heaven before He came:

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” John 6:38

Jesus prayed on the way to Gethsemane that His Father would glorify Him with the glory that He had with Him **before the world** was created:

*“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You **before the world was.**” John 17:5*

Jesus existed in heaven with the ‘form’ (*morphé*; ‘the very substance’) of God before he took the form of a servant on earth:

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the **form of God**, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the **likeness of men.** ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” Philippians 2:5-8*

John referred explicitly to Jesus as God:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the **Word was God.** ² He was **in the beginning** with God. John 1:1, 2*

One of the two names given to Christ at His birth (the other was Jesus) was Emmanuel, which means ‘God with us’.

*“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name ‘Immanuel’, which is translated, ‘**God with us.**’” Matthew 1:23*

Jesus forgave sins, a prerogative that belongs only to God:

*“When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, **your sins are forgiven** you.’ ⁶ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷ ‘Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? **Who can forgive sins but God alone?**’” Mark 2:5-7*

Jesus claimed the sacred name YHWH ‘I AM’ of Exodus 3:14:

*“Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I AM.**’ ⁵⁹ Then they **took up stones** to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.” John 8:58, 59*

Thomas confessed that Jesus was his God without rebuke:

*“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and **my God!**’” John 20:28*

The apostle Paul referred to Jesus as ‘God over all’:

*“Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is **God over all**, forever praised! Amen. Romans 9:5, NIV*

Christians are looking forward to the return of their “*great God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:11, 12).

Fact #2: Jesus was the **Father's Master Builder** in the creation of all the heavenly hosts and this world, and He sustains all things in the universe. The heavenly hosts sang an anthem of praise to God the Father who was seated on His heavenly throne. We find two important details in this verse. First, creation was by the **Father's will**, and the passive voice ‘**were created**’ indicates that someone else did the actual work:

*“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and **by Your will** they exist and **were** created.” Revelation 4:11*

Jesus is THE WORD (John 1:1-3). Notably, in Genesis 1 the formula ‘God said’ appears 11 times. Jesus spoke the Father’s plan into existence (cf. Psalm 33:6).

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ **All things** were made through Him, and **without Him** nothing was made that was made.” John 1:1-3*

Paul wrote that creation was **of** the Father **through** the Son:

*“yet for us there is one God, **the Father, of whom** are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord **Jesus Christ, through whom** are all things, and **through whom** we live.” 1 Corinthians 8:6*

Colossians 1:15-17 states that through Jesus, all things were created, visible and invisible, earthly and heavenly.

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For **by Him** all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. **All things***

were created **through Him** and **for Him**.¹⁷ And He is **before all things**, and in Him **all things consist [hold together]**.”

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, **through whom** also He made the worlds.” Hebrews 1:1, 2

Only One who created **all** human beings could offer His life in place of all. However, in order to become our substitute, He had to become a member of our family. Only the Creator could be the Redeemer (see 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Fact #3: Some 2000 years ago, the Holy Spirit implanted the Divine Word in the womb of Mary and in this way, God assumed human nature. The divine nature of Christ was mysteriously blended with His human nature in one person (cf. 1 Timothy 3:16).

Jesus was both the Father and the son of Abraham and David. He descended from Abraham (Galatians 3:16) and yet He was before Abraham (John 8:58). Jesus is not only the offspring of David, but also David’s root (Revelation 22:16).

The divine Word, who created all things, became flesh:

“And the Word **became flesh** and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: **God was manifested in the flesh**, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.” 1 Timothy 3:16

Jesus was born of a woman like all human beings:

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, **born of a woman**, born under the law.” Galatians 4:4

Matthew 1:18-23 describes the virgin birth of Christ (cf. Isaiah 7:14). All during His earthly life, Jesus was accused of being an illegitimate child because, supposedly, no one knew who His earthly father was (cf. John 8:41):

*“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, **before they came together**, she was found with child of **the Holy Spirit**....²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” Matthew 1:18, 22, 23*

According to Matthew 1:1-17, Jesus was born from a **long line of human ancestors**. He was a direct descendant of Abraham and David (cf. Romans 1:3; Galatians 3:16) and yet His genealogy in Luke 3 tells us that His lineage goes **all the way back to Adam**. Thus, He is **genetically** and **physically** the last Adam (cf. Luke 3:38; 1 Corinthians 15:45).

Hebrews 2:14-17 states that Jesus was made in all things like unto His brethren. He was a real flesh and blood man:

*“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, **He Himself likewise shared in the same**, that **through death** He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.¹⁶ For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the **seed of Abraham**.¹⁷ Therefore, in **all things** He had to be made like His **brethren**, **that** He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”*

After Jesus resurrected from the dead He still had **his human body**:

*“And He said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Behold My **hands and My feet**, that it is I Myself. **Handle** Me and see, for a spirit does not have **flesh and bones** as you see I have.” Luke 24:38-39 (cf. John 20:27, 28)*

Jesus claimed to be **the ladder** that Jacob saw in a dream as he fled from the wrath of his brother:

“And He said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’” John 1:51 (cf. Genesis 28: 11, 12)

This ladder was **planted on earth**, but its top **reached to heaven**. The meaning is clear. As man, Jesus is **one with us**. As God, He is **one with God**. Thus, His humanity and divinity are the bridge between heaven and earth. As the intercessor, He has to be fully God, fully man and sinless.

Fact #4: As a human being, Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life, in the likeness of sinful flesh (cf. Romans 8:3; Romans 1:3; Philippians 2:7).

Jesus Himself testified that He did not sin when He challenged the crowd, *“which of you convicts Me of sin?”* and when He affirmed to His disciples, *“I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”* John 8:46; 14:30

John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Isaiah predicted that Jesus would be taken as a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7). Notably, in order for the sacrificial lamb to be accepted, the lamb could have **no blemish** (cf. Leviticus 20:20-22; 21:17-21; Exodus 12:6) and Jesus is that Passover Lamb (1Corinthians 5:7, 8; 1 Peter 1:18-20). The priest who officiated the sacrifice also had to be without blemish.

Matthew 4 describes the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness where He defeated the devil. He was tempted in **all things** and yet His sanctified sinful nature never manifested itself in sinful thoughts, words or actions:

*“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in **all points tempted as we are**, yet **without sin**.¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* Hebrews 4:15, 16

“For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.” Hebrews 7:26

Jesus was tempted far and beyond us, because His human nature was constantly tempted to use His divine power for His own good. When is the last time you were tempted to turn stones into bread or to escape carrying the sins of the whole world in Gethsemane?

Jesus gave us an **example** of a holy life for us to follow (1 John 2:6; 1 Peter 2:21). He did not overcome as God, because God cannot be tempted (James 1: 13). He overcame as a real man with our nature. He affirmed that of Himself He could do nothing (John 5:19, 20).

Jesus lived a holy life, not only to give us an example of how to overcome, but in order to empower us to overcome (cf. John 15:5; Philippians 4:13; Hebrews 4:14-16; 2:18). The secret of victory is to abide in Him (John 15:5), which means to abide in His Word (John 15:7). This is the same as eating His flesh and blood (cf. John 6:54), which means to eat His Word (John 6:63). When the Word is in us, we will be able to answer Satan's temptations with an **“IT IS WRITTEN”** and gain the victory over sin (cf. Psalm 119:9-11). We are victorious in His name (cf. John 14:13, 14; Acts 3:6; 4:7, 10, 18; Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 10:17). The secret to success over temptation has two steps:

*“Therefore **submit** to God. **Resist** the devil and he will flee from you.” James 4:7*

If Jesus had won **even one victory** over Satan by using His **own divine power**, Satan would have argued: **“No fair!** You conquered me because you employed Your **God-powers** and God cannot be tempted.” If Jesus overcame any temptation by using His **own divine omniscience** and **omnipotence**, then His victory would have been a **fiasco**. He gained the victory over temptation as a man with **no advantages** over us.

We are like **pebbles by the seaside**, moved to a fro by the winds of temptation. But Jesus was like the **huge boulders** on the edge of the sea on the **Pacific Coast**. The waves of temptation **crashed against Him** with all their force, but when the **waves receded**, Jesus still **stood firm**—He could **not be moved!**

Some think that Jesus can't really understand us because He never sinned. How can one who never sinned fully comprehend the situation of sinners? Let's look at this argument more closely.

If you were sinking in quick sand, would you rather have someone in the quick sand with you to sympathize with your precarious situation or would you rather have someone standing on solid ground with a rope ready to pull you out? The answer is obvious. If Jesus had sinned, he would be in the quicksand with us and He, as well as us, would be lost!

Jesus is the great pioneer of our salvation. He has scouted the trail to make it easier for us. He knows all the tricks that Satan has in his bag. There is nothing that we experience that He has not experienced before. He faced all the dangers, trials, temptations, weaknesses that we experience, but he won the victory each and every time, and therefore He is able to help us in each and every trial.

Jesus never gained any victory over temptation by using His own divine power. He conquered by depending on the power of His Father. How could Jesus be a perfect example for us if He had access to a source of power that is not available to us?

Let's suppose that Superman really existed and that a certain day he invited us to fly off into the sky with him. Would it be fair for Superman to encourage us to follow his example? Of course not, because he has powers that we do not have. In the same way, how could Jesus ask us to follow His example if He had access to powers that we do not have access to?

Jesus gave us an example of holy living:

"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."
1 John 2:6

Jesus left an example that we should follow in His steps:

"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps." 1 Peter 2:21

The sheep of Jesus hear His voice and **follow in His footsteps**:

*“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they **follow Me**.” John 10:27*

Jesus **is able** to keep us from falling:

*“Now to Him who is able to **keep you from stumbling**, and to present you **faultless** before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,²⁵ To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.” Jude 24, 25*

Jesus developed a **perfect life** which could stand in place of our sinful lives. When in repentance, confession and trust we receive Jesus, the Father accepts His perfect life in place of our sinful lives. His righteousness is credited to our account and we are covered with the spotless robe of His life. Then, we are reckoned as if we had never sinned and are accepted in the beloved (Ephesians 2:6).

Fact #5:

Jesus came to this world to reveal what God is really like. Satan had distorted the character of God and Jesus came to set the record straight. As we discern in Jesus what God is really like, we come to admire and love Him (John 14:4-8). In the life of Jesus, the character of Satan and the character of God were seen in stark contrast.

In the Garden of Eden, man had face-to-face communion with God. However, when man sinned, God had to conceal Himself or else man would have been destroyed by His glory. God and sin cannot coexist. God dwells in unapproachable light whom no man has seen, nor can see (1 Timothy 6:15, 16). God told Moses that he could not see His face and live (cf. Isaiah 33:14, 15; Revelation 6:14-17; Hebrews 12:28, 29):

“But He said, ‘You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.’” Exodus 33:20

God’s glory is as a consuming fire:

*“Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you. ²⁴ For the Lord your God is a **consuming fire**, a jealous God.” Deuteronomy 4:23, 24*

We must know God in order to have eternal life. However, how can we know Him if He dwells in unapproachable light?

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” John 17:3

In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself in **shadows and pictures**—through symbols and words. God revealed Himself in many and various ways (through prophets, visions, dreams, Urim and Thummim), but all of these revelations were partial and incomplete. Because God cannot reveal Himself to man in His divine nature, Jesus veiled His divine glory by taking on human flesh. In this way, Jesus revealed—in person—what God is like without destroying sinners.

Whereas in the Old Testament God revealed Himself in many and various ways, in these last days He has revealed Himself personally through His Son.

*“God, who at **various times** and in **various ways** spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us **by His Son**, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.” Hebrews 1:1, 2*

The Father revealed Himself in His Son, and Jesus is in the bosom of the Father, therefore, Jesus can reveal firsthand the Father’s character:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

*“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the **bosom of the Father**, He has declared Him.” John 1:18*

On a certain occasion, Philip requested that Jesus show him the Father. Jesus answered that by knowing Him they would know the Father. Like Father, like Son:

“Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” John 14:8, 9

Fact #6: Jesus came to this earth to suffer a vicarious death.

In the beginning, God warned Adam and Eve that *“The wages of sin is death”* (Genesis 2:15-17). Adam and Eve sinned and therefore the sentence of death was pronounced against them (Genesis 3:19). The devil appeared to have God’s character between a rock and a hard place—in a serious dilemma.

Satan challenged God: “If you don’t execute the death sentence, you are a liar and you are not just. However, if you punish man with death, how can you say that you are a God of mercy and love?” God solved this dilemma by sending Jesus to suffer the death penalty in place of His creatures. In this way, God could be just and the justifier of those who trust in Jesus (Romans 3:26).

God cannot die because He is immortal, so He sent Jesus with a mortal human nature to pay our penalty. The word ‘ransom’ in the following verse means ‘to buy back by paying a price’:

*“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a **ransom** for many.” Matthew 20:28.*

*“Greater love has no one than this, than **to lay down one’s life** for his friends.” John 15:13*

*“Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.”²⁸ For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is **shed for many** for the remission of sins.” Matthew 26:27, 28*

“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:4-6

*“For He **[the Father]** made Him **[Jesus]** who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:21*

*“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He **gave His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:14-16*

*“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having **become a curse for us** (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), ¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Galatians 3:13, 14*

*“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste **death for everyone**.” Hebrews 2:9*

*“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, **Jesus Christ the righteous**. ² And He Himself is the **propitiation for our sins**, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” 1 John 2:1, 2*

Satan did his utmost to kill Jesus on multiple occasions before He went to the cross. He tried to lead Him to sin and to deviate Him from going to the cross. And when Jesus was buried, Satan did his best to keep Him in the tomb at all costs.

When Jesus cried out “my God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46), the sins of the whole world crushed out His life. He died long before He should have!

Fact #7: The resurrection of Jesus made it possible for Him to go to heaven to be our intercessor or mediator. If Jesus had died but not resurrected, we would have no hope of eternal life; a dead savior can never save us.

Matthew 28:1-7 records the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus. And the beloved disciple describes Him as having the keys to *Hades* and to death.

The Bible compares *Sheol/Hades* to a prison house with bars and gates (Psalm 9:13; Isaiah 38:10). The first reference to *Hades* in the book of Revelation uses the prison analogy. Jesus said to John on Patmos:

*"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have **the keys** of Hades and of Death."* Revelation 1:18

Let's reflect for a few moments on verse 18 where Jesus has the keys of *Hades* and death. The grave is the prison, the dead are the prisoners, and Satan is the jailer with keys in hand who does not let his prisoners go free (cf. Isaiah 14:17). The good news is that Jesus died, went into the grave, took away the keys from the jailer and came forth with them in His hand. Because He lives, we will live also (John 14:19).

When the venomous serpents in the wilderness bit the Israelites, God neutralized the venom by raising His own serpent, a symbol of the death of Jesus (John 3:14, 15; 12:31-33). Scientists make anti-venom from venom. Likewise, Jesus defeated the venom of death by His death! He went into grave, took away the keys from Satan and came out alive! The book of Hebrews explains that by His death, Jesus destroyed Satan who had the power of death:

*"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that **through death** He might destroy him who **had the power of death**, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and **release** those who through **fear of death** were all their lifetime subject to **bondage**."* Hebrews 2:14, 15

As we stated previously (cf. Matthew 16:18), the gates of *Hades* will not prevail against the church because they did not prevail against Jesus (Matthew 16:21). The resurrection of those who died in Christ is dependent on the resurrection

of Christ. The book of Revelation describes Jesus as the Firstborn from the dead (Revelation 1:5), not because He was the first to resurrect in time, but rather because His resurrection guarantees the resurrection of those who died in Him. The word *Firstborn* is figurative and refers to the preeminence of Jesus' resurrection (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18). His resurrection makes all other resurrections possible. Because He lives, the dead in Christ will live also. If we have the Spirit of Christ in our lives, the one who raised Jesus will raise our mortal bodies as well (Romans 8:11).

If we die in Christ, He will unlock the prison house of death at His coming and take us to heaven. Paul wrote that *"the dead in Christ will rise first"* (1 Th. 4:16) and then He will transform this corruptible body into the likeness of His glorious body (Phil. 3:20, 21). Finally, death and *Hades* will be thrown in the lake of fire and destroyed once for all (Rev. 20:14, 15; 1 Cor. 15:26).

Christians usually think that the death of Jesus forgave our sins, but **without His resurrection**, there could be no forgiveness for sin:

*"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ **died** for our sins **[Passover]** according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was **buried** **[Unleavened Bread]**, and that He rose again **[First-Fruits]** the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. ⁶ After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep ⁷ and after that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. ⁸ Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.... ¹⁷ And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; **you are still in your sins!** ¹⁸ Then also, those who have fallen asleep in Christ **have perished**. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable." 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 17-19*

The **resurrection** of Jesus makes our justification or forgiveness possible:

*"Now it **[the story of Abraham's justification when he believed God]** was not written for his sake alone that it was **imputed** to him, ²⁴ but also for us. It shall be **imputed to us** who **believe in Him** who **raised up Jesus** our Lord from the dead,*

²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was **raised for our justification**.” Romans 4:23-25

Jesus laid down His life and took it up again by the authorization of the Father:

“For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself.” John 5:26

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.

¹⁸ No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command **I have received from My Father**.” John 10:17, 18 (cf. Luke 23:46)

The following texts prove that Jesus possesses **inherent eternal life**, and therefore, He is able to give that life to us:

“Jesus said to her, “**I am** the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall **never die**. Do you believe this?” John 11:25, 26

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me **has** everlasting life.” John 6:47

Jesus did not say that He has life. He is life:

“Jesus said to him, “**I am** the way, the truth, and **the life**. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” John 14:6

“And this is the testimony: that God has given us **eternal life**, and **this life is in His Son**. ¹² He who **has the Son has life**; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” 1 John 5:11, 12

Fact #8: Jesus **ascended** to the right hand of His Father to intercede for those who come to God through Him. Jesus Christ can intercede before the Father because He is **righteous**:

“**My little children**, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an **Advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ **the righteous**.” 1 John 2:1

*"For there is one God and **one Mediator** between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 2:5*

Jesus is able to be a merciful and faithful High Priest because He is our brother:

*"Therefore, in **all things** He had to be made **like His brethren**, that He might be a **merciful and faithful** High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." Hebrews 2:17*

Jesus **intercedes only** for those who come to God through Him:

*"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost **those who come to God through Him**, since He always lives to make **intercession** for **them**." Hebrews 7:25*

*"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot **sympathize** with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:15-16*

No one can approach the Father except through Jesus:

*"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father **except through Me**.'" John 14:6*

The Bible does not teach that the death of Jesus on the cross **forgave** everyone's sins. At the cross, He made **provision** to forgive the sins of those who repent of their sins, confess them, trust in His merits and are baptized:

*"Then Peter said to them: '**Repent**, and let every one of you be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Acts 2:38*

Jesus **went to heaven** in order to **give repentance** to Israel:

*"Him God has **exalted** to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, **to give repentance** to Israel and **forgiveness** of sins." Acts 5:31*

When individuals **believe** in Jesus, God forgives their sins:

*“To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever **believes** in Him **will receive remission** of sins.” Acts 10:43*

The sins of individuals are forgiven when they **confess** them:

*“**If** we confess our sins, He is **faithful and just** to **forgive us our sins** and to **cleanse us** from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9*

Mercy comes when individuals **confess and forsake** sin:

*“He who covers his sins will not prosper but whoever **confesses** and **forsakes** them will have **mercy**.” Proverbs 28:13*

Jesus died for the whole world, but we must individually claim His payment if we are to be saved. John 3:16 is inclusive of all, but also exclusive of those who refuse to believe (cf. Numbers 21:4-9). John 18:9, 15, 20, 21; 16:23, 24 clearly reveal Jesus as the great intercessor for His followers.

When we come to the Father in prayer in the name of Jesus, the Father accepts the righteousness of Jesus in our place and looks upon us as if we had never sinned. In other words, Jesus is now applying the benefits of His sacrifice to individuals who come to Him.

It is different to watch others suffer than to suffer ourselves. I remember several years ago when millions were dying of hunger in Ethiopia. The television images of people who were nothing but skin and bones covered with flies was grotesque. In a certain manner, I felt sorry for those people. But, could I really understand what they were going through? Of course not! You see, I have never been in their shoes.

Jesus could have remained in heaven and watched our suffering from afar. He could have felt sorry for us. But only by becoming one of us could He fully comprehend our pain, sorrow, suffering and grief. When He represents us in heaven, we can have absolute certainty that He understands us, because He walked in our shoes.

We do not need a mother figure—the Virgin Mary—or saints who have died to intercede for us before God, because Jesus understands and can represent us

with full empathy and sympathy. We have only one mediator or bridge—He is the supreme pontiff—the bridge between heaven and earth.

Fact #9: Jesus serves as the judge to separate the righteous from the wicked:

According to Jesus Himself, the Father does not judge anyone, but has committed all judgment into the hands of His Son because His Son is the ‘Son of Man’.

*“For the Father judges no one, but has committed **all judgment to the Son**....²⁷ and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, **because** He is the Son of Man.” John 5:22, 27*

According to Paul, the Father will judge through the instrumentality of His Son:

*“. . . because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by **the Man Whom He has ordained**. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” Acts 17:31*

In the last days, all must appear before the judgment seat. We will stand before the **judgment seat of Christ**:

*“For we must all appear before the **judgment seat of Christ**, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:10*

The good news is that in the judgment, the judge is **also our defense attorney**.

*“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an **Advocate** with the Father, **Jesus Christ the righteous**.” 1 John 2:1*

There are **two reasons** why Jesus had to become one of us in order to serve as our judge:

First, we can be certain that we have a judge who understands us, because He has walked in our shoes. He knows human nature and will be able to represent us fairly as one who sympathizes with us. Jesus is the judge but He is also the

advocate. If we are in Him, He will defend us from the accusations of Satan and credit His righteousness to our account.

Second, the fact that Jesus was fully man and faced all our experiences will allow no excuses in the judgment. No one will be able to say that the temptations and trials were too powerful to resist (1 Corinthians 10:13). No one will be able to say: “Well, you didn’t know what suffering pain and depression was like that led me to take drugs.” In answer, Jesus will simply tell the story of **Gethsemane** and **Calvary**!

Fact #10: Jesus will soon return as King of kings and Lord of lords.

In the Upper Room, Jesus promised His disciples that He would return to take them (and us) to heaven:

*“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again** and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” John 14:1-3*

- ✓ He lived His perfect **life** to weave a robe of righteousness.
- ✓ He suffered in Gethsemane and died on the cross to **bear the penalty** of our sins.
- ✓ When we come to Him in repentance and confession and trust in His merits, He saves us from the **guilt** of sin.
- ✓ But through the Holy Spirit, He also is saving us from the **power** of sin.
- ✓ When He comes He will save us from the **presence** of sin.

Just before He ascended to heaven, Jesus assured us that He will come back personally, literally, and visibly:

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹ who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same

Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” Acts 1:9-11

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.” Revelation 22:12

Jesus will return to gather all the faithful saints from all ages (cf. Matthew 24:31):

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

This earth will then be the capital of the universe forever:

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” Revelation 21:1-4



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #5 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT GOOD AND EVIL

Introduction

Our study today will focus primarily on the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). As you read the parable, you will notice that it contains several symbols. Each of these symbols has a specific meaning and are important in the interpretation of the parable. There are some elements missing from the parable that we find in other places of the Bible which we will add to the story as we move along. We will study this topic more in depth in a future lesson on the judgment. Although this parable applies primarily to the presence of faithful (the wheat) and unfaithful members (the tares), in the church it also can apply to the world in general at the end of the age. Here are the symbols in the parable:

- ✓ The field
- ✓ The farmer
- ✓ An enemy of the farmer
- ✓ The men who slept
- ✓ The good seed
- ✓ The planting of tares
- ✓ The harvest (the end of the age)
- ✓ The reapers

- ✓ The barn
- ✓ The burning of the tares

The Interpretation of the Parable (Matthew 13:36-43)

The central lesson of this parable is that good will ultimately triumph over evil. However, the parable does not give us all the details on how this will happen so we must look elsewhere for the full picture. Let's examine first the meaning of the symbols.

#1 The **field** is a symbol of the world (*kósmos*).

#2 The **farmer** who planted the good seed symbolizes Jesus, the Son of Man. According to Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31, everything which Jesus 'planted' at the beginning (cf. John 1:1-3 with Genesis 1:1) was very good (Genesis 1:31). All was beautiful, orderly and perfect. At that time, Adam was placed as the legitimate ruler of the earth (Genesis 1:26, 28; Psalm 8:5-8).

#3 The **sleeping** of the men of the house in the parable means that Adam was not vigilant and therefore, he lost his position as ruler of the earth.

#4 The **good seed** represents the righteous, that is, those who have received Jesus as Savior and Lord. At the very beginning, before sin, the good seed represented Adam and Eve. After sin entered, the good seed represents those who accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, those who have been born from above (John 1:12, 13).

#5 The **enemy** who planted the tares represents the devil. There are several things we need to say about the enemy:

Where did he come from? Jesus saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18). Jesus is echoing the scene of Isaiah 14:12-14 where Satan aspired to universal dominion but was cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:7-9).

When Satan was cast out of heaven, he came to this earth and under the guise of a serpent. The existence of an evil 'serpent' means that evil existed in heaven before Adam and Eve sinned! In fact, Jesus, in John 8:44, explained that the devil

is a liar and a murderer from the beginning! 1 John 3:8 tells us that Satan has sinned from the beginning—and sin is transgression of the law. This means that the law existed before both Satan and evil! (cf. Ezekiel 28:16)

When Satan conquered Adam and Eve, he took over dominion of the world (cf. Romans 6:16; Luke 4:5-8). He was not the legitimate ruler but rather a usurper. Sadly, man was too weak to recover his lost position. An illustration will help us comprehend this entire scenario. In 1991, Saddam Hussein overwhelmed Kuwait. He was not the legitimate ruler of Kuwait, but rather a usurper—he took over a territory that did not belong to him by force. The deposed king of Kuwait had no way of recovering his lost dominion because Saddam was more powerful. This made it necessary for the allied forces under the command of Arnold Schwarzkopf to implement ‘Desert Storm’ to remove the usurper and restore dominion to Kuwait’s legitimate king.

Satan soon won followers (the tares) and planted them all over the world. One of these tares was Cain, who professed to be religious but was of the wicked one (1 John 3:12). Other notable counterfeit ‘believers’ were Judas (John 6:70; 13:2), the scribes and the Pharisees (Matthew 23:33), the Jewish populace of Jesus’ day (John 8:44), Elymas, the sorcerer (Acts 13:10) and the medieval church. All these claimed to be religious and to worship God, but they were counterfeits.

Satan spreads the tares of his kingdom through people who share his character and agenda. Through these people, he tempts other people, who in turn tempt others, and thus the tares multiply. We see this evil method from the beginning when Satan tempted Eve and then Eve became Adam’s tempter.

We must now turn to an aspect that the parable touches upon but does not fully develop. In the parable, there are two farmers—one good and the other evil. Elsewhere in the gospels, we are told that these two are caught up in hand to hand combat to the death! Let’s examine this dimension which is not addressed directly in this parable.

In no place of the Bible can we see good and evil in starker contrast than in the gospels. All the powers of darkness unleashed their weapons against Jesus.

Satan and his angels knew that it was either do or die. During the ministry of Christ, Satan revealed his true character before the universe by making people sick, possessing them, causing strife, hatred, murder, death, sorrow and pain. Then, he led people to blame God for these evils (cf. Matthew 9:33; Mark 5:1-7; Luke 9:38, 39, 42; Matthew 17:15; Luke 8:12). Leprosy was called the 'finger of God' and blindness was thought to be caused by sin (John 9:2).

In contrast, Jesus revealed what God is really like. He showed that God loves publicans and sinners, poor and rich, women, the sick, the demon possessed, children, Gentiles and even the hated Samaritans. He revealed that God wants people well and desires human beings to have joy, peace and hope.

Jesus epitomized His revelation of the Father when He said to Philip, "*He who has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:4-9). Everything that Jesus did was a revelation of the Father's character of love (cf. Mark 6:53-56; Matthew 4:24).

Satan knew, by a study of the prophecies, when and where Jesus would be born. He also knew that Jesus was coming as the second Adam to recover the lost kingdom (cf. Genesis 3:15) and to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

The powers of darkness whipped up into a frenzy never before seen in the history of the world. Satan lined up his demons and his wicked followers (the tares within the church of the age) to war with all his might against Jesus. He carried on his war against Jesus from the cradle to the grave—twenty-four, seven, three sixty-five. For 33 years Jesus was not allowed a moment's rest.

The demons' fear is clearly discerned in Luke 4:31-36. The demons knew that Jesus had come to destroy them. Satan knew that if he allowed Jesus to live a perfect life and to offer up his life for man, his kingdom was finished. In his mind, Jesus must be overcome at all cost. Satan attempted to do this in several ways:

- ✓ He **tried to kill Jesus** on repeated occasions [when He was born (Revelation 12:1-5), at Nazareth (Luke 4:28-30), in a storm (Mark 4:35-41), by having Him stoned (John 8:59)].

- ✓ He tried to **corrupt Jesus** with the virus of sin by enticing Him to yield to temptation (Matthew 4:1-13).
- ✓ He did all in his power to keep Jesus **from going to the cross** (cf. Matthew 4:8-11; 16:23; 17:4; John 12:20-26; Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:53; Matthew 27:40).
- ✓ He tried to dishearten Jesus by leading His own nation to reject Him, one of his disciples to betray Him and the others to forsake Him, and by causing sickness, suffering, sorrow, pain and strife to frustrate Him. He led wicked men to revile Him and strike Him so that He would lose His temper and retaliate. He tortured Jesus with the thought that His sacrifice would be in vain and that He would be separated from His Father forever. And after He died and was buried, Satan did his utmost to keep Him in the tomb.

When Jesus said, "It is finished," Satan knew that his kingdom was lost. Jesus had conquered and cast out the ruler of the world (cf. John 12:30-33). For this reason, Satan is filled with fury and desperation because he knows that his time is short (cf. Revelation 12:10-12).

Before we study about Satan's final struggle for world dominion, we must go back to the parable of the wheat and the tares.

#6 The **harvest** represents the conclusion of the judgment when the crop of wheat and the crop of tares are fully ripe (cf. Revelation 14:14-20). The expression 'end of the age' refers to the end of probationary time. At this point, all cases have been decided for life or death.

First, the grain is harvested and bound in bundles to be gathered into the barn. Then, the tares are tied up in bundles to be burned. The parable not only takes us to the second coming when the righteous are gathered to heaven, but also to the destruction of the wicked in the fire after the millennium. Like the two resurrections in John 5:28, 29, the parable does not clearly demarcate the events at the second coming and after the millennium. Clearly, the judgment

separation of the wheat from the tares takes place **before the reward** is meted out.

#7 The gathering of the wheat into the **barn** represents the gathering of the faithful to 'the Father's house', where the saved will be taken after they have been 'harvested' (John 14:1-3).

#8 The casting of the tares into the fire, represents the wicked who are cast into the lake of fire and brimstone after the millennium. In Matthew 25:41 Jesus expanded this point when He stated that the fire will destroy Satan and his angels (cf. Malachi 4:1-3; Ezekiel 28:18,19; Revelation 20:7-10). Thus the universe will be cleansed by fire and sin will be eradicated once for all.

#9: The **reapers** are the angels. Jesus will send out his angels to gather the elect from the whole world (Matthew 24:31) at the second coming to take them to His Father's house in heaven. The wicked are also gathered by the angels to be burned in the fire.

Another Parable with Similar Lessons

Let us examine some helpful background from the parable of the dragnet and two miraculous fishing expeditions. Jesus called Peter and Andrew, his brother, to be fishers of men:

*"And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, **casting a net** into **the sea**; for they were **fishermen**.¹⁹ Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will **make you fishers of men**."²⁰ They **immediately** left their nets and **followed Him**." Matthew 4:18-20*

The parable of the dragnet compares the process of fishing with the process of salvation and perdition:

*"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a **dragnet** that was **cast** into the **sea** and gathered some of **every kind**,⁴⁸ which, when it **was full**, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the **good into vessels**, but threw the **bad away**.⁴⁹ **So it will be** at the **end of the age**. The angels will come forth, **separate** the*

wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ and **cast them** into the furnace of fire. There will be **wailing and gnashing of teeth**." Matthew 13:47-50

Here are the symbols of the parable and their meaning:

The **sea** represents the **world** which we refer metaphorically to a **sea of faces**! The sea represents the same as **the field** in the parable of the **wheat and tares**. According to Mark 16:15, Jesus commanded His disciples to go into **all the world** to preach the gospel.

The **fish** represent the individuals that live **in the world**. Sometimes we use **fish symbolism** to refer to people. We speak of an important person as a 'big fish in a small pond' and someone in an uncomfortable environment 'like a fish out of water'.

The **fishermen** represent the proclaimers of the gospel (Matthew 4:18-20).

The **net** symbolizes the gospel:

The act of **casting** the net represents the **preaching** the gospel. The gospel net (the preaching of the gospel) gathers into the church both **genuine and counterfeit** believers. The fishing takes place during probationary time before the work of separation at the shore.

The **boat** represents the church:

*"And the Lord **added to the church** daily those who were being saved."* Acts 2:47.

We use ship terminology metaphorically in common conversation. When a person leaves the church or backs out of a commitment, we say that 'he's jumped ship'. We speak of 'all hands on deck' to refer to everyone's involvement in something. We say, 'don't rock the boat', meaning leave things as they are. 'We are all in the same boat' means we are all in this together, and use the expression that a good administrator 'runs a tight ship'.

What attracts the fish to a region of the boat? Acts 4:13 has the answer:

*"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that **they had***

been with Jesus."

The first miraculous fishing expedition illustrates the secret to successful fishing:

*"Then **He [Jesus] got into** one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. ⁴ When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, 'Launch out **into the deep** and **let down your nets** for a catch.' ⁵ But Simon answered and said to Him, 'Master, we have toiled all night and **caught nothing**; nevertheless, **at Your word** I will let down the net.' ⁶ And when they had done this, they caught a **great number of fish**, and their net was breaking." Luke 5:3-6*

There was a similar miraculous fishing expedition after the resurrection of Jesus. The disciples had fished all night and caught nothing. In the morning, Jesus instructed them to cast the net on the **right side of the boat**, the side where He stood on the shore:

*"And He said to them, 'Cast the net on the **right side** of the boat, and you will find some.'" So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish." John 21:6*

To use another analogy, the existence of transformers, power stations, power towers, cables, wires, switches, plugs and bulbs does not guarantee that there will be light. In order for there to be light, there needs to be electrical power. In the same way, state of the art church resources, a nice building, contemporary music, and excellent 'felt needs' programming, does not guarantee success in soul winning. In order for light to be possible, there must be the power of electricity present. In order for soul winning to meet with success, the power of Christ in the church is indispensable.

The **separation** of the good from the bad **on the shore** represents the **investigative judgment** (cf. the island of **Margarita**). Only the fish that are **in the boat** are separated on the shore. Although the parable does not directly bring this into view, the fish that remained in the sea when fishing is over, will be judged later.

The **end of fishing** represents the end of the preaching of the gospel—the close of probation.

Gathering the **good fish in baskets** represents the righteous taken to heaven when Jesus comes. In the parable of the wheat and tares, the wheat is gathered into the barn.

The **casting out** of the bad fish represents the **execution** of the judgment on the counterfeit believers and the wicked.

Our Response to Satan's Final Onslaught

When Jesus came the first time, the whole demonic world of the occult sprang into action because they knew that Jesus had come to contest Satan's dominion. So, today, as the second coming draws near, the world of the occult has sprung into action. The world is filling with incredible evil just like before the flood (cf. Genesis 6:5, 11-13 with Matthew 24:37-39). Racism, war, famine, riots, 'natural' disasters, hatred, strife and disease are on the increase. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 paints a depressing picture of the religious world shortly before Jesus returns.

Satan knows that Jesus is coming soon to empirically take the members of His kingdom to heaven, and therefore he is filled with rage (Revelation 12:10-12, 17). The deceptions of Satan in these last days will be so great that they will deceive, if possible, the very elect! (Matthew 24:23, 24). As almost the entire Jewish nation rejected Jesus at the first coming, almost the entire Christian world will reject the remnant of Jesus at the end. Satan will gather the powers of the whole world for a final, desperate struggle to retain his kingdom (Revelation 16:13, 14).

How can we protect ourselves from Satan in a world where evil seems to have taken over?

First, we must pray as never before. Jesus prayed immediately before He entered His time of trouble in Gethsemane and the cross. He encouraged His disciples to pray that they would not enter into temptation.

Second, we must study the Scriptures and obey them. We must always remember that Jesus is far more powerful than Satan and all his angels. After all, they were not able to overcome Jesus in heaven or on earth. Our only refuge is to build upon Jesus and His Word (Matthew 7:21-27). We can claim the victory of Jesus **in His name**. We have power of attorney and can speak and act in Jesus' name (see Luke 10:17-19; John 14:13, 14; Acts 3:6; 4:7, 10; 5:28, 41). Satan is a bully and works by intimidation—we must remind him that Jesus has overcome him and that he is a defeated foe! (cf. Luke 10:17-19)

James 4:7 has the secret of victory over the power of Satan. First we submit to God, then we resist the devil and as a result he will flee from us.



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #6 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE RULE OF LAW

Jesus, the Leader Greater than Moses

There are many similarities between the life of Moses and the life of Christ. Let's examine some of them:

- ✓ Both delivered their people from bondage.
- ✓ Both were threatened with death when they were born.
- ✓ Both found refuge in Egypt.
- ✓ Both were called out of Egypt.
- ✓ The people were baptized into Moses and we into Christ.
- ✓ The death of the Lamb marked the deliverance.
- ✓ Moses interceded for the people when they sinned.
- ✓ Both established twelve.
- ✓ Both established a group of 70.
- ✓ Both delivered a law to the people from a mountain.
- ✓ Both were criticized and tested by their own.
- ✓ Both gave water to the people.
- ✓ Both gave manna to the people.
- ✓ Moses raised a serpent in the wilderness and Jesus was the serpent.
- ✓ Both celebrated the Passover.

- ✓ Both were tempted in the wilderness—Moses for 40 years and Jesus for 40 days.

Unfortunately, some Christians have created a dichotomy between Moses and Christ. They base their view on John 1:17 where we are told that *“the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*. This is interpreted as the Old Testament being all about law and the New Testament all about grace. But, is this true? Was Israel saved by keeping the Law while New Testament Christians are saved by grace? Is there no law in the New Testament and no grace in the Old? We must remember that the word ‘Law’ in John 1:17 does not refer merely to the Ten Commandments but to the entire Pentateuch which includes the Ten Commandments.

Both Moses and Jesus gave a law to the people from a mount and this is the point I want to focus on (cf. Exodus 19; Matthew 5:1, 2). There are two mountains: Sinai where God gave the Law and the Mount of the Beatitudes which includes Mt. Calvary.

What was Jesus' attitude toward the Law? Was His concept of the Law different from the concept of Moses? Is the Law from Mount Sinai a law of justice while the Law from the Mount of Beatitudes is a law of love and grace? In order to answer these questions, we must go back to the story of the original Moses because he is a type of Christ.

Law and Grace in the Exodus

The early chapters of Exodus focus on the enslavement of Israel to Pharaoh and their deliverance when they cried out to God to remember His covenant (Exodus 2:23-25). Israel was delivered solely on the basis of God's grace. God did not tell them to obey in order to earn their deliverance. God delivered them because, in their helplessness and great need, they cried out to Him. The sacrifice of the Passover lamb was the symbol, or token, of their deliverance from bondage to Pharaoh who is called ‘the great dragon’ (Ezekiel 29:3). Does this mean that God did not expect Israel to keep the Law because they were under grace? We shall see the answer to this question is a resounding no!

After delivering them from bondage, God did not take His people directly to Canaan. He took a free people to Mt. Sinai and made a covenant with them. First, God reminded Israel that He had delivered them from bondage by His outstretched arm (Exodus 19:3, 4). Next, God told redeemed Israel that if they obeyed Him and kept His covenant, they would be His special people (Exodus 19:5, 6). Moses then relayed God's offer to the elders of the people and they and the people responded, "*all that the Lord has spoken we will do*" and Moses then relayed the response of the people to God (Exodus 19:7, 8). Thus, the covenant between the two parties was established.

In the very next chapter, God gave Israel the Ten Commandments. God gave the Law to a free people. It would have been virtually impossible for Israel to keep them while they were slaves of Pharaoh. God freed them from service to Pharaoh so that they could serve Him. Keeping the Ten Commandments did not earn redemption from bondage. God was saying to them as Jesus later said, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments*" (John 14:15).

The Ten Commandments do not begin with commands, but rather with a reminder of God's loving deliverance of Israel from bondage (Exodus 20:1, 2). Thus, redemption was the incentive for loving obedience.

The question is, what would happen if Israel broke their side of the covenant? Were they then doomed to destruction? The answer is found in Exodus 25-40 where God revealed the sanctuary service.

What is the relationship between the Ten Commandments and the sanctuary service? Though many sacrifices were offered in the sanctuary service, we will focus on the most common one, the morning and evening sacrifice. The children of Israel were sinners. Even after their deliverance from bondage, they broke God's Law every day and therefore they were under the sentence of death. They needed grace, and the sanctuary provided that grace!

Because of their transgression of the law which deserved death, a lamb was slain morning and evening to atone for their sins (Exodus 29:39). Thus the blood of the lamb, in type, made provision for the forgiveness of their sins. The lamb bore the penalty of their guilt. However, according to the testimony of the

book of Hebrews, the blood of the lamb and other beasts did not legally remove sin because the blood of animals cannot forgive sin (see Hebrews 10:4). The sacrifice of animals had the sole purpose of pointing to the sacrifice of Christ.

There are two things we must remember at this point. The sins of the Israelites were not any different than ours. Their transgressions of the law merited them death just like ours do (cf. Romans 6:23). One purpose of the law was to reveal to them (and to us; Romans 7:7) their sinfulness and the need of forgiveness. The blood of the animals was not able to remove sin—it just pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ. The blood of animals was deficient but Jesus has better blood!

Jeremiah 31:31-32 makes it abundantly clear that Israel constantly violated the terms of the covenant even though God was a loving husband to them. The problem was with them, not with the covenant (Hebrews 8:7, 8). Israel neither understood God's Law nor God's grace.

Law and Grace in the New Testament

The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is the prophet like Moses. Yet Jesus is greater than Moses. The expression 'greater than' refers to typology. Moses is the type, and Jesus is the antitype:

*"For **Moses** truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you....' ²⁴ Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold **these days**. ²⁵ You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' ²⁶ To you first, God, having raised up **His Servant Jesus**, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Acts 3:22, 24-26*

Now let us turn to Matthew 26:26-28:

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' ²⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave

*thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ For this is My blood of the **new covenant**, which is shed for many for the **remission of sins**.'"*

Here Jesus refers to the blood of the new covenant. Does the law change between the old and new covenants? The answer to this question is found in another: Why did Jesus have to shed His blood? Because of sin, right? And what is sin? Sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). So, in the new covenant there is law because Jesus had to die because it had been broken, and there is also grace because Jesus took the penalty upon Himself. That is to say, if the law had not been broken, Jesus would not have needed to pour out His blood for sin.

In fulfillment of the Old Testament type, John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who **takes away the sin** of the world (John 1:29, 36). Jesus was the real lamb to whom the lamb of the sacrificial service pointed. In contrast to the blood of animals, the blood of Jesus does actually take away sin! In other words, the great difference between the old covenant and the new is that the new covenant has better blood which really does take away sin!

However, there is more to the new covenant than just better blood. Up until now, we have shown that the new covenant truly forgives because it is based on the powerful blood of Jesus. However, let's go back to Jeremiah 31 and read about a second blessing in verse 33:

"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

We find here another awesome difference between the old covenant and the new. In the new covenant, Jesus not only offers to forgive our sins because His blood is powerful. He also offers to write his law on our hearts and minds. Under the new covenant, Jesus wants to do more than just forgive sin. The passage in Jeremiah 31 is not only a promise for the Old Testament generation. Hebrews 8:7-13 applies this passage to New Testament Christians as well.

The passages in Jeremiah and Hebrews show that the new covenant accomplishes two things: First, it forgives sin, and second, it writes the Law in the heart. Thus, under the new covenant we have **better blood** for forgiveness, and the Law is written in a **better place**, the heart. In both there is blood and Law, but the blood is more powerful in the New, and the Law is written in a better place. Do not miss the point that it is the same Law but written in a better place. The Law does not change; the place where it is written changes! Under the new covenant we do not serve in oldness of letter but in newness of spirit (Romans 6:6).

When Jesus died on the cross and said, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30), the veil of the temple was rent from top to the bottom (Matthew 27:50-51). By this act, God was announcing that the old covenant sacrifices and offerings had come to an end (cf. Daniel 9:27). Now there was a better High Priest, a better sanctuary, better blood, a better hope, a new Jerusalem, a new Israel, a new Zion and a new covenant.

However, someone might object, "Isn't the new covenant all about love and grace while the old was about justice and law?" How did Jesus, the one greater than Moses consider the relationship between love and law under the new covenant? Let's take a look at the law that Jesus uttered from the Mount of the Beatitudes and revealed fully at Mt. Calvary.

Matthew 5:17-19 gives us Christ's profound interpretation of the law. We must remember that the word 'law' here refers to the entire Pentateuch which contains the Ten Commandments. Jesus categorically stated that He had not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them. What does He mean by the word 'fulfill'? Some think it means that He came to do away with them. But really, the word fulfill means to fill full with meaning, in other words, to 'fill full' (cf. Matthew 3:15 where Jesus "fulfills" all righteousness). Without Jesus, the entire Old Testament system is like an empty canister. Jesus is the meaning of the Old Testament; it all centers on Him (John 5:39, 40, 45-47).

Instead of abolishing the law, Jesus intensified and magnified it (Isaiah 42:21). Thus, for Jesus, adultery begins in the heart and is not merely a lustful act

(Matthew 5:27-28). Murder is an attitude of the heart and not merely the act of slaying someone (Matthew 5:21-22; see also, 1 John 3:15). From the heart *“proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies”* (Matthew 15:19) and greed (Matthew 6:21). Jesus actually made the law more demanding by defining sin as a heart problem!

Only Love Matters?

But didn't Jesus say that love is all that matters under the new covenant? To answer this question, let's take a closer look at the relationship between the law and love.

Law is not the antithesis of love, but rather the antithesis of sin. In fact, we will see that the true definition of love is keeping the law from the heart. Many Christians think that love is all we need and they base their concept on texts such as John 13:35:

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

However, love is more than an emotion or feeling. Too many marriages end because love is conceived as a feeling. Love is a divine principle that does not change no matter the circumstances. What is love? Jesus explained the meaning of love in Matthew 22:36-40. There he taught that love has two dimensions: one vertical toward God and the other horizontal toward our fellow human beings (these two dimensions already existed in the Old Testament. Cf. Deuteronomy 6:4; Leviticus 19:18).

But we must still ask, what does it mean to love God and our neighbor? The answer is that the Ten Commandments define the specifics of love. The first four commandments explain what it means to love God and the last six what it means to love our neighbor. However, the definition of love for God and our neighbor is further expanded in the law and the prophets, that is, the Bible. Every passage of the Bible is a further explanation and amplification of the Ten Commandments. We can compare this concept to a funnel which begins narrow at the neck and then broadens to the edge.

You see, Jesus refused to create a dichotomy between law and love. As the apostle Paul put it, *"love is the fulfilling of the law"* (Romans 13:8-10). Jesus repeatedly stated that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments (see John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:10; 1 John 2:3-4; 5:2-3). Love is the Law expressed in action. In fact, the Holy Spirit who writes the Law in our hearts is the same Spirit that pours out love into our hearts (cf. Romans 5:5).

The Law describes proper relationships. If there were no people, then there would be no reason for the Law to define proper relationships. God would not say, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"* if there was no one to commit adultery with. He would not say, *"thou shalt not steal"* if there was no one to steal from. Each commandment is relationship oriented. In short, a perfect observance of the Law would mean an ideal relationship with God and with our neighbor. Breaking the Law is breaking a relationship, and when you break a relationship, you have pain and separation (Isaiah 59:2). Sin is not separation from God. Sin is breaking the Law, which in turn, separates us from God and our fellow human beings!

This link between the Law and relationships is clearly illustrated in the fall of Adam and Eve. As soon as they disobeyed God's command, their relationship with God was severed, and they hid from Him. Further, marital strife ensued. You see, Jesus is the perfect personification of love because He is the perfect personification of the Law. He lived the Law. He is the Law in human flesh. Jesus never killed or lied or coveted or stole or dishonored his parents. His relationships with other people were perfect because He lived the Law in human flesh (cf. Psalm 40:7-8). And this is what Jesus expects from us (John 13:34). Is it loving toward others to kill, steal, gossip, rape, covet, worship idols, use foul language, and have other gods?

You see, the Law is a perfect transcript of God's character, and it is a written description of what He is like in his relationships with others. When we say that the Law demands perfection, we are saying that God demands perfection. We cannot offend tables of stone. We cannot cause pain to tables of stone. Commandments on tables of stone are indifferent to our sins because they are

hard and inanimate. When we say that Christ satisfied the demands of the law we mean that He satisfied the demands of a person—God.

When we say that we transgress against the Law, we really mean that we are sinning against someone. This is why the prodigal son, upon his return home, said to his father: “I have sinned against heaven and against you.” Obviously he had broken the fifth commandment by dishonoring his father, but in breaking the fifth commandment, he sinned against a person. The same can be said about David. After his horrendous crimes of adultery and murder, he confessed to God, *“Against you, you only, have I sinned” Psalm 51:4*

Here lies the reason why Satan **hates the Law**: The Law shows a person his sin and the need of a Savior. That is to say, it not only reveals the problem of our sinfulness, but also the solution through Jesus. Satan also **despises God's grace** because it reveals the love of Jesus who assumed the penalty for our sins. At the cross we see both law and love. Our transgressions of the Law nailed Him there. He died to satisfy the just demands of the Law (of God). But at the cross, we also see love because He suffered the penalty of death in our place. The God of grace is the same God who gave the Law. You see, there was grace in the old covenant or else no one in the Old Testament period could be saved. There is also law in the new covenant or else grace would be unnecessary.

Why was Jesus nailed to the cross? Because of sin. What is sin? Transgression of the Law. And, what is the wages of sin or transgression of the Law? Death (Romans 6:23). What **love** Jesus showed when He was willing to pay our debt of death! What **justice** he showed when he paid the wages that the law demanded! He is just and justifier.

But there is more in the cross than forgiveness. From the cross, flow two great blessings: Forgiveness and power. When I see Jesus in Gethsemane sweating great drops of blood (Luke 22:44) and bleeding on the cross and crying out, *“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me”* (Matthew 27:46), I ask, “Why, Lord, why did this happen to You?” His answer comes back: *“The wages of sin is death.”* This moves me to repentance and to cry out, “Lord, forgive me for

nailing you there!” And Jesus answers, “*Your repentance is accepted and your sins forgiven.*” This brings rejoicing of heart and a lifting of the burden of sin.

But there is more! When I see the hideous monster that sin is (It nailed Jesus to the cross!), I will want nothing more to do with it because it hurts Jesus. Thus, from the cross flows power not only to forgive sin, but also to overcome it. We sin because we take our eyes off the cross. Next time we are tempted to commit adultery, lie, cheat and steal, let us remember, that these are the very things that nailed Jesus to the cross!

Christian Attitudes Toward the Law

Many Christians today have an extremely superficial view of salvation. We can see this for example, in the bumper sticker that reads, “I’m not perfect, just forgiven.”

Twice during His ministry, after forgiving people of their sins, Jesus commanded, “Go and sin no more” (John 5:14; 8:11). God not only wants to forgive sins, but He also wants to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). According to Matthew 1:21, God promised to save His people **from** their sins, not **in** them. God does not take half measures in saving us from sin. He is a complete Savior or He is no Savior at all! The God who justifies is the God who sanctifies. Justification is our title to heaven and sanctification our fitness. Jesus offers to save us from the guilt of sin and also from its power. The problem with so many Christians is that they are so afraid of legalism that they have gone to the other extreme—cheap grace. Legalism sees the law without love. **Cheap grace** sees love without law. True love leads us to love and obey the Law! That is why David could exclaim, “*O how love I your law! It is my meditation all the day.*” Psalm 119:97

Paul on Law and Grace

Some Christians claim that Paul demeaned the Law and exalted grace, and in attempt to prove their point, they use some favorite texts such as Romans 3:28;

5:20, 21; and 6:14. However, because they fail to read the immediately succeeding context of these verses, they reach wrong conclusions.

It is true that man is justified by faith without the works of the law (Romans 3:28), but according to the immediately succeeding context, it is equally true that faith establishes the law (Romans 3:31). It is true that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more (Romans 5:20, 21). However, Paul adds in the very next verse, *“shall we sin that grace may abound?”* His answer is categorical: *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”* Romans 6:1, 2

Christians love to quote Paul when he wrote, *“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”* Romans 6:14. However, they fail to quote the very next verse: *“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!”* Grace does not give us an excuse to live in sin, but rather to live for Jesus!

Someone once asked me: Is your church law-oriented or grace-oriented? My answer was, “Neither. My church is Bible-oriented”. You see, if there is no law, there is no sin, and if there is no sin, there is no need for grace to save us from it.

The Rich Young Ruler is an example of one who boasted that he kept the Law, but in reality he had no love (like Israel at Mt. Sinai, the Law was on tables of stone and not on the tables of the heart). On the other hand are those who claim to follow Jesus and feel it is not necessary to keep the Law. For example, in Matthew 24:12 we are told that at the very end of time, *“because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold”*. Notice that it does not say that because of a lack of love, lawlessness will abound. Sin is transgression of the law, but it also kills love because love is the fulfilling of the law.

Matthew 7:21-23 speaks of an end-time people who claim to follow Jesus. They even appear to have the gifts of the Spirit, casting out devils, prophesying and performing miracles. And yet Jesus will refuse to recognize them as His because they are transgressors of the Law (cf. 1 John 3:4).

Let us go back for a moment to Mt. Sinai. When the Lord offered to make a covenant with them they quickly answered, *'all that the Lord has said we will do'*. They saw the Law as a list of regulations to obey rather than a love response to God. For them, the Law was a code on tables of stone to be kept. However, there is one person who had the Jeremiah experience of the Law written in the heart—Moses.

At the top of the mountain, Moses communed with the Lord in intimate converse and Moses found grace in God's sight (Exodus 33:17, 18). Because of his personal relationship with the Lord, the glory of God rubbed off on the face of Moses and his face shone with the glory of God (Exodus 34:29). When Moses descended from the mount, the people pleaded with Moses to cover his face. They wanted Moses, but not the glory. The apostle Paul picked up on this in 2 Corinthians 3. The Israelites looked at the Law as commandments on tables of stone, but Moses had the Law written on his heart—the experience later referred to by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-33). Thus, Moses experienced the new covenant during the old covenant period.

A Personal Experience from one of the Glow Tracts

Have you ever broken the speed limit? Perhaps for most people, the better question would be, "Have you ever kept the speed limit?" One night on my way home, I was driving 60 mph in a 40-mph zone. It wasn't long before a patrol car drove up behind me with its lights flashing. The officer came to the window and asked if I knew why he had stopped me. I replied that I was pretty sure it was because I was speeding. I told him that I was genuinely sorry and that I knew I deserved the ticket. To my surprise, he simply gave me a warning and said: "I'm going to let you off the hook this time. Just remember that lives are put in danger by speeding in this residential area."

Needless to say, I was elated! But then I got to thinking. Did the officer do the right thing? Was his forgiveness really grace? Actually, it wasn't. As an officer of the law, his obligation is to punish transgression of the law, not forgive it. I broke the law and he was obliged to enforce it. Someone might object, "But you were sorry!" True, but it makes no difference. The violation of the law required

payment and payment was not made; he did not do his job. How then could the officer have forgiven me and still upheld the requirements of the law?

He could have told me: “I can’t let you go without the law getting its just due. You broke the law and the law demands payment. But I’ll tell you what I am going to do. I’m going to write the ticket, but I’ll go down to the courthouse and pay it for you. In this way I will honor the law and yet forgive you.” This illustration perfectly presents the spiritual situation all of us are in today.

Let’s reflect for a few moments—not on the speed limit, but on the greatest Law that has ever been written, the Law of Almighty God. God not only spoke this Law with His own lips but He also wrote it with His own finger (Exodus 31:18). The Bible describes this Law as “holy, just and good” (Romans 7:12) because it describes perfect relationships in a perfect society. This Law contains ten simple principles (called the Ten Commandments) written on *two tables of stone*, indicating their permanence. The first table contains four principles, which explain what it means to love God, and the second contain six that describe what it means to love our fellow human beings.

Some Christians claim that we no longer need to obey the Ten Commandments because we are now under a different law, the law of love! But this misconception is based on a faulty understanding of love. The very lips of Jesus uttered the words “if you love me you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). And the great apostle Paul affirmed, “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). There is no conflict between the law and love because God is the source of both!

Since the very beginning, the inhabitants of our planet have disobeyed this law. This is an extremely serious matter because the Bible defines disobedience to this law as sin, and the payment for sin is death (1 John 3:4; Romans 6:23). Because each of us has broken the Law, we have all sinned, and because each of us has sinned, we are all on death row (Romans 3:10, 23).

To give us a way of escape from the penalty of the Law, Jesus, who created us all, offered to come to this world to live the life that the Law requires of us. He

also offered to take the place of every single human being who has ever drawn breath on planet earth by taking the death penalty upon Himself in our place.

Here is something many people don't realize: Jesus' death shows that this same law cannot be changed or discarded. Think about it. Why did Jesus have to die? The answer is, to save sinners from the death penalty of the Law. If God wanted to save sinners some other way, He could have done away with that law which required the death penalty. Right? But in doing so, He would have set aside the foundation of truth, the detector of right and wrong. He would have condoned sin and contradicted His own character of righteousness. When God had to choose between letting the Law be destroyed or letting sinners be destroyed, *He was unwilling to do either*. Instead He chose a third option of sending His Son to die on the cross. By so doing, He indicated the permanence of the Law as well as His love for sinners.

Were the Ten Commandments Nailed to the Cross?

Incredibly, many Christians think that the Law no longer exists or applies. They assume that the Law was "nailed to the cross" rather than established at the cross. Obviously, when Paul mentioned in Colossians that something was "nailed to the cross" and done away with, he was not referring to the Ten Commandments. He was rather referring to certain ceremonial requirements that pointed forward to Jesus and passed away when He died on the cross.

Sadly, even some Christians at times misapply Bible verses and in the process justify sin! They take some texts from the writings of the apostle Paul and misuse them to validate their point. They say: "Didn't Paul write that where sin abounds grace is even more abundant (Romans 5:20)? Didn't the great apostle affirm that we are not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:14) and that we are justified by faith without works of law (Romans 3:28)?" As a matter of fact, he did! But in each one of these statements Paul immediately corrected any possible misunderstanding of his words. He categorically denied that grace gives us a license to sin: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:1, 2) "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:15)

“Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not!” (Romans 3:31) Those attempting to justify sin take Scripture and twist it “to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16).

It is a serious misconception to believe that Old Testament believers were saved because they kept the Law while New Testament believers are saved by grace. In Acts 4:12 we are told that there is no salvation outside of Jesus. Old Testament believers were saved in the same way as New Testament believers—by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Some Christians claim that because Jesus kept the Law and paid its penalty, we don’t have to keep it. But does this really make sense? Did Jesus die so that we could disobey? Would the officer’s payment of my ticket give me the right, from that point forward, to drive 60 mph in a 40-mph speed zone? In other words, would the cancellation of my debt then give me a license to break the law? Of course not! If anything, the officer’s goodness in paying for my ticket would be a powerful incentive for me to obey the law.

When I meditate upon what sin cost Jesus, I will hate sin and love Him. Can there be a more powerful incentive to keep the Law than this? Not only does our Savior’s death on the cross show that the Law was not done away with, it also motivates us to keep that Law! “We love him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3).

God Himself has opened a door of opportunity for you. Will you take it? Not all will be saved. Obedience to God still matters! Will you prove yourself loyal to Heaven? The Law of God expressed in the Ten Commandments still stands today. The Bible says, “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life” (Rev. 22:14). Hear God as today He pleads with you and others, saying, “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29)

In our next lecture we will conclude this study by analyzing how God transforms our hearts. May we truly appreciate God's Law and God's grace.



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #7 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT OVERCOMING LIFE'S MISTAKES

Review and Introduction

In our last study, we noticed that the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant is two-fold: The new covenant has better blood and a better place to write the law, that is, the heart.

In this present study we will see that we all have contracted a terminal spiritual disease. We will also note the measures God has taken to heal us from it. Our foundational passage of study will be John, chapter three.

Lessons from a Legalist

According to John 3:1, Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jewish Sanhedrin. As a Pharisee, he considered himself a meticulous observer of the Law. However, his obedience was a façade. His religious experience was like that of Saul of Tarsus who was also a Pharisee, and after the stoning of Stephen, a member of the Sanhedrin (cf. Acts 6:12; 7:58; 8:1). After his conversion, Saul of Tarsus (who came to be known as Paul) described the arrogant opinion that he had of himself before his conversion to Jesus Christ:

“If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the

Hebrews; **concerning the law, a Pharisee**; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the **righteousness which is in the law, blameless.**"
Philippians 3:4-6

Clearly, before his conversion, Paul was the consummate legalist. For him the law was written on tables of stone, not on the tables of his heart. Keeping the Law was meritorious for salvation. The rich young ruler that came to Jesus is another example of a legalist who boasted of keeping the law to the very letter and yet lacked love (cf. Matthew 19:16-22). We can see the stark contrast between the self-righteous Pharisee and the truly repentant sinner in the story of the Pharisee and the publican who went to the temple to pray:

"Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' ¹³ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14

Jesus described the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites who boasted of being holy. Outwardly they appeared holy and righteous but Jesus assured them that they were outside like whited sepulchers but inside they were full of rot (cf. Matthew 23:23-28). Nicodemus was a strict Pharisee, and prided himself on his good works. He was widely esteemed for his benevolence and his liberality in sustaining the temple service, and he felt secure of the favor of God.

And so, Nicodemus the Pharisee came to an interview with Jesus on the Mount of Olives at night. He came at night because he wanted to guard his reputation among his colleagues and the people (John 3:2). It would be too humiliating for a ruler of the Jews to acknowledge himself in sympathy with a teacher as yet so little known.

Nicodemus began the conversation by flattering the Master, extolling his great qualities as a teacher and his miracles. The words of Nicodemus expressed unbelief because he recognized Jesus as a great teacher, but not as the promised Messiah who would save the world from sin.

Jesus cut to the chase. He sidestepped all the accolades and got to the point. He said to Nicodemus, *"Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* John 3:3

But by virtue of his birth as an Israelite, Nicodemus regarded himself as sure of a place in the kingdom of God. He felt that he needed no change. Hence his surprise at the words of Jesus.

According to John 3:4, Nicodemus, no doubt irritated by the words of Jesus, attempted to deflect the conversation by suggesting that what Jesus had just said was absurd:

"Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?'"

Jesus, instead of softening his message, went even further. He now said to Nicodemus that not only could he not see the kingdom of God, but he could not enter it unless he was born again:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh, is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." John 3:5, 6

By water, Jesus was referring to water baptism, and by Spirit He was referring to the Holy Spirit. When we are born the first time, we are born in the flesh, but when we are born again, we are born of the water and the Holy Spirit. Paul amplified this point when he stated: *"So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."* Romans 8:8. By flesh, the apostle Paul means that we are born with a fallen, selfish nature when we come from our mother's womb (Psalm 51:4). Without the new birth, we are lost!

Let's diagnose the disease we are born with and how it can be cured. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the populace that they needed to have a

greater righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). What did Jesus mean by a 'greater righteousness'?

Verses 21-22 tell us that the Pharisees did not actually commit the act of murder, but by having hatred in their hearts they were just as verily guilty of it as if they had performed the act. The same rings true with adultery. The Pharisees prided themselves because they had not committed the **act** of adultery, but Jesus told them that adultery takes place **in the heart** before it bears fruit in action. Jesus picked up on this theme in Matthew 23:23-28 where he was once again addressing the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. Jesus accused them of having a façade of external righteousness but with a diseased heart. They were hypocrites because they hid the filth inside by an apparently spotless external conduct.

Sin always begins in the heart, and for this reason it must be overcome there first. We notice this in the story of the temptation of Eve and the story of Achan. In both stories, sin follows a four step process (cf. Genesis 3:1-6 and Joshua 7:21):

- ✓ First, the eyes see that which entices the person to sin.
- ✓ Then, the sinful desire takes root in the heart.
- ✓ Next, the sinful root in the heart produces the sinful act.
- ✓ Finally, the sinner attempts to hide what he/she had done.

If sin is to be overcome, it must be overcome in the heart before it springs into action! However, in order to overcome, the old heart must be replaced by a new one.

The horrendous sins of David illustrate the same principle:

- ✓ David saw this beautiful woman bathing naked.
- ✓ Instead of turning away, David coveted her.
- ✓ The next step was to take her.
- ✓ And then he did all in his power to hide what he had done.

This is the reason why David, when he repented, not only asked the Lord for forgiveness, but also for a clean heart that would sin no more (see Psalm 51:1,

10). If David had not received a new heart, he would have done the same thing all over again! After his conversion, David expressed love and reverence for the Law (see Psalm 119:97, 113, 163, 165; 97:10). The reason why he loved the law is because it showed him his sin and his need for forgiveness, cleansing and power.

Jesus taught that we can know what is in the heart by the fruits (Matthew 7:15-20). How can we tell that a tree is an apple tree? Because it produces apples, right? You know the nature of the tree by its fruits. You do not have to command an apple tree to produce apples because it does so by nature. So if we have a spiritual nature, it will produce the fruit of the Spirit. However, it is possible to go to the supermarket and buy many bags of apples and hang them on a tree. This might fool a few people into thinking that the fruit was natural when it is really artificial. Many people who have a wicked heart, hang artificial fruits in their life to give an appearance of holiness.

The rich young ruler exemplifies the spiritual disease with which every person on earth is born. The ruler was a member of the Sanhedrin. He considered himself an exemplary and strict law keeper. Yet something was missing. His superficial religion made him uneasy. There was a canker sore in his heart. He hung good works on the tree, but they were not produced by the tree. Jesus said, *"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* Matthew 6:21. This young man's outside appeared fine but he had a heart problem—greed. (cf. Luke 18:18-23)

Jesus taught that words are a window to the heart. Let's read Matthew 12:34-35:

"Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things."

If someone talks predominantly about money, possessions, job, personal appearance and has little to say about heaven and Jesus, that person can say that he is a Christian, but his words will mean nothing! Our words reveal what

our real interests are. A legalist can usually be detected quite easily. He is constantly talking about his own goodness, piety and accomplishments and criticizing others for not reaching his 'high' spiritual level. The words reveal the self-righteousness which is in the heart. In Mark 7:7, Jesus reproved the people of His day because they honored Him with their lips, but their heart was far away from Him. Words are cheap when the heart is wrong!

In Mark 7:20-23 Jesus got to the root of the problem:

*"And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. ²¹ For **from within, out of the heart** of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²² thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things **come from within** and defile a man."*

The sinful heart is like a poisoned fountain. All evil acts come from the heart and if the fountain is not cleansed, the stream which flows from it will be defiled.

As we saw in the last lesson, the story of the Pharisee and the publican illustrates the same idea. The Pharisee was proud of his own accomplishments, and he boastfully let everyone know about it. He was also highly critical of the publican for not reaching what he considered to be his high level of spirituality. Stories such as this have led some Christians to think that legalism and keeping the law are one and the same thing. But they are not! The fact is that a legalist thinks he can earn salvation by keeping the law. But keeping the law because there is love in the heart is not legalism (cf. Luke 18:9-14).

Jesus used leaven as an illustration of growth from the inside out.

"Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.'" Matthew 13:33

A baker does not form a lump of dough and then sprinkle the yeast on top of the bread. The leaven must be put inside the dough and then the lump will grow from the inside out.

There is a common belief among Christians that God doesn't care what we look like on the outside as long as the inside is right. But the fact is, that if we are right on the inside, the outside will also be right (cf. Matthew 23:23, 26). When the heart is right, our acts will be right. When the heart is right, our words will be right. The problem with the Pharisees was not that they had an external religion—God wants the outside to look nice. The problem with the Pharisees is that the outside was not the natural outworking of the inside. The Law was not in the heart; it was on tables of stone and they were always trying to 'measure up' in their own strength. The life of the Pharisee is one of spiritual misery because with an old, sinful heart a person cannot keep the Law of God no matter how hard they try.

Jesus compared the outworking of the Holy Spirit with the effects produced by the wind:

"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:7, 8

One writer has described the metaphor of the wind:

"While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power. When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven." Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 173

I have seen people who look like physical marvels on the outside and yet, next I hear, they have suffered a massive heart attack. Their heart was bad and yet they looked so good! In a similar way, many Christians look nice and healthy on the outside and yet they have a bad heart. A physical heart attack will cost your present physical life, but a spiritual heart attack will cost you your future everlasting life!

Fortunately, there is good news. God is in the heart-transplant business. God takes no half measures in the surgery He performs. He does not change valves, do bypasses, angioplasty or put in pacemakers. He is the heavenly surgeon and the only type of surgery He performs is heart transplants. If we seek Him with all our hearts, He will take out our old, sick heart and put in a new, healthy one!

God's Awesome Solution to our Deadly Disease

God not only offers to forgive our sins but He actually promises to take out our old heart of stone and to put in a heart of flesh. Go promised His people:

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh". Ezekiel 36:26

Does this mean that we no longer have to keep God's commandments? Of course not! Notice the following verse:

*"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you **to walk** in My statutes, and you will **keep** My judgments and **do** them." Ezekiel 36:27*

God not only promises a heart transplant. He also promises to write His Law on the new heart:

*"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put **My law in their minds**, and **write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Jeremiah 31:31-33*

Let's take a closer look at how the Holy Spirit writes God's Law in our hearts. Exodus 31:18 tells us that the Ten Commandments were written with the finger of God. What is the finger of God? A comparison of Matthew 12:28 with Luke 11:20 reveals that the finger of God is the Holy Spirit! So it was the Holy Spirit who wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. However, the same

Spirit wants to write them on the tables of our hearts. Wrote the apostle Paul about the Corinthians, *"You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart."* 2 Corinthians 3:3

Clearly, both under the old and new covenants, the same Holy Spirit wrote the Law. The difference between the covenants is not in the Law, but in the place where the Law is written.

And when does the Holy Spirit write God's law in our heart? Let's return to the story of Nicodemus once again. God told him that he must be born of the water and of the Spirit. What did Jesus mean by water and Spirit? Peter provided the answer in Acts 2:38:

*"Repent, and let every one of you be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the **Holy Spirit.**"*

According to Peter, baptism provides two blessings: First, when a person is buried in the water, their sins are remitted—that is, forgiven. This is the first blessing of the new covenant (see Matthew 26:27, 28). But there is more. The second blessing is that the believer receives the gift of the Holy Spirit who writes God's Law in our hearts and provides power for witness!

The baptism of Jesus established the pattern. Although our Lord had no sin, He was buried in the water and when he came up, the Holy Spirit fell upon him and the voice of God announced that Jesus was His Beloved Son. Next, Jesus went to the wilderness and gained the victory over temptation (Mark 1:9-11). Likewise, the baptismal candidate is buried in the water, comes up from the water, becomes a child of God and receives the Holy Spirit to overcome temptation and power to witness to others.

God could not have chosen a better symbol than baptism to illustrate death to sin and birth to a new life. When people are buried into the water, they cease to breathe and when they come out, they breathe again. This is an inclusion into Christ's experience in miniature Who died, was buried and resurrected.

We must remember, however, that the gift of the Holy Spirit must be received afresh each day. It is not a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We need a new baptism every day. As we behold Jesus every day (the law in human flesh), we will be changed from glory to glory until we reflect His image fully. What an awesome thought! We must learn to abide in Him (John 15:4-7). By beholding Jesus on the cross (Jesus shared the secret of victory with Nicodemus in John 3:14-16), we are changed daily into His likeness.

When the believer comes forth from the waters of baptism he/she is a new creation, a child of God and a member of His family. Then, the good works that flow from his/her heart (cf. Matthew 5:14-16; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10) bring glory to God.

Jesus said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."* Matthew 5:8. Two thousand years before His birth, in a beautiful messianic prophecy, Jesus said: *"Then 'Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. ⁸ I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart."* Psalm 40:7, 8. If we wish to see Jesus come in glory and be found ready, we must allow Jesus to forgive our sins and cleanse our hearts from all unrighteousness.

Converted Nicodemus

Whatever happened to Nicodemus? Did he see the light? Was his interview with Jesus fruitful? We have two strong hints that the answer is yes. In John 7:50-52 we find Nicodemus defending Jesus before the Jewish council of which he was a member. Furthermore, and more significantly, in John 19:39 we are told that Nicodemus contributed a large sum of money to buy myrrh and aloes to embalm the body of Jesus. Then, in public, he participated in the burial of Jesus (John 19:40-42).

The interview with Jesus had brought Nicodemus everlasting life. Some day he will not only see the kingdom of God, but actually enter in! What about you? What are your plans? Have you had an interview with Jesus? Have you made your decision to be baptized by the water and the Spirit? The decision is yours and your eternal destiny depends on it!

A Final Illustration

When I was a child in Venezuela, I became a proficient butterfly collector. In fact, I learned so much about butterflies that I became an amateur entomologist. Probably most of you know that butterflies have ‘two births’. The first birth is the caterpillar. The caterpillar laboriously drags itself along the branches of the tree where the mother butterfly laid the eggs. It eats from the leaves of the tree and grows—but it is still a caterpillar.

The second birth is nothing short of miraculous. When the caterpillar has reached its full growth, it buries itself in a cocoon and something spectacular occurs. By a process of metamorphosis, the caterpillar is transformed into a ‘new creature’, nothing like the old. After a period of time, the cocoon begins to shake and lo and behold, out comes a beautiful butterfly. The new creation is nothing like the old. The habits, appearance, diet and environment all change! Old things have passed away and everything is new.

The question is, how did the caterpillar change into a butterfly? It did not change because it tried to change. The change came by a miracle of God. A butterfly is not a caterpillar with wings. It is a totally new creation. Scientists cannot see the power that transformed the caterpillar into a butterfly, but they can see the results of that power when the butterfly comes forth. Jesus taught a similar lesson when He told Nicodemus that we cannot see the wind but we can see the effects of the wind.

A well-known author explained:

“The Christian’s life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.” Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 172.

The apostle Paul explained it this way:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

Abiding in Jesus

After being born of water and of the Spirit, however, Satan will kick into action all the more to recover his lost hostage. When I hunted butterflies, I used carbon tetrachloride to kill them.

- Describe my experiences catching butterflies in Venezuela: The **jar, with carbon tetrachloride**.
- The process of catching the *Morpho* butterflies and how I **discovered their weakness**.
- We must **abide in Jesus** by **constantly beholding Him** because Satan, the **great hunter**, is on the loose.
- Our only safety is to **abide in Christ**.
- The butterflies that **left the refuge** became easy prey.
- We abide in him by speaking with Him in prayer, studying His Word and talking about Him.

*“By **beholding** Christ, by **talking** of Him, by **beholding** the loveliness of His character we become changed. Changed from glory to glory. And what is glory? Character, --and he becomes changed from character to character. Thus we see that there is a **work of purification** that goes on by beholding Jesus.”* Ellen White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 337.



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #8 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT HOW TO PRAY

Introduction: What is Prayer? Definitions

Here are some excellent definitions of prayer:

- ✓ It is the key in the hand of faith which opens the treasure house of heaven.
- ✓ Prayer is to open our heart to God as to a friend.
- ✓ It is the breath of the soul.
- ✓ It is when the weak arm of man lays hold of the omnipotent arm of God.

What did Jesus have to say about prayer? What were his prayer habits? What conditions did Jesus lay out for our prayers to be answered?

Best Place and Time to Pray

Although we are taught to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), during His ministry on earth, Jesus exemplified the **best** time and **place** to pray. He usually chose **solitary** locations early in the morning or in the evening after everyone had retired for the day.

*“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have **shut your door**, pray to your Father who is in the **secret place**; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” Matthew 6:6*

Whenever a critical event was about to take place in His ministry, He spent the night in prayer.

When He was about to begin His ministry in Galilee, He prayed by Himself in a solitary place:

*“Now in the morning, having risen a **long while before** daylight, He went out and departed to a **solitary place**; and there He **prayed**.” Mark 1:35*

The night before he ordained the twelve, he prayed all night:

“Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. ¹³ And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.” Luke 6:12, 13

Jesus prayed to His Father before the transfiguration that the Father would reveal His glory to assure the disciples that He was indeed the promised Messiah. At this point, the disciples were confused by events that occurred immediately before (cf. Matthew 16:13-16, 21-23):

*“Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain **to pray**.” Luke 9:28*

When He was about to go through the final events of His ministry in Gethsemane, He poured out His heart to His Father:

“He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” Matthew 26:39

*“Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. ²³ And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain **by Himself to pray**. Now when evening came, He was **alone there**.” Matthew 14:22, 23*

Address the Father in the Name of Jesus

According to Jesus, we must always address our prayers to the Father in His name because no one comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). There is no Bible evidence that we are to pray to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit. Jesus is our brother and we approach the Father through our brother. He instructed us to address the Father in the name of Jesus:

*“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ If a **son** asks for bread from any **father** among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your **heavenly Father** give the Holy Spirit to those who **ask Him!**” Luke 11:9-13*

*“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your **Father** who is in the secret place; and your **Father** who sees in secret will reward you openly.... ⁸ “Therefore do not be like them. For your **Father** knows the things you have need of before you ask. ⁹ In this manner, therefore, pray: Our **Father** in heaven, hallowed be **Your name**.... ¹⁴ “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your **heavenly Father** will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will **your Father** forgive your trespasses.” Matthew 6:6, 8, 9, 14, 15*

Also, the evening after of the resurrection He told His disciples that He was going to return to His Father and their Father (John 20:17). Jesus addressed God in prayer on the way to Gethsemane as “Father”:

*“**Holy Father**, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.... ²⁰ “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, **Father**, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe*

that You sent Me.... ²⁵ O **righteous Father!** The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me.” John 17:11, 20, 21, 25

“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come **to God through Him**, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Hebrews 7:25

Pray with a Humble and Teachable Spirit

We must pray with humility, sensing our great need. When our heart is filled with pride, we pray as the Pharisee did—to ourselves (Luke 18:10). Notice the contrast between the prayer of the Pharisee and the publican:

“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple **to pray**, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and **prayed thus with himself**, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ ¹³ And the tax collector, standing **afar off**, would not so much as **raise his eyes** to heaven, but **beat his breast**, saying, ‘God, **be merciful to me a sinner!**’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who **exalts himself** will be humbled, and he who **humbles himself** will be exalted.” Luke 18:9-14

Psalms 139:1-4 tells us that God knows all about us:

“O Lord, You have searched me and known me. ² You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. ³ You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.”

Jesus described the Father’s foreknowledge:

“For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” Matthew 6:8

Why, then, do we need to pray? Prayer is the way we manifest our absolute dependence and trust in our Father. Sometimes He does not immediately

answer our prayers because He knows that we would not grow in our trust of Him. Prayer is for our benefit, not for God's.

Avoid Vain Repetition and Recited Prayers

When we pray we should avoid vain repetitions and public displays:

“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward...⁷ And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.⁸ “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6:5, 7, 8)

The purpose of prayer is not to show off our oratorical skills. Some people who pray, incessantly repeat God's name. We should avoid using God's name unnecessarily, lest we take it in vain (Exodus 20:7). Nor is prayer a means of showing off our piety and consecration. Prayer should express the deepest thoughts of the heart and for this reason, private, secret prayer is to be preferred.

Pray that God's Will be Done

We must always pray that God's will be done. Sometime we think we now what is best for us but with regards to the this, the saying is true that 'Father knows best'.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray, *“Thy will be done”* (Matthew 6:10). When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, as He neared the end of His life, His human nature recoiled from the ordeal ahead. Yet, He prayed three times, *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will but as You will.”* Matthew 26:39

John, the disciple that Jesus loved, expressed it this way:

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” 1 John 5:14

God knows the end from the beginning. For this reason, He knows what is best for us. In fact, we wouldn't choose any other way than God's way if we could see the end from the beginning. James, the half-brother of Jesus warned us never to say, 'I will do this' or 'I will do that'. We should always say, 'if God wills'.

*"Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "**If the Lord wills**, we shall live and do this or that." James 4:13-15*

Though we find multiple stories in the Bible that illustrate the importance of abiding by His will, let's briefly consider two of them. The story of Joseph is a living illustration of a life that could be better understood from the back side than from the front side. He was sold into slavery in Egypt undeservedly and unjustly by his brothers. He could have complained about his plight, but he did not because he knew that God had a plan that he could not understand at that moment. God providentially led him step by step in His plan, and as Joseph looked back, he could see the hand of God at every step of his experience. When his brothers tearfully begged forgiveness at the end of the ordeal, Joseph told them to cheer up:

"But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." Genesis 45:5-7

By his willingness to cooperate with God's providential leading, Joseph not only saved his family, but preserved the Seed that would be born from the holy line. God certainly works in mysterious and sometimes incomprehensible ways. However, if we abide by His will, at the end we will see that His way was the best way.

The danger of requesting favors from the Lord that are not in harmony with His will can be seen in the life of Hezekiah. The king was on a sickbed and was at the point of death. But Hezekiah did not want to die (2 Kings 20:1). Maybe he felt that his work on earth was not finished yet or was simply afraid to die. So Hezekiah begged the Lord to spare his life a while longer:

"Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, ³ "Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly." 2 Kings 20:2-3

Although it was not God's plan 'A', God answered Hezekiah's prayer, giving him an additional fifteen years of life. However, during those years Hezekiah's foolishness in showing a Babylonian delegation all the riches of Israel would put God's people in jeopardy in the future (2 Kings 20:6). It would have been better for Hezekiah to leave well enough alone!

Pray with Perseverance

In the parable of the persistent widow, Jesus underlined the importance of perseverant, unyielding prayer (Luke 18:1-8). The central lesson of the parable tells us that 'we should pray always and never give up.' Although this parable is encouraging to all Christians at all times, it has a special application to the elect of God who will live in the last remnant of time when the great tribulation will test their faith to the utmost.

Jesus experienced an anguishing delay when He prayed to His Father in the garden and on the cross. In Gethsemane, He prayed three times that the cup of the Father's wrath would be removed from Him if it was His Father's will (Matthew 26:39-44). The writer of the book of Hebrews described the anguish with which Jesus prayed to His Father in Gethsemane as Jesus *"offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear."* Hebrews 5:7. The Father heard Jesus, but delayed in delivering Him from death until resurrection morning (cf. Psalm 22:1-8).

Our prayer life needs to be like that of Jacob. We should not let go until we have received the assurance of God's blessing (cf. Genesis 32:9-12). The story of Jacob will be repeated in the final remnant (cf. Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:4-9; Matthew 24:21-24). The story of Job illustrates in vivid color the importance of perseverant prayer. Job prayed to God for understanding on why he was going through his trials and did not receive an immediate answer. He struggled long in prayer with God. He did not faint in approaching God, nor did he lose his faith. In fact, he uttered the famous words *"though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."* Job 13:15

The apostle Paul admonished us to *"pray **without ceasing**"* (1 Thessalonians 5:17), to *"continue **earnestly** in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving"* (Colossians 4:2) and *"rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing **steadfastly** in prayer"* (Romans 12:12). In beautiful words the Psalmist wrote, *"**Evening** and **morning** and at **noon** I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice"* Psalm 55:17

Confession, Forgiveness and Forgiving

We should repent of our sins and confess them pleading with God for forgiveness. Repentance is something that happens in the heart, by the working of the Holy Spirit. The prodigal son repented in his heart while he was far from home and then returned home and made confession of his sin to his Father: *"I have sinned against heaven and against you and I am not worthy to be called your son."* Confession is to verbally pray to God sorry that we have sinned and pleading for forgiveness. There is a difference between admitting that we have sinned and repenting of it as we can see in the contrast between the repentance of Peter and Judas (Matthew 27:3; Luke 22:61, 62; John 21:15-19). One regrets the consequences of sin and the other the sin itself. If we confess our sins to God, we can have the assurance of forgiveness:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

David is a living illustration of the relationship between repentance, confession and forgiveness. After committing his grave sins of adultery and murder, David repented and confessed his sin as we can see in Psalms 32 and 51.

However, the Lord's Prayer and the parable of the two debtors tell us that God only forgives us as we forgive our debtors:

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Matthew 6:12

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6:14, 15

We find a vivid illustration of this principle of forgiveness and forgiving in the parable of the two debtors in Matthew 18:21-35:

"So My Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses." Matthew 18:35

Quite frequently we carry around grudges which weigh down our spiritual experience and poison our life. It is important to remember that God does not forgive us because we forgive others, but as we forgive others. In other words, God's forgiveness flows through us to others (See the study of Christ's parable of the two debtors at the end of these study notes.).

We Must Pray in Faith

We must pray in faith, believing that God will do what He has promised. Jesus is a prime example of this. John 11:41, 42 tells us that Jesus thanked His Father for hearing Him even before He resurrected Lazarus! James, the brother of Jesus, explained the importance of faith and trust in prayer:

"If anyone lacks wisdom let him ask of God, who gives liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to Him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." James 1:5-8

Even before James wrote these words, Jesus had given us the assurance that God will answer when we come to Him in faith:

*“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you **will find**; knock, and it **will be opened** to you. ⁸ For everyone who **asks receives**, and he who **seeks finds**, and to him who knocks **it will be opened**. ⁹ Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” Matthew 7:7-11*

*“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, **believe** that you receive them, and you will have them.” Mark 11:24*

Sometimes people will say to me, “Pastor, I have confessed my sin time and again and I still do not feel that God has forgiven me.” Well, folks, feelings have nothing to do with it. We must take God **at His Word**. If He promises to forgive, then, if we meet the conditions, we must accept that fact, not because we feel it, but because God says so. The experience of Jacob is an illustration of someone that had been forgiven but was not able to forgive himself for over twenty years. Sometimes we make it harder to forgive ourselves than for God to forgive us (cf. Genesis 32). If God was willing to give His Son, what makes us think that He is not willing to give us all things?

“He who did not spare His Own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Romans 8:32

Beware of Presumption

However, we must remember that presumption is the counterfeit of faith. The track of faith and the track of presumption lie close together. Faith claims God's promises in obedience while presumption claims the same promises in disobedience. Satan tempted Jesus to be presumptuous. Let's examine the Satan's second temptation in the wilderness:

*“Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw **Yourself** down. For it is written: “He shall give His angels charge over you,” and, “In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”’ ⁷ Jesus said to him, ‘It is written again, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God.”’” Matthew 4:5-7*

The Father had not instructed Jesus to jump from the temple tower. The word ‘Yourself’ indicates that Satan was tempting Jesus to act independently of His Father—on His own. Satan tempted Jesus to claim God’s promise of protection in disobedience. Satan even quoted the promise in Psalm 91, but he left out the condition to claim the promise **“to keep you in all your ways”**:

*“For He shall give His angels charge over you, **to keep you in all your ways.** ¹² In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” Psalm 91:11-12*

We run the same risk of claiming God’s promises without meeting the conditions. To refuse medical treatment, to handle snakes, and to drink poison is not a show of faith, but of presumption (cf. Mark 16:18). Likewise, to pray for God to help us pass a test when we have not studied, or to ask God to heal us when we continually violate the laws of health is presumptuous. Also, asking God to protect us from harm when we needlessly put our life in danger is presuming upon the promises of God.

It is presumptuous to ask God for the wrong things, expecting Him to provide them. James, the brother of Jesus, (Matthew 13:55; John 7:2-5; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Acts 1:14) wrote:

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.” James 4:3

When Jesus was agonizing in Gethsemane and the temple guard came to arrest him, Peter took out his sword to defend Him. Jesus told Peter to put away his sword, telling him that he could ask His Father to send twelve legions of angels to deliver Him. However, Jesus did not make this request because it would have been contrary to the Father’s plan:

“But Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.’⁵³ Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?⁵⁴ How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?” Matthew 26:52-54

Pray with Thanksgiving

It is common for us selfish human beings to ask and not to thank. Jesus not only made requests to the Father, but He also frequently thanked Him:

When He was about to resurrect Lazarus, He thanked His Father for hearing Him:

*“Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank You that **You have heard Me.**” John 11:41*

*“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, ‘I **thank You, Father,** Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.” Luke 10:21*

Before Jesus fed the four thousand, He gave thanks to the Father:

“And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude.” Matthew 15:36

When Jesus instituted communion, He gave thanks:

*“Then He took the cup, and **gave thanks,** and said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’¹⁹ And He took bread, **gave thanks** and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’” Luke 22:17-19*

Pray with thanksgiving in your heart because of God's marvelous blessings (Colossians 4:2; Philippians 4:6; Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Seek God with an Obedient Heart

We must seek God with all our heart:

*“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”
Jeremiah 29:13*

We must be willing to obey when God speaks:

“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” 1 John 3:22

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you.” John 15:17

We cannot harbor iniquity in our hearts or else the Lord will not hear:

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”¹⁹ But certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer.” Psalm 66:18, 19

Whoever turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer will be an abomination:

“One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.” Proverbs 28:9

When we are sincere and are praying for light, God will reveal His truth to us as we can see in the experience of Cornelius (cf. Acts 10:1-4 for an example).

Come to God in the Powerful Name of Jesus

When we approach the Father, we must do so in the name of Jesus (cf. John 14:6; 14:13,14; 16:23,24,27,28) because our sinful condition will not permit us to approach the Father without a mediator. We need Jesus the Righteous as an Advocate (1 John 2:1). Our prayers must be mingled with the fragrant incense of His meritorious obedience (cf. Luke 1: 10, 11; Revelation 8:3,4; Psalm 141:2), and then we will be accepted “in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). Jesus referred to Himself as the ladder that bridges heaven with the earth (John 1:51). The angels

take our prayers to the Father and bring back the answers from the Father to us! (cf. Daniel 8:20-23).

The name of Jesus is powerful. Over thirty times in the book of Acts the importance and power of the name of Jesus is underlined. The following texts describe the awesome power of the name of Jesus. Coming in the name of Jesus means to share His authority and power:

“Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.” Acts 3:6, 7

*“And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, ⁶ as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, ‘By **what power** or by **what name** have you done this?’ ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: ⁹ If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, ¹⁰ let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by **the name of Jesus Christ** of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.... ¹² Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” ... ¹⁸ And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” Acts 4:5-10, 12, 18*

“Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’ ¹⁸ And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour.” Acts 16:16-18

By the powerful name of the Lord of Hosts, David slew Goliath and Elisha cursed the children who were questioning his prophetic call (cf. 1 Samuel 17:45; 2 Kings 2:23-25).

Jesus is our older brother and when Satan bullies us around, he must contend, not with us, but with Jesus. The name of Jesus gives us power of attorney to accomplish all His biddings, but we must be careful that our lives are in harmony with Jesus before we employ His Name (Acts 19:11-16).

When I was a student, I used to sell religious books. The first thing I did when I arrived in town was to visit the mayor, the chief of police, the education superintendent, and any other important functionary in town. I showed them the books and explained their value and then asked them to put their seal and signature on my prospectus. When I later presented the books to the general public and they saw the signatures and seals of the town dignitaries, they were much more prone to buy. You see, the names of these dignitaries had clout! So it is that the name of Jesus has clout against Satan!



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #9 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT MARRIAGE, GENDER, ENVIRONMENT, FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND REST

Jesus was the Creator

The Bible teaches that the same Jesus who created us also redeemed us:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” John 1:1-3

When Jesus was on earth, He sought to restore His original plan at creation. And yet there are several ways in which the world, and even some Christians have changed or rejected God’s original plan to the detriment of society.

The Beginning is the Standard

Jesus, the Creator, made it clear that we must return to God’s original plan:

“The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?’ ⁴ And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶ So then,

*they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let **not man separate.**'⁷ They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?'⁸ He said to them, 'Moses, because of the **hardness of your hearts,** permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the **beginning it was not so.**⁹ And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.'" Matthew 19:3-9*

The Pharisees had distorted God's original plan for marriage. Moses had allowed divorce due to their hardness of the heart (cf. Deuteronomy 24:1), but Jesus went back to the beginning for the standard. Clearly, the fundamental problem of the Pharisees was the heart. Hardness of heart led to a distortion of marriage.

It is important to underline that Jesus did not destroy or change His marriage because it had been distorted. He actually did two things: He went back to the beginning to endorse His original plan and He employed the written Word—not tradition—as His standard.

Restoring Country Living

*"Then the **Lord God took** the man and **put him** in the **garden** of Eden to tend and keep it." Genesis 2:15*

The word *garden* appears **13 times** in **Genesis 1-3** to describe the **environment** where Jesus placed Adam and Eve. **City living** was **never** God's original plan. It is no coincidence that Jesus repeatedly used agriculture in His parables to teach spiritual truths. Even further, when he wanted to be in intimate communion with His Father, He sought solitary places away from the hustle and bustle of the crowd. With the exception of the New Jerusalem, the Bible paints a dim picture of the city. In fact, the first city builder was wicked Cain (1 John 3:12).

*"And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And **he built a city,** and called the name of **the city** after the name of his son — Enoch." Genesis 4:17*

The next city was built by the rebels at the Tower of Babel:

*“And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves **a city**, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a **name for ourselves**, lest we be **scattered abroad** over the face of the whole earth.’” Genesis 11:4*

The aspirations of these Babel builders became **the root** for the **end time Babylon** that is called “the great city”. A desire to build a **world order** was based on human **ingenuity, technology, and science**. The spirit of the original Babel builders is reflected in the **arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar**, the builder of the Neo-Babylonian Empire:

*“The king spoke, saying, “Is not this **great** Babylon, that **I** have built for a royal dwelling by **my** mighty power and for the honor of **my** majesty?” Daniel 4:30*

The next cities mentioned in the Bible are **Sodom and Gomorrah**. Need I say anything about these wicked cities?

*“Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. ¹³ But the men of Sodom were **exceedingly wicked and sinful** against the Lord.” Genesis 13:12, 13*

The Bible story tells us that Abraham stayed in the country while Lot chose the convenience and comforts of the city. What were the results?

- ✓ He lost **all his children** except two daughters.
- ✓ He lost **his wife**.
- ✓ He lost all of his **possessions**.
- ✓ He was a **brand plucked** from the burning (2 Peter 2:7, 8).
- ✓ His single daughters that came out with him committed **incest**.

Today 55% of the world population live in cities. The percentage is expected to grow to 68% by 2050. I have been to New York many times. Everything in the city speaks of the greatness of man and is artificial.

The concrete jungle, the traffic, the defiled air, the foul smell of fossil fuels, the rats in the subway, the impressive skyscrapers, the artificial entertainment—TV, sports, shows and movies; the food, the endless hustle and bustle, Wall

Street, human technology, the noise of buses, cars, trains and planes, flesh foods, refined foods, the immorality, the filthy rivers, the humanist university curriculums all speak of man, not of God. You cannot even see the stars in the city at night because of the artificial light of man. Surrounded by the greatness of man, human beings forget God. This is the reason why the most secular places in the United States are in the great cities!

Life in the country is vastly different. It is natural, not artificial. Instead of a concrete jungle, the country offers rich soil with grass, trees, and gardens. Instead of smog, clear and fresh air. Instead of defiled rivers and aqueducts, crystal clear springs of water. Instead of the hustle and bustle of constant activity, serenity and peace. Instead of the noise of cars, buses, trains and planes, the songs of birds and the rustling of the wind as it blows through the trees. Instead of meat and processed foods, the natural fruit and vegetable products of the ground. Instead of television, sports and shows, the delightful contemplation of the awesome God of nature. Instead of the foul-smelling gym, hiking and gardening in natural surroundings. Instead of human philosophies, learning from God's two books: the Bible and the book of nature.

Restoring Monogamous Heterosexual Marriage

At the beginning, Jesus established the marriage covenant between a man and a woman and then commanded them to have children and form nuclear families.

"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.²² Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.²³ And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."
Genesis 2:21-24

There is not a single example of a gay marriage in the Bible. In fact, the Bible strictly forbids a man to lay with a man and a woman with a woman. While on

earth, Jesus confirmed the plan that He established in the Garden of Eden. Jesus confirmed **God's original plan**:

*"And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them **at the beginning** "made them **male** and **female**," [heterosexual]⁵ and said, "For this reason **a man** shall leave his **father and mother** [normative for all time] and be joined to **his wife** [monogamous], and the two shall become one flesh?"⁶ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh, therefore what God has joined together, **let not man separate** [indissoluble].'⁷ They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?'⁸ He said to them, 'Moses, because of the **hardness of your hearts**, permitted you to divorce your wives, but **from the beginning** it was not so.'" Matthew 19:4-8*

Let's summarize Jesus' original plan A:

- Marriage is to be **heterosexual** (male and female).
- Marriage is to be **normative** for all time (Adam was told to leave father and mother, but he had neither).
- Marriage is to be **monogamous** (in SINGULAR, "man and his wife", not "man and his wives!").
- Marriage is to be **indissoluble** ("What God has joined together, let not man cast asunder." Matthew 19:6).

Divorce, fornication and adultery have led to single mothers and deep psychological problems among children. Furthermore, gay marriage has clearly violated God's original plan for a family composed of a female mother and a male father who can grow and nurture a nuclear family. The physiological and psychological makeup of the father and of the mother is different. God did not create two fathers or two mothers. He created a father and a mother.

Restoring Gender Distinctions

The Genesis story tells us that Jesus made two genders—**male and female**:

*"Then God said, 'Let Us make **man** [the broader generic use without the definite article; cf. Genesis 5:1, 2] in Our image, according to Our likeness; let **them** have*

dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’²⁷ So God created **[the more restricted use: “the”] man** in His own image; in the image of God He created **him; male and female** He created them.” Genesis 1:26-27

Jesus confirmed the words of Genesis while He was on earth:

*“And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them **at the beginning** ‘made them **male and female**,’ [heterosexual]⁵ and said, ‘For this reason **a man** shall leave his **father and mother** [normative for all time] and be joined to **his wife** [monogamous], and the two shall become one flesh?’” Matthew 19:4, 5*

Discarding the creation account **as symbolic** has led even some **Christians to justify** the legitimacy of a multitude of genders. I found **two lists of genders** on Google. One list has **64 genders** and the other has **one hundred**. Needless to say, none of these have come as the result of **scientific research**. God made it simple: There are **two genders**, male and female.

Restoring God’s Plan for Parents and Children

Jesus also restored the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and your mother”, to its original meaning and intention.

Mark 7 describes a controversy between Jesus and the **scribes and Pharisees** over the issue of ritual cleansing. However, three times in the passage we are told that the issue was **much broader** than this. It really involved “many other such like things” Mark 7:4, 8, 13.

We are immediately struck by the technical terminology that the rabbis use such as “**holding the tradition of the elders**” (7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13), “which they have **received to hold**” (7:4), “ye **hold**” (7:9), “ye **received**.” The words *received* and *tradition* indicate a process of transmission supposedly from previous generations. Notably, the word *tradition* appears only in the singular in this passage, thus indicating that we are dealing here with a body or deposit of tradition of which the washing of hands was only one element. The word *hold*

also indicates the existence of a deposit which they claimed to preserve in their own day. The meaning of the expression *tradition of the elders*, is described in the *Jerome Bible Commentary*:

*“A rabbinical term for the body of unwritten laws that the Pharisees considered as **equally binding** as the written Torah.” The Jerome Bible Commentary, Volume 1, “The Gospel According to Mark”, Mark 42:42, p. 36.*

The battle in the passage was between the **written** Word of God and the **unwritten** tradition or commandments of men. Jesus faced this conflict by quoting the **written** Word of God twice.

The first quotation is of Isaiah 29:13. Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that Isaiah had them in mind when he wrote, *“This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me,⁷ and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”* Mark 7:6, 7.

The second quotation is from Exodus 21:17 where he quotes Moses: *“For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’”* Mark 7:10.

Jesus used the second quotation to prove that the commandments of men, which came from the deposit of **unwritten** tradition, really conflicted with the commandments of God which come from the **written** Word of God.

Jesus, then gave a practical example of this conflict by referring to the rabbinical law of Corban, which was found in the body of **unwritten** tradition but conflicted with the fifth commandment of the **written** Law of God. Basically, the law of Corban allowed children to dedicate all they owned to the temple, but while they lived, they could freely use everything they owned for their own pleasure. Children could use the tradition of Corban as an excuse to neglect the needs of their parents under the pretext that what they had was dedicated to the temple. In this way, the tradition of Corban led the young people to annul the force of the commandment that states, “Honor your father and your mother.”

Significantly, Jesus also said that following the unwritten tradition of men not only annulled the written Word of God, but also constituted vain worship:

“And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men.” Mark 7:7

Vegan Diet

“And God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.’³⁰ Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food’; and it was so.” Genesis 1:29-30

Imagine what the world would be like if no chickens (50 billion), cows (39 million), pigs (121 million), sheep (500 million) were eaten. When people eat meat, they are eating processed, second-hand food. Water sources would be cleaner, there would be less coronary artery disease, less cancer, fewer strokes, and less greenhouse gases.

In fact, the farm animal sector annually accounts for 9% of human-induced emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂), 37% of emissions of methane (CH₄), which has more than 20 times the global warming potential (GWP) of CO₂, and 65% of emissions of nitrous oxide (N₂O), which has nearly 300 times the Global Warming Potential of CO₂. Even further, the problem of deforestation is acute because large corporations mow down trees to raise cattle for meat consumption, thus aggravating the problem of climate change!

What would the world be like if we stopped eating sugar and fat in processed foods that are artificially flavored and colored? What would the world be like if we did not smoke, drink or do drugs? There is a lot of talk about health care being a human right. However, what about human responsibility? Why should those who live a healthy lifestyle pay the bills of those who abuse their health?

Restoring God's the Manner of Keeping the Day of Rest

At creation Jesus instituted a day of rest from the weekly toil, and that day was the seventh-day Sabbath:

"Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.² And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.³ Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." Genesis 1:31—2:3

The fourth commandment reaffirms that the day to rest from labor is the seventh day Sabbath:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work,¹⁰ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore," the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." Exodus 20:8-11

The Sabbath is a day to spend with God and with family! It is a commemoration of the Creator's rest on the seventh day of the first week. One writer described it this way:

"The first six days of each week are given to man for labor, because God employed the same period of the first week in the work of creation. On the seventh day man is to refrain from labor, in commemoration of the Creator's rest." Ellen White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 111.

The Sabbath is not primarily man's rest but rather a commemoration of the Creator's rest. To commemorate a historical event, it must be commemorated on the very day on which it occurred. The collapse of the World Trade Center is observed on September 11th and Independence Day is celebrated on July 4th

because those are the very days when the original event occurred. Wedding anniversaries and birthdays are also celebrated on the very day when they took place. This is the reason why it is impossible to commemorate or enter God's creation rest on Sunday!

In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI presented a homily where he affirmed that Christians must keep Sunday in commemoration of the Creator:

*"The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week. After six days in which man in some sense participates in God's work of creation, the Sabbath is the day of rest. But something quite unprecedented happened in the nascent Church: the **place of the Sabbath, the seventh day, was taken by the first day**. As the day of the liturgical assembly, it is the day for encounter with God through Jesus Christ who as the Risen Lord encountered his followers on the first day, Sunday, after they had found the tomb empty. **The structure of the week is overturned. No longer does it point towards the seventh day, as the time to participate in God's rest.** It sets out from the **first day as the day of encounter** with the Risen Lord. . . This **change** is utterly extraordinary, considering that the Sabbath, the **seventh day** seen as the day of encounter with God, is so profoundly rooted in the Old Testament. . . We celebrate the first day. And in so doing we celebrate God the Creator and his creation. Yes, we believe in God, the Creator of heaven and earth." Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Saint Peter's Basilica, Holy Saturday, 23 April, 2011*

The Sabbath is not merely a day to go to church. It is a day to totally cease for 24 hours from our secular, weekly activities. Most Sunday keepers go to church in the morning and then watch television, play sports, work in the yard and go out to eat in restaurants after church.

The scribes and Pharisees once condemned Jesus for allowing His disciples to pluck ears of grain on the Sabbath. In effect, the disciples, according to the religious leaders, were breaking four rabbinical rules: The disciples **plucked** the grain, which would be equal to harvesting (Mark 2:23); they **rubbed** the husks, which would be equivalent to threshing (see Luke 6: 1); they probably **blew away** the chaff, which would be equivalent to winnowing; and the entire

process was considered the **preparation of a meal**. All four of these things were forbidden on Sabbath by the rabbinical law but not by the Bible.

Why did the rabbis add these rules and regulations to the Sabbath? The answer is that after the Babylonian captivity, Jewish scholars set up a hedge around the Sabbath, establishing 1,521 rules and regulations to assure its observance (cf. Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried, *Code of Jewish Law*, pp. 63-133). These rabbinical rules and regulations were not part of the Sabbath commandment; they were created by the religious leaders with the intention of preventing the breaking of the Sabbath.

As in the case of marriage, gender distinctions, and the relationships between parents and children, Jesus went back to the beginning for His standard of Sabbath observance. In contrast to the scribes and Pharisees, He stated that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath and that He was the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27, 28).

Two Creation Institutions

Marriage and the Sabbath are very closely linked. The first six days, God made material things. But the seventh day God made holy time (see Genesis 2:1-3). In Mark 2:27, Jesus clearly stated that the Sabbath was “made” (cf. John 1:1-3, 10).

In order to fully understand why Jesus made the seventh-day Sabbath, we must first comprehend what occurred on the first six days. According to the Genesis record, God created man and woman on the latter portion of the 6th day and then instituted marriage (Genesis 2:23). After marrying Adam and Eve, Jesus made the Sabbath for man. In this order of events, God was teaching that the world was made for man and woman for man. However, the Sabbath teaches that man and woman were both made for God. Thus, marriage is a triangle between man, woman and God. In order to remind our first parents of this fact, they were to spend the Sabbath with one another and with their Creator. Thus, the Sabbath was the family day par excellence! It was a day for the Creator and the family to meet together in fellowship and worship.

Jesus did not abolish the Sabbath. He is Lord of it and therefore He has the right to define how it is kept. Clearly, Mark 2:27-28 teaches that the Lord's Day is the Sabbath because Jesus referred to Himself as the "Lord of the Sabbath"!

When we compare Matthew 19:1-8 and Mark 2:23-28, we discover that Jesus went back to the beginning to uphold the two great creation institutions—marriage and the Sabbath. As Creator, Jesus made both marriage and the Sabbath at the very end of creation week. The question then is this: why do Christians uphold the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman but not the Sabbath? Clearly, both are creation institutions and Jesus did His utmost to restore both to their original intended meaning.

The Sabbath Miracles of Jesus

As we look at the Sabbath miracles of Jesus, we come to understand a little better the profound significance of the Sabbath. All the healings of Jesus on the Sabbath were **chronic** cases that could easily have waited till after sundown:

- ✓ A crippled woman sick for 18 years (Luke 13:10-17)
- ✓ A man sick with the dropsy (Luke 14:1-6)
- ✓ A man paralyzed for 38 years (John 5:5)
- ✓ A man blind from birth (John 9: 1, 14)
- ✓ Peter's mother in law that had a high fever (Mark 1:29-31)
- ✓ A man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1-6)
- ✓ A man who was demon possessed (Mark 1:21-28)

The Jewish Rabbis allowed for the healing of someone who was on the point of death on the Sabbath. In *Mishnah Yoma* 8:6, the rabbinical law stated:

"Whenever there is doubt whether life is in danger, this overrides the Sabbath."

By healing people with chronic cases, Jesus wanted to make a point. We know that the populace obeyed the traditions of the rabbis—because they waited till sundown to come to Jesus (Mark 1:32). Jesus wanted to emancipate the Sabbath from man-made rules and regulations.

Some have been puzzled as to why Jesus did not give a direct command in the gospels to keep the Sabbath. The reason is actually quite simple. All the Jews **claimed** to be Sabbath keepers while Jesus was on earth. The central issue that Jesus was confronting was not whether the Jews were keeping the Sabbath but how they were keeping it. Jesus did not have to restore the **right day** (which everyone claimed to keep) but the **right way** (which the people were not doing).

Did Jesus Break the Sabbath?

Did Jesus break the Sabbath as some Christians claim? The answer to this question is serious. If Jesus broke the Sabbath, He was a sinner because sin is transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4). And if Jesus had sinned, He would have needed a Savior. Furthermore, if Jesus was breaking the Sabbath, then the Pharisees were right to criticize Him. Most Christians have taken the side of the Pharisees on this one by accusing Jesus of breaking the Sabbath!

A careless reading of John 5:18 would seem to indicate that Jesus broke the Sabbath. However, the context of this verse and other texts in the gospels clearly indicate that Jesus did not break the Sabbath that He Himself created. He broke the Sabbath of the rabbis. Let's take a closer look at John 5:18:

*"Therefore **the Jews** sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only **broke the Sabbath**, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God."*

Jesus had just healed a paralytic on the Sabbath, and the Jews accused Him of breaking the Sabbath. This text clearly indicates that it was **the Jews** that accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath and their accusation was false. It bears noting that there is no Old Testament law against **healing** on the Sabbath or telling a man to **pick up his bed** and walk home. These were rabbinical rules added by the scholars, not found in Scripture, and handed down by tradition.

Luke 13:11-13 describes how Jesus healed a hunchback woman who had been unable to stand straight for **18 years**. The **ruler of the synagogue**, who was a Sadducee, accused Jesus of breaking the law because He healed the woman on

the Sabbath. The ruler announced to the crowd that six days were for work and on those days they could come for healing but **not on the Sabbath** (verse 14). It bears repeating that there is **no law** in the Old Testament that forbids healing on the Sabbath. The law against healing was a **rabbinical rule** based on human tradition. Here is what Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue:

“The Lord then answered him and said, ‘Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? ¹⁶ So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound — think of it — for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?’”
Luke 13:15, 16

Jesus pointed to the absurdity of **their law** by telling them in effect, “Your traditions allow you to care for the needs of beasts on the Sabbath but not of a human being. For you, the well-being of a beast is more important than that of a human being.”

Matthew 12:10-12 tells us explicitly that Jesus did not break the Sabbath law by healing on the day. His work of healing on the Sabbath was **lawful**:

*“And behold, there was a man who had a **withered hand** and they asked Him, saying, ‘**Is it lawful** to heal on the Sabbath?’ [Not according to them!]*—that they might **accuse Him**.* ¹¹ Then He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value then, is a man than a sheep? Therefore, **it is lawful** to do good on the Sabbath.’”*

Some use the example of a police officer who is above the law because he can violate the speed limit. However, Jesus did not come as a police officer to be above the law. According to the apostle Paul, Jesus was **born under the law** (Galatians 4:4, 5). He needed to obey all the Law because He was taking our place. If Jesus had broken the Law, He would have been a sinner in need of a redeemer.

The fact is that the Sabbath of the rabbis was not the Bible Sabbath of the Lord. A day of fellowship with Jesus had been turned into a day to earn merit before

God. Time and again the Jewish intelligentsia claimed to be zealous for the Sabbath while they plotted to kill the Lord of the Sabbath. A Christ-less Sabbath is worthless. Keeping the Sabbath without discerning its meaning is vain and useless (see Isaiah 1: 11-14). There was really no Bible law which prohibited healing the sick on the Sabbath. Jesus broke the Sabbath of the rabbis but not His own Sabbath! Jesus showed that the Sabbath is a day of creation, re-creation and restoration.

Let's a few moments to consider the story in Mark 3:1-6. In the synagogue there was a man with a withered hand. Healing this man was not an emergency because his illness was chronic. Jesus could have waited until sundown to heal him. The story tells us that the Pharisees watched Jesus closely with the intention to accuse Him. How bizarre it was that in their mind, it was wrong to heal on Sabbath, but certainly it was alright to criticize on the day! Verse 3 indicates that Jesus wanted to make a point because he told the man to step forward for everyone to see. Then Jesus asked a question: *"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?"* Verse 4.

The issue was not whether the Sabbath was the right day of worship because this was a settled issue with the Jews in the days of Christ. The issue was how the Sabbath should be kept and whether it was lawful to heal on it. By his question, Jesus put the Pharisees in a serious dilemma. If they answered that it was not lawful to heal on the Sabbath, they would appear merciless. However, if they answered yes, they would be admitting that their laws were wrong and would have lost their authority with the people. So, they kept quiet!

When Jesus asked, is it lawful to save life or to kill he was making a direct allusion to the intentions that the Jewish leaders had to kill him. Verse 5 tells us that Jesus felt anger and also pain. This is what we might call "righteous indignation". Just like with the issue of divorce and remarriage, their hearts were hard. The Sabbath had become an end in itself. They were concerned about the dead letter on tables of stone rather than on the needs of this sick man.

After Jesus healed this man, the Sabbath became man a sign of healing and restoration—so to speak, a new creation of his hand. The parallel passage in Matthew 6:11 tells us that the Pharisees were filled with madness or were out of their minds when Jesus healed this man. They went out and plotted to kill the Creator of the Sabbath on the Sabbath! The *Code of Jewish Law* forbade killing any living thing on the Sabbath.

“It is forbidden to catch any living thing on the Sabbath, even a flea, but if an insect stings a person, it may be removed and thrown off, but one is not allowed to kill it, because it is forbidden to kill on the Sabbath, anything that possesses life.” Ganzfried, Vol. 2, p. 97.

We know that some rabbis went so far as to carry a broom to sweep the path before so that they would not kill ants or any other insects in their path. In this story, they refused to kill a flea on Sabbath and yet they are plotting to kill the Creator of all life on the Sabbath just to uphold their merciless, silly and unbiblical traditions and regulations.

The problem with contemporary Christianity is that it looks at the Sabbath of the rabbis as if it were the Sabbath of the Lord. For this reason, they call it the “old Jewish Sabbath” or “the Sabbath of the Jews”.

Frequently I ask Christian friends of other denominations to whom the light, the firmament, the vegetation, the heavenly bodies, the fish, the birds, the land animals and human beings belong. Their immediate answer is that it all belong to God. Then I ask them why these things belong to God and the answer is immediate: “Because God created them.” They are of course correct for the psalmist wrote:

*“The earth is **the Lord’s**, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.² **For** He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters.” Psalm 24:1, 2*

However, these same Christian friends fail to take their statement to its logical conclusion. If everything that God made during creation week is His, because he made it, then the Sabbath must be His as well because He made it for man at

the conclusion of creation week (Mark 2:27). To say that all that God made the first six days is His but the Sabbath is of the Jews is absurd. This is why the Bible refers to the Sabbath with expressions such as:

- ✓ “a Sabbath rest, a holy **Sabbath to the Lord**” (Exodus 16:23)
- ✓ “the Sabbath **of the Lord** your God” (Exodus 20:11)
- ✓ “you shall keep **my** Sabbaths” (Ezekiel 20:12, 20),
- ✓ God refers to it as “**my** holy day” (Isaiah 58:13, 14)
- ✓ “The Son of man is **Lord of the Sabbath**” (Mark 2:28)

Not once in the Old or New Testament do the writers refer to the Sabbath as the **Jewish Sabbath** or the Sabbath of the Jews. However, John does refer to the feasts that passed away when Jesus died as “feasts of the Jews”.

- Jesus is the King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2; 27:11). Is He not the King of everyone?
- John 2:13: The Passover is called the “Passover of the Jews”
- John 5:1: “a feast of the Jews”
- John 6:4: “the Passover, a feast of the Jews”
- John 7:2: “the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles”
- John 11:55 “the Jews Passover was nigh at hand”

The Christian church today commits the same mistake the Jews in Christ’s day made. The Jews claimed to keep the Sabbath, but they could not see beyond their wall of rules and regulations to the Lord of the Sabbath. On the other hand, the Christian church rejects the Sabbath because they can’t see the Lord in it. Thus, both reject the Lord of the Sabbath because they do not truly keep the Sabbath!

The Pharisees created a counterfeit sabbath based on human tradition. If Jesus had kept this sabbath, he would have been accepting their human authority above the authority of God. He would have paid homage to the authority which changed the meaning of the Sabbath and burdened it with human traditions. The fact is that Jesus, the Sabbath keeper, was accused of being a Sabbath breaker because he did not keep the counterfeit sabbath created by the rabbis. Now let’s take a look at end time events.

We know that the great issue in the final controversy will involve the commandments of God versus the commandments and traditions of men and true worship to God versus false worship to the beast (Revelation 12:17; 14:7, 9-12)! Is it just possible that the conflict between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees will be repeated on a much larger scale between God's faithful church and apostate Christianity?

Jesus made it clear that by not helping the needy, the Pharisees were actually breaking the Sabbath, while He was keeping it. In other words, their tradition had made of none effect the written Word of God. Their rules, which had the intention of protecting the Sabbath from being broken, actually led them to break it! The Sabbath of the Pharisees was actually a false sabbath because it was made by man and not by God. Keeping this sabbath was really false worship because it glorified man instead of God!

Will the final conflict involve a false sabbath and a true Sabbath? Yes. The only difference between the times of Jesus and ours is that in those days the ones who claimed to be the people of God kept the Sabbath in the **wrong way** (based on tradition) while in the end-time, the Christian world will keep the **wrong day** (based on human tradition). But the principle is the same. In both cases it is a sabbath of human devising and not the Sabbath which Jesus made at creation. The conflict in Christ's day was actually over the Sabbath made by God versus the sabbath made by human tradition, and to keep a sabbath made by man is to practice false worship!

It must be underlined that the Pharisees not only broke God's Sabbath by abstaining from doing good on the Sabbath, but they also broke the Sabbath by intending to kill Jesus on it (Mark 3:6; Matthew 12:14; John 5:14). Irony of ironies, they condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, but they wanted to kill on it! Certainly their rules of Sabbath observance had made of none effect the commandment which says, "Thou shalt not kill." In other words, it is as if they were saying, "You either keep our sabbath or we will kill you." Does this ring a bell? Is there coming a time when the Christian world will want to kill those who do not keep **their** sabbath, that is, a sabbath of human invention?

It has always been an enigma to me how the Christian world can accuse Seventh-day Adventists of being legalists for keeping the Sabbath and then turn right around and say, “You either keep the Sunday or we will kill you!” What worse legalism could exist than to keep Sunday for fear of death rather than out of love for God? We also know that the Christian world will teach that the increasing natural disasters in the world are due to God’s wrath because of the desecration of Sunday as the day of worship. They will say, “Let us return to God, keep Sunday, and then God will bless America once again.” This is legalism of the highest order—attempting to earn God’s blessing and turn away His disfavor by keeping Sunday!



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #10 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT RELIEF FROM STRESS

Jesus and the Sabbath in the Gospels

According to Luke 4:17-21, Jesus began His ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath day. As he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1, 2) he explained that the purpose of His mission was to preach the gospel, heal the brokenhearted, deliver the captives, open the eyes of the blind and give liberty to the oppressed. As we examine the gospels we find that Jesus did these things every day, but especially on the Sabbath. Immediately before Jesus explained His mission, He entered the synagogue as was His custom:

“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.” Luke 4:16

For three and a half years Jesus worked day and night for the salvation of mankind. He did everything that he had announced in the synagogue of Nazareth. In fact, His Sabbath miracles particularly accomplished what He had announced. Mark 1:21-24 tells us that He delivered a demon-possessed person who was in bondage to Satan. Mark 3:1-6 describes how Jesus restored a man’s withered hand. Luke 14:1-6 informs us that Jesus healed a man who had the dropsy (an excessive accumulation of water in the tissues). Luke 13:10-17 describes how Jesus healed a woman who had been bound by Satan for 18

years. John 5 tells us that Jesus healed a man whose legs had been paralyzed for 38 years. John 9 describes how Jesus healed the eyes of a man who was born blind.

All of these miracles were performed on Sabbath in fulfillment of the announcement that Jesus had made in the Nazareth synagogue on Sabbath. To these people, the Sabbath became a sign of their restoration, re-creation, emancipation, and redemption! It is of more than passing interest that in Deuteronomy 5:12-15 the Sabbath was given to Israel as the sign of their emancipation from slavery in Egypt. Thus, the Sabbath became a sign of their emancipation from bondage to Pharaoh whom the Bible describes as 'the great dragon' (Ezekiel 29:3).

During His ministry, the enemies of Jesus attempted to arrest Him many times but could not. When He suggested to His disciples that they should return to Galilee, they complained because the Galileans hated Jesus and had attempted to kill Him just a short while before (cf. John 8:58, 59; 10:30-33). Here are the words of the disciples:

*"The disciples said to Him, 'Rabbi, lately the Jews **sought to stone** You and are You going there again?'" John 11:8*

The reply of Jesus to His disciples was strange and seemed disjointed:

*"Are there not **twelve hours in the day**?" Verse 9*

What did Jesus mean when He said that there were twelve hours in the day? The answer is that Jesus symbolically compared the length of His ministry to a twelve-hour day. The beginning of His ministry was hour #1 and His death marked hour #12. This is what Jesus meant when He said to the Jews:

*"I must work the works of Him who sent Me **while it is day** [during His **ministry**]; the night is coming [when He died] when no one can work." John 9:4*

During His twelve-hour day, Jesus **worked** incessantly for our redemption. When He died on the cross (hour #12), His work was finished, and this is why He cried out to His Father on the cross, *"It is finished."* John 19:30.

During His ministry, Jesus repeatedly said that “*his hour had not yet come*”. On a certain occasion, Jesus told the Jews that **His Father had sent Him** into the world and His enemies were not able to lay a finger on Him because His hour—the time for His death—had not yet come:

*“Then they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because **His hour had not yet come.**” John 7:30*

On another occasion, His enemies could not arrest Him because hour #12 for His passion and death had not yet come:

*“These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and **no one laid** hands on Him, for **His hour** had not yet come.” John 8:20*

Jesus had no fear to return to Galilee with His disciples because He was following the Father’s will and He knew that He could rest secure because He could count on His Father’s protection. Jesus was in perfect peace as long as He followed the Father’s guidance.

On Thursday evening on the way to **Gethsemane**, Jesus poured out His heart in prayer to His Father. Jesus was about to experience the last few minutes of His symbolic “twelfth hour”. John 17:1 tells us that at this point Jesus no longer said that His hour had **not yet come** but rather that the hour, hour #12, **had come**:

*“Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: ‘Father, **the hour has come.** Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.’”*

As stated before, Jesus had worked to save humanity for three and a half years (His symbolic twelve-hour day). When the twelfth hour arrived, to the very minute, He cried out on the cross, “It is finished.” Provision for the redemption of man was complete, not by the work of man but by the work of Christ. Said another way, man was saved by the works of Christ, not by his own works!

After crying out, “It is finished,” Jesus rested from His work of redemption in the tomb on the Sabbath as He had done at creation. However, Jesus did not rest alone on the Sabbath. Luke 23:56 tells us that the women who came to embalm His body “rested the Sabbath according to the commandment”. No doubt the disciples also rested on the Sabbath.

Jesus had intended the rest of His followers to be one of joyous anticipation of His resurrection. Jesus had repeatedly told them that He would resurrect the third day (cf. Matthew 16:21). If His followers had carefully paid heed to the words of Jesus, what a day of joyous anticipation that Sabbath would have been! They would have understood that Jesus was resting from His work of redemption and they would have rested and rejoiced in His accomplishments for them! The key point to remember here is that both Jesus and His disciples rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

It is of more than passing interest that Christ's work of redemption is expressed in creation terminology. Notice, for example, 2 Corinthians 5:17:

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**: old things have passed away; behold **all things** have become **new**."*

Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that our salvation was procured for us by Christ's work apart from our works. All the honor and glory belong to Him:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast."

However, in verse 10, the apostle informs us that once we have been created and have rested in what Jesus has done for us, we will begin to do the works He has prepared for us to walk in them:

*"For we are His workmanship, **created** in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."*

It is of great interest that the disciples first rested in what Jesus had done for them, and then they went out to all nations to work for Him! Rest comes before work. We rest in what He did first and then we work His works! Thus the weekly seventh-day Sabbath is a weekly sign and reminder of His grace, His works for our salvation without our help or participation. As in creation, also in redemption. Man did nothing to help Jesus work or to earn what Jesus gave him. Jesus first worked to give man the gift of creation and redemption. Jesus did not begin by resting but by working. In contrast, man does not begin by working but by resting—enjoying what Jesus made and then working!

The Sabbath and Redemption

Jesus followed the same pattern in redemption as He did at creation. We must remember that the Creator and the Redeemer are the same person so we would expect the same pattern (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-3). After doing **all** the work of redemption on His “twelve-hour” day, and crying out, *“It is finished,”* when His “twelve-hour” day concluded, Jesus rested on the seventh-day Sabbath inside the tomb while His followers rested outside as the commandment required (Luke 23:54-56). The words at creation, *“Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were **finished**”* are parallel to the cry of Jesus on the cross, *“It is **finished**.”* Genesis 2:1; John 19:30.

More on Jesus and the Sabbath at Creation

Let’s pursue the link between creation and redemption a little further. During the first six days of creation week, man did none of the work. Jesus did it all:

*“Then God saw everything that **He had made**, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. ^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were **finished**.”* Genesis 1:31-2:1

On the seventh day, Jesus rested from His works and Adam and Eve rested with Him although they had done none of the work. It is inconceivable that Adam and Eve worked on the seventh day while Jesus rested from His work. This is particularly true because the fourth commandment commands man to rest on the seventh day and because Jesus affirmed that Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27), not for Himself. Man did not help Jesus create anything. Thus, none of the glory in creation belonged to man. The praise and honor belonged to Jesus alone! Adam could not add anything to what Jesus had created. Creation was full and complete; nothing needed to be added to it. Jesus did it all!

However, after resting with the Lord on the seventh day, on the very next day, Adam and Eve began to work as the commandment requires. Thus, they rested in Christ’s finished work on the seventh day and began to work the day after—the first day (cf. Exodus 20:8-11). The first day is not a rest day but a work day!

Jesus expected man to render Him loving obedience out of gratitude for what He had accomplished. He expected man to care for the Garden and to have dominion over the earth. This would not add to any of Christ's creative works but would be a loving response to Him. For this reason, in Exodus 20:8-11, God tells man to work six days and rest on the seventh. But man's work begins after He has rested. From then on, man would work six days and keep the seventh in remembrance of all that Christ did for him.

Jesus and the Manna

The manna story of the Exodus also helps us understand the redemption meaning of the Sabbath. The manna was **more than physical food**; it symbolized the **word** that comes out of the **mouth of God** (cf. Matthew 4:4) and Jesus is the Word. Thus, the manna represented Jesus:

*"So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall **not live by bread alone**; but man lives by **every word** that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD." **Deuteronomy 8:3***

*"In the beginning was **the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made **through** Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." John 1:1-3*

The apostle Paul agreed that the manna was spiritual food:

*"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ all ate the same **spiritual** food, ⁴ and all drank the same **spiritual** drink. For they drank of that **spiritual** Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." 1 Corinthians 10:1-4*

Jesus claimed that the manna represented Him:

*"**I am** the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. ⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down from heaven that one may eat of it and not die." John 6:48-50*

However, the manna did not represent Jesus in general terms. It represented something **specific** about Jesus—**His flesh**:

*“**I am** the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is **My flesh**, which I shall give for the life of the world.” John 6:51*

In order to fully understand Jesus’ claim to be the manna, we must go to the root passage that He was referring to—the manna episode in **Exodus 16**.

The Manna Episode

If the Israelites picked up a double portion of Manna on **any day other** than on Friday for the Sabbath, it bred **worms and stank**:

*“And Moses said, ‘Let no one leave any of it till morning.’²⁰ Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred **worms and stank**. And Moses was angry with them.” **Exodus 16:19, 20***

Clearly, this was not ordinary bread! What breeds worms and stinks? Certainly not **ordinary bread**! A **corpse** eventually **breeds worms** and **stinks** when the flesh decomposes! When Jesus commanded the stone to be removed from the tomb of **Lazarus**, the people complained that **his body** already **stank**. However, when manna was saved on Friday for Sabbath, a **great miracle** occurred—it did not breed worms nor stink. It was **as fresh on Sabbath** as it had been on Friday. What does this mean? Remember that we are dealing with a **Messianic prophecy** here because Jesus said that the manna represented **His flesh**.

“Then he said to them, ‘This is what the LORD has said: “Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.”’

*²⁴ So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it **did not stink**, nor **were there any worms** in it.” Exodus 16:23, 24*

Why didn't the manna breed worms and stink on the Sabbath? The gospels give us the answer.

The gospels make it clear that Jesus died on the sixth day (Friday), rested in the tomb on the seventh day (the Sabbath), and resurrected on the first day (Sunday):

*"That day was the **Preparation**, and the **Sabbath** drew near. ⁵⁵ And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they **rested on the Sabbath** according to the commandment."*
Luke 23:54-56

As we have seen, in the mid-afternoon on the sixth day Jesus said, *"It is finished,"* because He had **made provision** for the salvation of the human race. He had lived a **perfect life** to weave a robe of perfect righteousness and had purchased salvation **by paying the price** for our sins.

No doubt, for the followers of Jesus, that Sabbath was a day of **anguish, sorrow** and **restlessness**. However, if they had **truly understood** the Messianic meaning of the manna episode, their rest would have been **totally different**; it would have been a rest of **joyous celebration of Christ's finished work**. They would have **truly entered Christ's rest**. The Creator was Jesus, so this was actually **Jesus' rest from His work of redemption**. They would have rested in **His accomplishments**.

Some believe that Jesus purposely chose to resurrect on **Sunday** because He wanted His church to know that Sunday was holy and that it should be observed in honor of His resurrection from that day on. However, understanding the manna episode helps us understand that the important day was **not Sunday, but** the Sabbath! If Jesus rested in the tomb on Sabbath and His body saw no corruption, then He would **have had to resurrect on Sunday**. The reason why Jesus resurrected on Sunday is because His flesh **had to rest in the tomb** on the Sabbath to fulfill the manna prophecy.

As we have seen, the manna represented the flesh of Jesus (John 6:51). What happened to the flesh of Jesus when His body rested in the tomb on the Sabbath? A normal body would have begun to decompose and eventually breed worms and stink but another Messianic prophecy indicates that the flesh of Jesus did not decompose:

*"I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall **not be moved**.⁹ Therefore, my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My **flesh** also will rest in hope¹⁰ for You will not leave **my soul** [**"me"** in the NIV] in **Sheol** [**"grave"** NIV] nor will You allow Your **Holy One** to see **corruption**." Psalm 16:8-10*

As the manna did not breed worms or stink when it was saved on Friday for Sabbath, so, the body of Jesus did not begin decompose on the Sabbath because He was what the manna represented! While the body of Jesus **rested inside** the grave on the Sabbath from His **finished work** of redemption, He wanted His disciples to **rest outside** in what He had accomplished.

The apostle Peter, in his Pentecostal sermon provided the meaning of the Messianic manna prophecy of Psalm 16:

*"I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope,²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay....³¹ Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the **resurrection of the Christ**, that **he** was not abandoned to the **grave**, nor did his body see **decay**." (Acts 2:25-27, 31)*

Questions and Answers

Christians commonly refer to Sunday with the word *Sabbath*. This is not only puzzling, but absurd! Luke 23:50—24:1 gives us the clear sequence of days of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Clearly, Jesus died on what Christians call Good Friday. It is also abundantly clear that Jesus rested in the tomb on the Sabbath. And Jesus resurrected the first day of the week, which all Christians agree was Sunday, the first day of the week.

Being that Sunday is the first day of the week—not the seventh—it cannot be called the Sabbath! Christians have trouble locating the Sabbath on the calendar, but they have no problem locating Sunday. Many calendars in Europe now make Monday the first day of the week and Sunday the seventh day. This is crafty, but it won't work unless you want to believe that Jesus resurrected on the seventh day which Luke 24:1 makes impossible!

Some Christians claim that the sequence of days of the week has been lost and therefore we cannot know which day is the Sabbath. Needless to say, this would mean that Sunday has also been lost! The fact is that practically all Christians agree that the sequence of days on our calendar today goes all the way back to the days of Christ. This being the case, the Sabbath today is the same as in the days of Christ. However, someone might object, "How do you know that the Sabbath in the days of Jesus was the same Sabbath of creation?" The answer is really quite simple. Would Jesus have kept the wrong day if the Sabbath of His day was not the same Sabbath that He made at the beginning?

As we shall see in the next lesson, the apostles kept the Sabbath long after Jesus died on the cross (cf. Acts 13:14, 27, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). In fact, Jesus predicted that 40 years after His resurrection the Sabbath would still be kept (cf. Matthew 24:20).

The Sabbath and the Final Restoration

The Sabbath is not only a sign of creation and redemption, but also of the final re-creation and restoration of the world. Isaiah 65:17 explains that God will make a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more sorrow, pain, suffering, or death (Revelation 21:4). It will be a perfect world once more as at the beginning. Once again, man will have nothing to do with this re-creation. It will be the work of Jesus alone and it will be given to man by grace alone.

At the beginning, man did not see God create anything, but those who are alive when Jesus creates a new heaven and new earth, will be eyewitnesses of Christ's awesome creative power. God will once again use a seven-day cycle to re-create the world. The redeemed will then keep the Sabbath in

commemoration of the new creation. From month to month (to eat from the Tree of Life, Revelation 22:2) and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh will come to worship before the Lord (Isaiah 66:22-23). After resting on the first Sabbath of the new creation, man will work the works of God throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity!

Thus the Sabbath will reach its final and fullest meaning. It will be a sign of creation, redemption and re-creation. So then, does it really make any difference which day we keep? Aren't all days alike? Well, let me ask you, does it make any difference which day you celebrate your birthday or the independence of the United States or your anniversary? Does it really make any difference whether you meet your regular doctor's appointment a certain day and certain time? How about staff meeting at work? Will any day and any time do? If your meeting is scheduled for Monday, is it okay to show up on Tuesday instead?

The fact is, the Sabbath is like our National Anthem and our flag. They are not our country, but they stand as signs of our country. Does it really make any difference which flag and national anthem is used at the Olympics when the gold medal ceremony takes place? The fact is that when God says something, we should obey Him because we love Him. How about you? Are you willing to keep Christ's holy Sabbath?

In Matthew 8:23-27, we find the account of Jesus and His disciples in a storm on the lake. Jesus was asleep and the disciples came to Him frantically to awaken Him. Only the One who created the sea could calm the storm and the storm in the hearts of the disciples. In like manner, Jesus tells us to come to Him to find rest in the turmoil of life. The Sabbath is the weekly sign that Jesus is the creator and he will bring peace and rest to our souls (cf. Matthew 11:28-30).



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #11 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT HISTORY’S GREATEST HOAX

Introduction

The great Aristotle lived around the year **350 BC**. Besides being a **renowned philosopher**, he was also a **naturalist**. He defined a spider as a small **insect** that has **six legs**.

For **two thousand years**, people accepted his definition **without question**. After all, who would question the authority of the **great Aristotle**?

Then, in the second half of the **1700’s**, **Jean-Baptiste Lamarck** decided to examine a spider **for himself**. Lo and behold, he discovered that a spider is **not an insect**, but rather an arachnid; it actually has **eight legs**.

- ✓ For over two thousand years, people had **passed on** an erroneous tradition based on the **opinion of an expert**. This proves that depending on the statements of an authority cannot be the **test of truth**. We must examine things **for ourselves**!
- ✓ The **passing of time** does not make error truth or truth error. The spider did not grow two legs after Aristotle.
- ✓ The beliefs of the **majority** do not make error truth.

Planetary Names

There are only eight texts in the New Testament that mention the “first day of the week”. If we are going to find evidence for Sunday observance, it must be in one of those texts.

The word *Sunday* never appears in the New Testament even though the Romans did use the name dies solis to refer to the first day of the week. The Bible numbers the days of the week but does not name them. Thus, Genesis 1 identifies each day by number. Actually, only one of them has a number and a name, the seventh-day Sabbath.

Latin was the language of the Romans. Even though the Bible numbers the days (the Brazilians number the days from Monday to Friday and refer to Sunday as Domingo and Saturday as Sábado), the pagan Romans gave the days planetary names in honor of their gods. Here are the names that the Romans gave to the days of the week:

- ✓ Dies solis (sun)
- ✓ Dies lunae (moon)
- ✓ Dies martis (Mars)
- ✓ Dies mercurii (Mercury)
- ✓ Dies lovis (Jovi or Zeus)
- ✓ Dies veneris (Venus)
- ✓ Dies saturni (Saturn)

Eight References to the First Day

We are going to study all eight references to the first day of the week and ask four questions of each:

- Does the text state that the first day is the Lord's Day?
- Does the text tell us that the first day of the week is holy?
- Does the text tell us that we are supposed to go to church on the first day?

- Does the text tell us that we are to keep the first day in **honor of the resurrection**?

We will also consider **Revelation 1:10**, a verse that Christians have used as a proof text for the observance of Sunday.

Text #1: Matthew 28:1

*“Now **after** the Sabbath, as the **first day of the week** began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.”*

This text **does not** say that the first day of the week is the **Lord’s Day**, that we are to **keep it because it is holy**, that we are supposed to **attend church** on it or that we are to keep it in **honor of the resurrection**.

Furthermore, the text makes it clear that **Sunday is not the Sabbath** because it tells us that Jesus resurrected *“after the Sabbath.”*

The Sabbath is the **seventh day**, while Christ resurrected on the **first day** (Exodus 20:8-11). Some **calendars** today in various parts of the world **muddy the waters** by making **Monday the first day** of the week and **Sunday the seventh**. This is a **crafty way** of making people think that Sunday is the seventh day of the week (**Septimo Día, AVIANCA**).

Text #2: Mark 16:1, 2

*“Now when the **Sabbath was past**, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. ² Very early in the morning, on the **first day of the week**, they came to the tomb when **the sun had risen**.”*

This text does not say that the first day of the week is the **Lord’s Day**, that we are to **keep it holy**, that we are supposed to **attend church** on it or that we are to keep it in **honor of the resurrection**. The text simply states that **Jesus resurrected** the first day of the week.

Furthermore, the text makes it clear that **Sunday is not the Sabbath** because the first day is the day after the Sabbath.

Pope **John Paul II** attempted to prove that Sunday is the rest day of Christians because of **everything that occurred** on Sunday:

- Jesus **resurrected** on Sunday.
- On Sunday, Jesus walked and talked with **two disciples** on the road to Emmaus on Sunday (Luke 24:36).
- He appeared to the **eleven apostles** on the evening of Sunday (John 20:19).
- A **week later** he appeared to the apostles again on Sunday (John 20:24-28).
- God poured out the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost on Sunday.
- The **first proclamation** of the gospel took place on Sunday.
- The **first baptisms** took place on Sunday.

Why did Jesus resurrect on Sunday? What people do not realize is that He resurrected on Sunday because of what He needed to do on the Sabbath! He resurrected on the first day because He had to **rest in the tomb** on the seventh.

- ✓ **At creation**: He finished on the sixth day, rested on the seventh day.
- ✓ **At redemption**: He said “it is finished” and rested in the tomb on the Sabbath.
- ✓ **At the restoration**: He will recreate the world in six days and rest on the seventh.

Text #3: Mark 16:9

*“Now when He **rose early** on the **first day** of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.”*

This text does not say that the first day of the week is the **Lord’s Day**, that we are to **keep it holy**, that we are supposed to **attend church** on it or that we are to keep it in **honor of the resurrection**. The text simply states that Jesus resurrected the first day of the week. Once again, it tells us that Jesus resurrected the **day after the Sabbath**.

Some Christians use a **psychological argument** in favor of Sunday:

“The Sabbath was a **sad day** for the disciples because Jesus was dead in the tomb while **Sunday was a joyful day** for them because Jesus resurrected. Therefore, we Christians keep the happy day!”

This argument, based on **human reason** and logic **contradicts the Bible**. There was no reason why they should have been sad because **Jesus had told them** multiple times that He was going to die and resurrect the third day (see Matthew 16:21). The Sabbath should have been a day of **joyous expectation**. Furthermore, on **Sunday evening** the disciples were **still sad** because they did not believe that Jesus had resurrected.

*“Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. ¹⁰ **She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept.** ¹¹ And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, **they did not believe.** ¹² After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. ¹³ And they went and told it to the rest, but **they did not believe them either.**” Mark 16:9-13*

Text #4: John 20:1, 2

*“Now the **first day of the week** Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was **still dark**, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”*

According to scholars, the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation were written by the **same person** at about the **same time**—the end of the **first century**. By this time, **more than sixty years** had passed since the resurrection.

Neither book refers to Sunday as the [1] **Lord’s Day** or as a [2] **memorial of the resurrection**. Neither book attributes [3] **any holiness to Sunday**. It is not

called a [4] **day of rest** nor are believers encouraged to go [5] **to church** on it. Neither book states that Christians must keep Sunday [6] in **honor of the resurrection** of Jesus.

In fact, **all the gospel writers** wrote their books at least **30 years after** the resurrection and none of them single out the first day of the week **as a special day**. The text **simply tells us** that Jesus resurrected on the first day of the week.

Text #5: Luke 24:1-3

*“Now on the **first day of the week**, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. ² But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. ³ Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.”*

This text does not say that the first day of the week is the **Lord’s Day**, that we are to **keep it holy**, that we are supposed to **attend church** on it, or that we are to keep it in **honor of the resurrection**. The text simply states that Jesus **resurrected** the first day of the week. Once again, it tells us that Jesus resurrected the **day after the Sabbath**, so Sunday is not the Sabbath.

As we examine the **sequence of days** in **Luke 23:50-24:1** we see clearly that Jesus died on **Friday** (the sixth day, the preparation), rested in the tomb on the **Sabbath** (the seventh day), and resurrected on what we today call **Sunday** (the first day). Therefore, **Sunday cannot be the Sabbath**.

According to scholars, John wrote the Gospel of John at the **end of the first century**. The book never refers to Sunday as the [1] **Lord’s Day** or as a [2] **memorial of the resurrection**. The book does not attribute [3] any **holiness to Sunday**. John does not refer to it [4] as **day of rest** nor are believers encouraged [5] to go **to church** on it. Finally, John never even hints that [6] Christians must keep Sunday in **honor of the resurrection** of Jesus.

*“That day was the [1] **Preparation**, and the Sabbath **drew near** ⁵⁵ and the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices*

and fragrant oils and they [2] rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.^{24:1} Now on the [3] first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.² But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.” Luke 23:54—24:3

Luke wrote **30 years after** the resurrection and wrote that the women **rested on the Sabbath**, according to **the commandment**. They kept the Sabbath **after Christ died**. Therefore, Jesus did **not abolish** the Sabbath when He died. The **Hebrew feasts** predicted Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection over one thousand five hundred years before the events occurred.

Leviticus 23:4-11 mentions three feasts: Passover, Unleavened Bread and First Fruits. Jesus **fulfilled all three right on time**. He died on the **14th day** of Nissan, remained in the tomb the **15th** and resurrected the **16th**.

Christians celebrate the entrance of Jesus to Jerusalem on **Palm Sunday once a year**. The same is true of **Holy Thursday** and **Good Friday**. Why then do they celebrate Resurrection **Sunday every week**? All three feasts were yearly, including First Fruits. It is ironic that Christians **observe Holy Week** that the Bible **never commands**, and they refuse to keep the Sabbath that the Bible clearly commands.

For more than **one hundred years** after the resurrection, we know that the church did not celebrate the resurrection every **Sunday** but rather **once a year** on the date of the **Passover on the 16th day of Nissan** no matter which day the Passover fell on.

It was only in the **second century** that **Bishop Victor** excommunicated the Christians **in Asia** for not commemorating the resurrection on the weekly Sunday.

Text #6: John 20:19

This occurred on Sunday night:

*“Then, the same day at evening, being the **first day of the week**, when the **doors were shut** where the disciples were assembled, **for fear of the Jews**, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”*

This text does not say that the first day of the week is the **Lord’s Day**, that we are to **keep it holy**, that we are supposed to **attend church** on it, or that we are to keep it in **honor of the resurrection**. The text simply states that Jesus resurrected on the first day of the week. Once again, it tells us that Jesus resurrected the **day after the Sabbath**.

Many Christians use this text to attempt to prove that Sunday is **God’s new rest day** because the disciples gathered on the first day of the week to **celebrate the resurrection**.

The **argument** goes like this:

The disciples **gathered** in the Upper Room to **celebrate Communion** in remembrance of the resurrection and Jesus actually **joined them** for the celebration. Thus, following Christ’s example, Christians must meet every Sunday to **celebrate Communion** in honor of Christ’s resurrection.

This argument is wrong on several counts:

- ✓ The text clearly tells us **why** they gathered in the Upper Room. It was for **fear of the Jews**. They were scared to death and in **hiding**.
- ✓ Jesus **could not have joined them** to celebrate Communion because the day before His death (Thursday) He told His disciples that He would not drink it with them until he drank it with them in the **Father’s kingdom**:

*“But I say to you, I will **not drink of this fruit** of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” Matthew 26:29*

- ✓ The Bible tells us explicitly **what Jesus ate** in the Upper Room the evening of resurrection day:

*“So they gave Him a piece of a **broiled fish** and some **honeycomb**.⁴³ And He took it and ate in their presence.” Luke 24:42, 43*

- ✓ Communion commemorates the **death** of Jesus, **not Sunday**:

*"For this is **My blood** of the new covenant, which is **shed** for many for the remission of sins." Matthew 26:28*

*"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death** till He comes." 1 Corinthians 11:26*

- ✓ The disciples broke **bread every day**, not only on Sunday:

*"All the believers were together and had everything in common. . . **Every day** they continued to meet together in the temple courts.... ⁴⁶ They **broke bread in their homes** and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." Acts 2:44, 46, NIV*

- ✓ Jesus instituted Communion on the **Thursday night** of Passion Week (1 Corinthians 11:23). Why did He institute it on Thursday if He wanted Christians to **celebrate it on Sunday**? He would have had the **excellent opportunity** to institute the Lord's Supper **on the Sunday night** of the resurrection, but He did not.

- ✓ The **greatest blow** against this entire argument is that the disciples did not gather to celebrate the resurrection because they **did not even believe** that Jesus had resurrected.

The morning of the resurrection:

"Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. ¹¹ And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them either." Luke 24:9-11

The **evening** of the resurrection:

*"Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to **Mary Magdalene**, out of whom He had cast seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told those who had been with Him, as **they mourned and wept**. ¹¹ And*

when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, **they did not believe**.¹² After that, He appeared in another form to **two of them** as they walked and went into the country.¹³ And they went and told it to the rest, but **they did not believe them either**.¹⁴ Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He **rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart**, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen." Mark 16:9-14

Text #7: 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2

"Now concerning the **collection for the saints**, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.² Upon **the first day** of the week let every one of you **lay by him in store**, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

The offering referred to here was not for church budget but rather for the **poor saints** in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-28).

These verses are not speaking at all about a gathering of Christians **at church** on the first day of the week. **Every Bible version** I have consulted states that this offering was to be **set aside** at home on a weekly basis. Why would members set it aside at home, if they were going to church on Sunday? Should they not rather take it to church? Not one Bible translation instructs believers to take the money to church.

Adam Clarke's Commentary was **half-right**:

"He was to do this at the conclusion of the week, when he had cast up his weekly earnings, and had seen how much God had prospered his labor. He was **then to bring it** on the first day of the week, as is **most likely**, to the church or assembly, that it might be put in the **common treasury**."

Albert Barnes:

"Let him lay up at home, treasuring up as he has been prospered. The Greek phrase, 'by himself,' means, probably, the same as **at home**. Let him set it apart;

let him designate a certain portion; let him do this **by himself** when he is **at home**, when he can calmly look at the evidence of his prosperity.”

NIV:

“Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the **first day of every week**, each one of you should **set aside** a sum of money in keeping with his income, **saving it up**, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”

NASB:

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. ² On the **first day of every week** each one of you is to **put aside and save**, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.”

ESV:

“Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the **first day of every week**, each of you is to put **something aside and store it up**, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.”

RSV:

“Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the **first day of every week**, each of you is to **put something aside and store it up**, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come.”

Weymouth:

“On the first day of every week let each of you put on one side and **store up at his home** whatever gain has been granted to him; so that whenever I come, there may then be no collections going on.”

Wuest:

*“On every first day of the week let each one of you have the habit of putting **aside at home** whatever he may be prospered in, **accumulating and keeping it in reserve**, in order that when I may come, then there may not be any collections.”*

It is **dishonest** to use this text to “prove” that Sunday is holy and people were going to church on Sunday. The text is not speaking of a meeting at church but rather a **private setting apart** of money at home to send to Jerusalem with Paul.

However, you might ask **why Paul commanded** them to set it aside on **Sunday**. The answer is simply because the workweek ended on Friday and Sunday would give them the first opportunity to sit down and figure out how much they should set aside. They would not do this on Sabbath because it is God’s day and not a day to take care of our personal finances.

What does this text teach us? Not Sunday observance, but rather **faithful stewardship**:

- ✓ Not suggested, but **commanded** (I gave orders and you must do).
- ✓ Not for **church operations**, but to send to the needy in Jerusalem.
- ✓ It was the practice in **other churches**
- ✓ **Regularly** (every payday).
- ✓ **Personally** (“each one of you”).
- ✓ **Privately** (set aside at home).
- ✓ **Amount** according to God’s blessings (amount).

Text #8: Acts 20:7-12

Furthermore, the following text makes it clear that Sunday is not the Sabbath because the first day is the day after the Sabbath:

*“Now on the **first day of the week**, when the disciples came together to **break bread**, Paul, ready to **depart the next day**, spoke to them and continued his message **until midnight**.⁸ There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. ⁹ And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a **deep sleep**. He was overcome by sleep; and as*

*Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.¹⁰ But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, 'Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.'¹¹ Now when **he** had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and **talked** a long while, even **till daybreak**, he **departed**.¹² And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted."*

The text tells us that the meeting took place in **the evening** of the first day of the week. The evening of the first day would be what we call **Saturday night** (Genesis 1 teaches that the evening comes before the morning). **Mark 1:32** indicates that the evening begins when the sun sets.

This was an **out-of-the-ordinary** meeting in that it was a **farewell** for the apostle Paul (20:7, 25, 36-38). He had probably preached **all day Sabbath** and the brethren, knowing that he would **leave the next morning** asked him to speak on Saturday night, the evening of the first day.

This passage gives **no justification** for a **regular observance** of the first day of the week. The book of Acts repeatedly tells us that the apostles went to church on Sabbath.

If they were Gentiles, why would they have to wait until the **next Sabbath day**? He could have done it then and there.

*"However, when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue **on the Sabbath day** and sat down...⁴² So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the **next Sabbath**...⁴⁴ On the **next Sabbath** almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God." Acts 13:14, 42, 44*

*"And **on the Sabbath day** we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there." Acts 16:13*

*"Then Paul, as **his custom** was, went in to them, and for **three Sabbaths** reasoned with them from the Scriptures,³ explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.'" Acts 17:2, 3*

He meets Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth:

*“And he reasoned in the synagogue **every Sabbath**, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.” Acts 18:4*

*“And he continued there **a year and six months**, [78 Sabbaths] that is teaching the word of God among them.” Acts 18:11*

To **ignore these clear texts** and try to make Luke say something that he did not intend is **dishonest**.

The apostle Paul walked **35 miles** (Acts 20:13) to **Assos** the next day, Sunday morning. If Sunday was the day of worship at this time, **should not Paul have been in church**? The simple fact is that the church was not meeting on Sunday at this time.

Incidentally, more than once while I **worked in Colombia**, I have had similar experiences. I once visited the city of Quibdó in the tropical rainforest of Colombia. After speaking all day Sabbath, the members, knowing that I would be leaving on Sunday morning, asked me to speak on **Saturday night** and the meeting lasted until **3:00 am**.

If you are going to use Acts 20:7-9 as a justification to observe Sunday, you must do it on **Saturday night** and have the service **all night**!

We have examined **every single text** in the Bible that mentions the **first day** of the week and have **found nothing** that even hints that Sunday is the day of worship for Christians. However, there is **one more text** that Christians use to justify the observance of Sunday, Revelation 1:10.

Text #9: Revelation 1:10

Patristic literature never uses the name *Lord's Day* for **Sunday** until the end of the **second century** in the **Apocryphal Gospel of Peter**. It is **not valid** to say that the use of the name at the end of the second century is proof that John used it with the same meaning in the book of Revelation one hundred years earlier.

Frequently, I ask Christian friends of **other denominations three questions**:

First, to whom (go one by one) do the **light**, the **firmament**, the **vegetation**, the **heavenly bodies**, the **fish**, the **birds**, the **land animals** and **human beings** belong?

Their immediate answer is that all of these belong **to God**.

Second, I ask them **why** these things belong to God.

Their answer is immediate: “**Because** God created them.” They are, of course, biblically correct!

*“The earth is **the Lord’s**, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. ² **For** He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters.”*
Psalm 24:1, 2

I then ask them a **third question: For whom** did God make all these things?

Once again, there is no hesitation in giving the answer: For all human beings!

However, these **same Christian friends** fail to take their answers to its **logical conclusion**. If everything that God made during creation week is His, because He made it then, the **Sabbath must be His** as well because He **made it** for man at the conclusion of creation week (Mark 2:27).

To say that all that God made the first six days is **His and that He gave it to man**, but the Sabbath belongs to the Jews is **absurd**. This is why the Bible refers to the Sabbath with expressions such as:

- “the Sabbath **of the Lord** your God” (Exodus 20:10)
- “you shall keep **my** Sabbaths” (Ezekiel 20:12, 20),
- God refers to it as “**my** holy day” (Isaiah 58:13, 14)
- The Son of man is “**Lord of the Sabbath**” (Mark 2:28)

Never once in the Old or New Testament do the writers refer to the Sabbath as the **Jewish Sabbath** or the **Sabbath of the Jews**. However, John refers to the **feasts that passed** away when Jesus died as “feasts of the Jews.”

- Jesus is the **King of the Jews** (Matthew 2:2; 27:11). Is He King **exclusively** of the Jews and not of all Christians?

- John 2:13: The **Passover** is called the “Passover of the Jews”
- John 5:1: “a **feast** of the Jews”
- John 6:4: “the **Passover**, a feast of the Jews”
- John 7:2: “the Jews’ Feast of **Tabernacles**”
- John 11:55 “the Jews **Passover** was nigh at hand”

Conclusion

We have studied all the texts that mention the first day of the week and not one of them even hints that Sunday is the **Lord’s Day**, that we are to **keep it holy**, that it is the day to **gather in church**, or that we are to keep it in **honor of the resurrection** of Christ.

We also studied **Revelation 1:10** and found no evidence that Sunday is the Lord’s Day. Twenty-three times the Bible refers to the Sabbath as the Lord’s Day and not once does it call Sunday by this name. The Bible in both Testaments is clear: Exodus 20:8-11 states that the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD and in Mark 2:27, Jesus tells us that He is the Lord of the Sabbath.



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #12 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE TEST OF DISCIPLESHIP AND HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM

The Roots of Holy Spirit Baptism

Let's begin by considering a conversation that Jesus had with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4). In the story, Jesus offered the woman water that would become in the person who drank, "a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (Verses 13, 14). As we can see in verses 10, 23, 35, the water represents the act of Jesus outpouring the Holy Spirit upon His followers on the Day of Pentecost. As believers "drank" of the Holy Spirit, they would become tributaries of the Well to the world.

The purpose of the outpouring, then, was to obey Christ's command to preach the gospel to the world (Matthew 28:18-20) and to empower them to proclaim the gospel to the world. The emphasis of the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman in John 4:13, 14 was that a person who receives the Holy Spirit (drinks the water that Jesus gives) becomes a channel through whom God gives the Holy Spirit to others. The primary purpose of the water is not individual edification or salvation, but receiving the Spirit to become a fountain of blessing to others.

In this context we must also consider John 7:37-39:

*“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, **out of his heart** will flow **rivers of living water.**’ ³⁹ But this He spoke **concerning the Spirit**, whom those **believing in Him would receive**; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”*

The historical context and place described in these verses was the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. During this feast, Jesus once again invited the thirsty to come to Him and drink. And once again, the emphasis falls upon believers receiving the Spirit (drinking the water) to become fountains of blessing to others. In this passage, the water is clearly a symbol of the Holy Spirit and the glorification of Christ refers to His enthronement at the right hand of the Father upon His ascension.

The apostle Paul used the water metaphor as well to describe the Holy Spirit:

*“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to **drink into one Spirit**.”*
1 Corinthians 12:13

The source for this idea of drinking water from Jesus finds its roots in the Old Testament (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:2-11). In the first episode, God told Moses to **strike** the rock with his rod and waters would flow forth from it. The rock in this story is a symbol of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 and Deuteronomy 32:4, 13, 15, 18, 30, 31, 37). The rod is a symbol of the Father’s judgment or punishment falling upon Christ as our substitute (the rod of Moses brought judgment and punishment every time he struck something). And, as we have seen, the water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The lesson is clear. The rod of the Father’s judgment fell upon Jesus in Gethsemane and the cross (cf. Isaiah 53:4-8; Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21), and as a result He was able to pour out the Holy Spirit for His followers to drink. Jesus received the promise from the Father (see Acts 1:4; 2:33, 39; Luke 24:49). Notice that the Holy Spirit could not be poured out until Jesus was

glorified—a clear reference to His death, resurrection and ascension to heaven (see John 12:23, 31; 21:9).

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the Holy Spirit was given to His disciples so that they, in turn, would impart the blessing to others. That is to say, the gift of the Holy Spirit flows from Jesus through us to others. We are merely tributary channels of the Holy Spirit.

Let's take a look at two other passages where Jesus promised the Holy Spirit before Pentecost. In Matthew 3:11 John the Baptist referred to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost with the word *baptism*. That is say, believers who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost receive the 'baptism' of the Spirit:

*"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will **baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.**"*

It would be well for us to remember these words of John because we will be meeting them again a little later in our study. Now notice Mark 16:15-18:

*"And He said to them, '**Go** into all the world and **preach the gospel** to **every creature**.¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.¹⁷ And these **signs will follow** those who believe: In My name they will **cast out demons**; they will speak with **new tongues**;¹⁸ they will take up **serpents**; and if they **drink** anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on **the sick**, and they will recover."*

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus promised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Two important things stand out in this passage: First, the purpose of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was witnessing or the preaching the Gospel. Secondly, the outpouring of the **gift** of the Holy Spirit gave the disciples the **gifts** necessary to fulfill the gospel commission. For this reason, the impartation of the Holy Spirit is called 'the gift' (cf. Acts 2:38; 10:45; 11:17), who then imparted the gifts. Without the gift of the Holy Spirit there could be no gifts, and without the gifts, the Gospel could not be proclaimed. The One **gift** of the Holy Spirit imparts the **gifts** (1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 28-31). Once again, we see that the

purpose of the Holy Spirit baptism is evangelism, the proclamation of the Gospel.

This same idea of Holy Spirit baptism as the power for evangelism can be seen in Acts 1:7-8:

*“And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. ⁸ But **you shall receive power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and **you shall be witnesses** to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

In this Gospel commission, Jesus promised that His disciples would receive power to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and even as far as the uttermost parts of the earth. The entire book of Acts is patterned after these geographical locations. Like a pebble thrown into a lake, the Gospel did indeed go to Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria and then to the ends of the earth.

According to the Gospel record, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a second blessing received sometime after baptism. In God’s plan, the Holy Spirit is imparted at the **very moment** of baptism. The Holy Spirit fell upon Jesus at the moment of His baptism (Mark 1:9-11), and Jesus linked water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism in His conversation with Nicodemus (cf. John 3). On the Day of Pentecost, Peter also stated that forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are received by the believer at the moment of baptism (Acts 2:38).

We see this same pattern in other texts in the book of Acts. I emphasize this point because some people teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit comes at some point later than water baptism, in what they call the “second blessing.” However, the Bible is clear that God wants us to receive both blessings at baptism.

A question still remains to be answered. Why did some of Christ’s disciples receive water baptism from John the Baptist but only received Holy Spirit baptism three and a half years later on the Day of Pentecost? We have already answered this question. The disciples could not receive Holy Spirit baptism until Jesus had died, resurrected, ascended to the right hand of the Father and

poured out the gift. After Pentecost, it is not necessary to wait for a second blessing because the Holy Spirit has already been poured out! Also, as we shall see in the lesson on the ordinances of the church, baptism is a symbolic incorporation into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and this could not happen until Jesus went through those steps.

In Acts, chapter 2, the promised gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out. When the **gift** of the Holy Spirit was poured out, all the **gifts** which Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 12 began to function in the church. Here is the list: **1)** healing (Acts 3:6; 8:4-8; 19:11-12); **2)** exorcism (Acts 5:16; 8:7; 19:11-12); **3)** Administration (Acts 6:1-7); **4)** helps (Acts 9:36, 39); **5)** evangelism (Acts 21:8); **6)** prophecy (Acts 13:1; 15:32; 21:9-10); **7)** tongues (Acts 2:1-13; 10:44-48; 19:3-6); **8)** teaching (Acts 5:25; 13:1; 15:35; **9)** word of knowledge (Acts 5:1-11); **10)** exhortation (Acts 11:32; 15:22; 13:15; 20:2); **11)** apostles (Acts 6:6). None of these gifts were for mere personal growth, but rather for evangelistic outreach and growth of the body—the entire church (see 1 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4:12).

The Gifts of the Spirit and the Gift of Tongues

Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians tend to focus on one particular gift as the most important—the gift of tongues. So, we must ask, is the gift of tongues the most important of the gifts of the Holy Spirit? An out-of-context reading of Acts chapter 2 would seem to indicate that it was. Does God intend that all true Christians should speak in tongues? Was the gift of tongues for personal spiritual edification or did it have an evangelistic purpose like the other gifts?

The apostle Paul makes it clear that the gift of tongues was not the most important. This is seen by the order of gifts that Paul lists in Ephesians 4:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-11, 28-31. In each of these lists, the gift of tongues is last on the list. Of course, the question is, why was this the only and most prominent gift in Acts 2?

Before we answer this question, we must underline that it is the Holy Spirit who owns and dispenses the gifts. Believers do not seek after them nor study to

receive them, because they are, after all, gifts! The Holy Spirit dispenses them when a particular contextual need requires them. 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, 18, 28 makes clear that the Holy Spirit is **Lord** of the gifts. With this caveat in mind, let's proceed to explain why the gift of tongues was the only gift imparted to believers on the Day of Pentecost.

A careful study of Acts 2 reveals that the gift of tongues was the most urgently needed at that particular moment. The feast of Pentecost was one of the three on which all men over the age of twelve were required to travel to Jerusalem. Thus, Jerusalem was bursting at the seams with Jews from the diaspora all over the Roman Empire. These Jews did not speak the language of the apostles. Like second and third generation immigrants to the United States, they had lost the use of their native tongue.

How, then, could the apostles share the Gospel with them at this crucial moment if they did not speak their language? The answer is obvious. God performed a miracle so that the 120 could speak in the tongues of all these people from the diaspora! As these people heard the gospel in their own tongue, they would then return to their lands and share the good news that they had heard in Jerusalem. Thus, the gift of tongues had an evangelistic purpose!

We previously noted, the book of Acts is patterned after the evangelistic sequence of Acts 1:6-8. The Gospel was to go first to Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria and finally to the uttermost parts of the earth. After the Day of Pentecost, when all the Jews from the dispersion had returned to their lands, the Holy Spirit was poured out again on those who lived in Judea, but there is no reference to them receiving the gift of tongues (Acts 4:31). The gift was no longer necessary because all present spoke Aramaic. Acts 8:14-17 describes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Samaria, but no reference is made to the gift of tongues. Why not? Simply because the Samaritans spoke the same language as the Jews who lived in Jerusalem, and therefore the gift was not necessary.

When the Gospel went to Caesarea, the Holy Spirit once again imparted the gift of tongues to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-48). Why in Caesarea? Caesarea was the most important seaport on the Mediterranean between Tyre

and Egypt. People from all countries, languages and walks of life came through Caesarea. God gave the gift of tongues to meet the necessity of witnessing to all these language groups.

The gift of tongues was once again imparted by the Holy Spirit in Ephesus (Acts, 19). Ephesus was a seaport city, one of the most important trade centers on the continent of Asia. People from every nation on earth came through this busy seaport. God, knowing this, gave the church members of Ephesus this gift so they could proclaim the Gospel to all these language groups.

The same could be said about Corinth. Corinth was one of the busiest seaports on the continent of Europe. People from many language groups passed through this busy metropolis. Once again, the Holy Spirit, knowing the need, imparted the gift of tongues upon the believers so that they could preach the Gospel to all these language groups!

As we saw in Acts 1:6-8, Jesus commanded His disciples to proclaim the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. How could they do this if they did not know the languages of those nations? The answer is that the Holy Spirit performed a miracle and gave them the ability to speak those languages. Truly, when God bids us to do something, He gives us the resources to do it!

Is the gift of tongues a test of a person's spirituality? Is it a test of salvation? Must a person feel guilty if they have never spoken in tongues? Is the gift of tongues a sign that that a person has the Holy Spirit?

Jesus taught that the test of a person's spirituality and salvation is not the gift the person has received, but rather the fruit in the life. The gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit are related because they are both imparted by the same Holy Spirit. However, they are also distinct one from another. Notice what Jesus says in Matthew 7:16-20:

*"You will know them **by their fruits**. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?¹⁷ Even so, every good tree bears good **fruit**, but a bad tree bears bad **fruit**.¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad **fruit**, nor can a bad tree bear good **fruit**.*

¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear **good fruit** is cut down and thrown into the fire.

²⁰ Therefore **by their fruits** you will know them.”

John the Baptist had taught the same lesson before Jesus began His ministry. In Matthew 3:10, John announced that a tree is determined by its fruit and immediately after spoke of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus also repeatedly emphasized the need for fruit as the evidence of true discipleship (cf. John 15:2, 4, 5, 8, 16; also, Matthew 12:33).

The Jewish nation made great pretensions of godliness, but they were cursed because they did not bear any fruit. True discipleship is known by the fruit, not by the gifts (cf. Matthew 21:19; 33-46; Mark 11:13, 20, 21).

Jesus taught that in the last days many who professed His name would have counterfeit gifts which appeared to be the genuine. Jesus described these counterfeit gifts in Matthew 7:21-23 (cf. Matthew 24:23-24):

*“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in **Your name**, cast out demons in **Your name**, and done many wonders in **Your name**?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I **never knew you**; depart from Me, you who **practice lawlessness!**”*

Those who claimed to have these gifts, cast out demons, prophesied and performed many miracles. Paul lists these three in his catalogue of gifts. And yet, they were counterfeit gifts. How do we know? Simply because Jesus said to those who seemingly exercised these gifts, “I **NEVER** knew you.” If Jesus never knew them, then how could the gifts of the Spirit of Jesus be operating in them?

Even more amazing, Jesus then explained why He never knew them. Those who exercised these “gifts” practiced lawlessness. They claimed to be filled with the Spirit and yet they were transgressors of the Law. They lived in sin while they professed to be followers of Jesus (1 John 3:4). Jesus then illustrated his teaching by telling the parable of the men who build their houses on the rock and on the sand (Matthew 7:24-29). Those who **hear** the words of Jesus but do not **do them** will make shipwreck of their faith. Those who **hear** the words of

Jesus and **do them** will withstand the tribulation to come. Read Luke 6:46-49 for a more detailed explanation of this passage in Matthew 7.

Galatians 5:19-23 clearly explains what the fruit of the Spirit is. It is actually a description of the character of Jesus. We must beware of wanting the gifts of the Spirit without having the fruit. We must desire the character rather than the power because when we have the character, we will have true power.

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit and Obedience

Acts 5:30-32 states that God gives His Holy Spirit to those who obey Him:

*"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. ³¹ Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the **Holy Spirit** whom God has given **to those who obey Him.**"*

God does not give the Holy Spirit indiscriminately to just anyone. Jesus, in John 14:15, stated, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."* Immediately after this Jesus promised the gift of the Spirit:

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever." (verse 16)

The same idea is in the beautiful promise of Ezekiel 36:26, 27:

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put **My Spirit within you** and **cause you to walk** in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.*

There is no dichotomy between the Holy Spirit and the Law. If you are truly connected with Jesus, you will bear fruit for His glory and use your gifts for the preaching of the Gospel. To say that we are connected with the Vine but not to bear good fruit, is just false pretense, like the fig tree with leaves but with no fruit! So, in the end, it is all about a relationship. If we are one with Jesus, He will

live out His life in us. The Spirit which is in our lives will flow out in blessing to others. It is impossible to receive and not give!

In conclusion, let's return for a moment to Matthew 7:21-23. There Jesus taught us that it is not saying "Lord, Lord" which counts, but rather doing the will of the Father who is in heaven. And what is the will of the Father? The apostle Paul explained that the will of God for us is sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth (John 16:13) and then sanctifies and cleanses us through that Word (John 17:17; cf. John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26). 2 Thessalonians 2:13 tells us that we are saved by "sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth"—and the truth is in God's Word! Thus, the Holy Spirit leads to all truth as found in the Word, cleanses us, sanctifies us, imparts His gifts to us, produces fruit in us and empowers us to witness. Thus, when we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, all other blessings follow in its train.

Finally, in Romans 6:22, the Apostle Paul puts it all together. He speaks of justification, sanctification and glorification with the following profound words:

*"But now having been **set free** from sin, and having become **slaves of God**, you have your **fruit to holiness**, and **the end** everlasting life."*

Are you willing to commit your life to Jesus Christ and obey Him out of love?



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #13 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT LIFE, DEATH, AND THE AFTERLIFE

Preliminary Remarks about John 11

John chapter 11 tells the story of Christ’s greatest miracle during His earthly ministry. Lazarus lived in Bethany, about two miles southeast of Jerusalem. When the story begins, Jesus had gone to Aenon (cf. John 3:23) because the Jews in Judea had sought to stone Him (John 8:58, 59; 10:30-33). The precise place where Jesus went is unknown, but we know it was relatively close to Jerusalem.

While Jesus was in Aenon, Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, became gravely ill and his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent word to Jesus (11:2-3). Jesus made a strange remark to His disciples when He heard that Lazarus was ill:

*“This sickness is **not unto death**, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” John 11:4*

This statement of Jesus to His disciples is strange because Lazarus did die. Verse 5 tells us “*Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*” If that was true, why did Jesus decide to remain for two more days where He was instead of going immediately to Bethany to heal His close friend? (Verse 6). What a strange way to show love for those whom Jesus loved! Why didn’t Jesus go immediately and heal his friend and bring comfort to the family? But things got even stranger. Next, Jesus told his disciples: “*Let us go to Judea again.*” (Verse 7). The disciples

protested, but Jesus insisted that they go. The disciples responded by saying, *“Let’s go that we may die with Him”* (Verses 5, 6, 16).

Death as a Sleep

Jesus then made a remark that surprised the disciples: *“Our friend, Lazarus, sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.”* (Verse 11). The disciples did not understand the meaning of what Jesus said so they responded: *“Lord, if he sleeps, he will get well.”* (Verse 12). However, Jesus was comparing the state of man in death with sleep:

*“However, Jesus spoke of His death, but **they thought** that. He was speaking about taking rest in **sleep**. Then Jesus said to them plainly, **‘Lazarus is dead.’**” John 11:13-14*

The idea of death as sleep should not have surprised the disciples or those who were present when Jesus arrived in Bethany. The Bible in multiple places uses sleep as an analogy of death.

The Old Testament is saturated with references to death as sleep. Job 14:7-15 is particularly significant where death is compared to a tree that is cut down, as a river that dries up and as sleep:

*“For there is **hope for a tree**, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its tender shoots will not cease. ⁸ Though its root may grow old in the earth, and its stump may die in the ground, ⁹ Yet at the scent of water it will bud and bring forth branches like a plant. ¹⁰ But man dies and is laid away; indeed, he breathes his last and where is he? ¹¹ As water disappears from the sea, and **a river becomes parched and dries up**, ¹² So man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be **roused from their sleep**. ¹³ “Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! ¹⁴ If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. ¹⁵ You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands.”*

Deuteronomy 31:16 tells us that Moses slept with his fathers. 1 Kings 11:21 tells us that David slept with his fathers; 1 Kings 11:43 states that Solomon slept with his fathers. In fact, dozens of times in Kings and Chronicles, the kings of Israel from David to Jehoiakim (Daniel 1: 1; 2 Kings 24:6) are said to have slept with their fathers.

In Psalm 13:3 David spoke of the “sleep of death”:

“Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

Isaiah 26:19 describes the resurrection of the righteous lie in the dust of the earth:

“Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”

Jeremiah 51:39, 57 explains that the wicked will sleep an everlasting sleep and shall not awake:

“In their excitement I will prepare their feasts; I will make them drunk, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake,” says the Lord....⁵⁷ And I will make drunk her princes and wise men, Her governors, her deputies, and her mighty men. And they shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake,” says the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts.”

Daniel 12:2 compares the death and resurrection of the righteous and the wicked sleeping and awaking:

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

The testimony of the New Testament is in perfect harmony with the Old. When Jesus told those who were mourning the death of Jairus’ daughter that she was asleep, they mocked Him to scorn. Notice Luke 8:52-55:

*“Now all wept and mourned for her; but He said, “Do not weep; she is **not dead**, but sleeping.”⁵³ And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead.⁵⁴ But He*

*put them all outside, took her by the hand and called, saying, “Little girl, **arise**.”⁵⁵ Then her spirit returned, and she arose immediately. And He commanded that she be given something to eat.”*

Acts 7:59, 60 describes the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr as sleep:

*“And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, **he fell asleep**.”*

The apostle Paul wrote that the righteous who passed are asleep:

*“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who **sleep in Jesus**.” 1 Thessalonians 4:14*

The apostle Paul vividly described the death and resurrection of the righteous as sleep and waking:

*“And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!¹⁸ Then also those who have **fallen asleep** in Christ have perished....²⁰ But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep....⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all **sleep**, but we shall all be changed—⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and **the dead** will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” 1 Corinthians 15:17, 18, 20, 51*

The apostle Peter used the same expression as dead people sleeping with the fathers (2 Peter 3:4), and Revelation 14:13 describes those who died in the Lord as resting from their labors. Thus, the most prominent writers in the New Testament—Jesus, Peter, Paul, and John—all refer to death as sleep.

There are three main reasons why these pillars of the faith referred to death as sleep. In both sleep and in death there is:

- ✓ Unconsciousness about what is going on in the world of the living.
- ✓ Rest from the hard labors and trials of life.
- ✓ There will be an awakening from death/sleep.

For those who are in Christ, death means nothing. They knew that their names are written in heaven (Luke 10: 18) and they simply await the glorious moment of the resurrection. Indeed, *“precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” Psalm 116:15*

The Arrival of Jesus to Bethany

Now let's get back to the story of Lazarus. In John 11:15, Jesus made an enigmatic statement that puzzled His disciples:

“I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe.”

This remark of Jesus seemed calloused and insensitive. However, what Jesus was saying is this: “If I had been there when Lazarus was sick, I would have healed him and you would have lost the opportunity to believe that I am the Son of God.” Jesus and sickness could not co-exist. If He had been there while Lazarus was alive, He would have healed him.

To further perplex the disciples, Jesus delayed to arrive in Bethany two more days (John 11:17). The disciples wondered why Jesus, who loved Lazarus so much, would delay so long in going to Bethany.

In the next several verses (17-32) Martha and then Mary complained that if Jesus had arrived earlier, He could have saved Lazarus from death. In this, Mary and Martha revealed their unbelief. Martha believed in the resurrection of the dead at the last day, but she did not understand that Jesus was God in the flesh who had the power to resurrect Lazarus from the dead at that very moment! Martha did confess, *“I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world”* (Verse 27), but like Peter on another occasion, she did not fully comprehend what that meant (Matthew 16:16, 17, 21-23).

Some have mistakenly interpreted Jesus' words in John 11:26, *“and whoever lives and believes in Me shall **never die**”* to mean that the Christian never actually dies because the soul lives on after death. However, verse 25 negates this view. It explicitly states: *“He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live.”* Jesus here makes it clear that though Christians die, they will live at the

resurrection—not at the moment of death! Jesus believed that the hope of life for the Christian is at the resurrection on the last day, not at death (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54).

Jesus did not say to Martha, “I have life and resurrecting power.” He said, *“I am the resurrection and the life”* (John 11:25). Jesus not only has life, **He is life**. His life is our only hope of everlasting life (cf. 1 John 5:11-12).

When Jesus met Mary, she repeated the same sentiments of Martha: *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* John 11:32. She accepted Jesus as a great healer, but did not yet understand that He was God who has life in himself. For her, Jesus was not the one who will resurrect people in the last day! She did not yet see that Jesus was God in the flesh.

The distress of Jesus in verses 33-38 was due to the great unbelief of those who were mourning. They actually thought that Jesus wept because He loved Lazarus when in reality He was weeping because of their unbelief. They were saying the same words as Mary and Martha: “Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?” John 11:37. This unbelief is further seen when Martha protested when Jesus commanded the stone to be removed (John 11:39). The unbelief of many who were there we see later when they laid plans to kill Jesus (John 11:53) and Lazarus (John 12:9-11).

Several remarks are in order about the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:41-44). Not once does John 11 even hint that only the body of Lazarus was sleeping. It was Lazarus in his totality. Jesus did not say, “Our friend Lazarus’ body is sleeping, I go to wake up his body.” In verse 39 Martha said that her brother Lazarus had been **dead** for four days. Verse 41 adds that the dead man was lying **in the tomb**. And in verse 43, Jesus called Lazarus **to come forth**. He did not call him down from heaven! Lazarus was in the tomb.

The Biblical Concept of Life, Death and Resurrection

The uniform hope of the Christian in the Bible is the resurrection from the dead (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12-20, 42, 50-55), never the immortality of the soul. Jesus spoke of two resurrections (John 5:28-29), one of the righteous and the other

of the wicked. Jesus hinted about the first resurrection when He referred to the **resurrection of the just** (Luke 14:14) which clearly implies a resurrection of the unjust. Paul described a resurrection of the just and unjust (Acts 24:14-15).

The full picture of the two resurrections is in Revelation 20:4-6. Clearly, the first resurrection (of the righteous) takes place at the beginning of the millennium (compare 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17) while that of the wicked takes place at the end (Revelation 20:5). In fact, the second death (the definitive punishment for sin) is always spoken of as occurring after the millennium (Revelation 20:6, 14; 21:8).

Jesus made it crystal clear that the judgment will take place at the last day (John 12:48). That being the case, how could people go to heaven or hell at the moment of death if we will not be judged until the last day? Furthermore, texts such as Matthew 16:27 and Revelation 22:12 clearly teach that Jesus will give the reward to His people when He returns at the second coming, not at death.

Where was Lazarus between his death and resurrection? If he went to heaven at death, how cruel it would have been for Jesus to make him come back. The fact is that Lazarus had no story to tell about the interim because he was sleeping the sleep of death.

The fundamental misunderstanding of the Christian world is found in its understanding of the word *soul*. The idea of an immortal soul has become so entrenched for such a long time that many find it impossible to think of the word *soul* in any other way than an entity which survives the body during the interim of death. Due to the influence of Greek philosophy, most Christians believe that the soul is an immortal entity inside man which can consciously survive the body. But, is this so?

The Bible teaches that the soul is not a part of a person, but the person in its totality. That is to say, man does not have a soul, he **is a soul**. Even today we use the word soul in this sense. We say, “not a soul showed up for the meeting”. We refer to someone who is suffering as “that poor soul” and evangelists say, “one hundred souls were saved”. Clearly, the word *soul* in these phrases means “person”. Genesis 2:7 tells us that the **total person** is a soul.

The word *soul* in both the Old and New Testaments is frequently translated “person”, “life” or even with a personal pronoun. Let’s examine several examples from the Old Testament:

- ✓ Leviticus 17:11 says that the soul of the person is in the blood. The word *soul* here means “life”.
- ✓ Leviticus 7:18, 20 explains that a soul eats. This means a person eats.
- ✓ Numbers 11:6 speaks of the soul drying up. Obviously, the best translation here is “life”.
- ✓ Psalm 22:20 tells us that a soul can be delivered from the sword. Here it would be best to translate the word *soul* with “person”.
- ✓ Psalm 30:3 speaks of the soul coming up from the grave, not from heaven. Here David is speaking about a dead person.
- ✓ Psalm 33:19 explains that a soul can be delivered from death. Obviously, the meaning of the word *soul* here is “person”.
- ✓ Psalm 49:15 speaks about redeeming the soul from the grave. The word here obviously means “life”.
- ✓ Proverbs 25:25 tells us that the soul gets thirsty. People get thirsty.
- ✓ Many more examples could be supplied from the Old Testament, but let us go to the New.

One of the most popular Bible versions in the Christian world today is the New International Version. When I was doing research for this class, I was surprised to find that the NIV frequently translates the word *soul* as “life”, “person” or even by using a personal pronoun. Sometimes NIV does not even translate the word. Let’s take several examples:

- ✓ In Acts 2:27, 31 the NIV translates the word *soul* as “me”.
- ✓ Acts 2:43 the NIV translates the word *soul* with “everyone”
- ✓ In Romans 2:9 the word *soul* is translated “human being”.
- ✓ In Romans 13:1 the NIV translates the word *soul* with “everyone”
- ✓ In Hebrews 10:38 the word *soul* is translated with the personal pronoun “I”.

- ✓ Hebrews 10:39 reads in the New King James: “to the saving of the soul”. This is translated in the NIV: “those who are saved”.
- ✓ In James 5:20 the word *soul* is translated with the personal pronoun “him”.
- ✓ In Luke 21:19 the word *soul* is translated as “yourselves”.
- ✓ In Acts 2:41 the word *soul* is not even translated. The NIV says “three thousand were added”.
- ✓ In Acts 14:22, once again the word *soul* is not even translated.
- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 2:8 translates the word *soul* with “lives”.
- ✓ Both in Hebrews 13:17 and James 1:21 the word *soul* is translated with the personal pronoun “you”.
- ✓ In Matthew 12:18 the word *soul* is translated with the personal pronoun “I”.
- ✓ For further examples look up the following texts: Matthew 2:20; 6:25; 20:28; John 10:11; Acts 15:26; 20:24; John 10:24; Luke 12:19, 20; Philippians 2:30. Incidentally, Isaiah 53:12 tells us that Jesus poured out his soul [life] unto death.”

Not once in all the Bible is the soul spoken of as a conscious, immortal entity that can live independently of the body, and not even once does any text of the Bible connect the word *immortal* with the word *soul* or *spirit*.

What Christians frequently do is read into the Bible their preconceived notions. Let's cite an example. Genesis 35:18 describes the death of Rachel as she was giving birth to Benjamin. The text states her death took place “as her soul was departing”. Does the text say that her soul went up or down? Does the text say that her “immortal soul” left the body? Does the text say that her “conscious soul” left the body? The answer to all of these questions is no! Christians just assume that her soul was immortal and conscious and that it was going to be with the Lord. We must beware of injecting our own meanings into the Bible. The fact is that her “life” was departing. The text tells us explicitly that she died! The NIV captures the meaning of the text: “As she **breathed her last** — for she **was dying** — she named her son Ben-Oni.”

What happens with the soul at death can be better understood by providing an illustration: the operation of a video camera. When you are videotaping something, the camera inputs what you are recording. However, when you put the camera on pause the videotaping is temporarily suspended. During the time that the camera is on pause, no input enters into the camera. But when you press the start button again, the camera picks up where it left off. The same is true of life and death. While you live, your five senses are processing the information that comes into your brain. At death, one's life is put on hold or pause. There is no new input during this period. When Jesus comes to resurrect His people, He will once again press the record button and life will start precisely where it left off. Thus, death is only a pause, a temporary suspension of life. This is why death means nothing to the Christian.

For the Christian who dies in Christ, there is really no time separation from Christ. Life stops at the moment of death and picks up again when Jesus comes. It will pick up at the very point where it left off when the person died. Thus, in a certain sense, from the perspective of the dead person, there was no separation during the interim because the dead person has known nothing from the moment of death till the resurrection.

The Glorious Hope of the Resurrection

Romans 6:23 presents two choices and two destinies, death or eternal life. The choice is not eternal life in bliss or eternal life in misery. How can we be sure to choose life? The answer is that we must choose to be "in Christ". And how do we choose to be "in Christ"? The incorporation ceremony into Christ is baptism. Romans 6:3-5 and Matthew 28:18-20 (cf. Galatians 3:26) explain that we benefit from what Jesus did by being baptized into His name.

At baptism we receive forgiveness for all our sins and also the gift of the Holy Spirit. At this moment, the Spirit of Christ dwells in us (Romans 8:11) and we have the gift of eternal life (1 John 5:11, 12). Thus, our choices, our decisions, are a matter of life and death. We can decide to hang on to our sins and die or give them to Jesus and live. There are no other choices. If we choose life, we can have the assurance that, should we die, Jesus will resurrect us with his

awesome power to live with Him forevermore. What an awesome privilege! Are you willing to give your life to Jesus?

Let's close with the story of Paul's encounter with the philosophers at Athens. These "wise men" did not believe in the resurrection of the body. Their hope was the deliverance of their "immortal soul" from the prison of the body. When Paul debated these intellectuals at the Aeropagus, they listened intently to what he had to say, but many were scandalized when Paul spoke about the physical resurrection of the body (see Acts 17:16-21, 30-32). For them, the body was a hindrance to true intellectual growth. Their aspiration was to get rid of the body that their immortal soul might live. What a contrast with the view of Paul! He expressed his hope in Philippians 3:4-11 where he articulated his intense desire to know Jesus and the power of His resurrection.

What a glorious day it will be when Jesus returns to awaken His sleeping children! Have you made the decision to give your life to Jesus?



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #14 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Introduction: The Reason for Israel’s Election

God always elects with a purpose and so it was with national Israel. God gave Israel its religious system of rites and ceremonies with the purpose of teaching the world lessons about the future coming of the Messiah. Israel was to proclaim in symbols and shadows the good news of a coming Messiah so as to prepare the world for His arrival. Isaiah 49:6 is one example of God’s plan for Israel:

“Indeed, He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”
(cf. Exodus 19:5-6 with 1 Peter 2:9-10; Zechariah 8:20-23).

According to prophecies such as Isaiah 61 and Zechariah 8:20-23, the nations would come to Israel as they marveled about her prosperity.

However, Israel failed to fulfill her mission and the reason for her election. Before the Babylonian captivity, she mingled with the surrounding nations and came close to losing her identity. After the captivity she shut herself away from the nations. Thus, to a greater degree, the nations remained in darkness

regarding God's plan of salvation. The gospel of John tells us that He came to His own and His own did not receive Him (John 1:11).

God's Final Call to National Israel

Matthew 21:1-11 describes the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem less than a week before His passion. As He "entered the temple of God" (21:12), He cast out the money-changers and then called the temple "My house" (21:13). Then from Matthew 21 to 23 Jesus spent most of His time in the temple and His teachings centered on the failure of Israel to fulfill her mission.

John the Baptist had compared Israel to a tree (Matthew 3:10) that symbolized Israel. John warned the Sadducees and Pharisees that if the nation did not bear fruit, it would be cut down and cast into the fire (Matthew 3:5-9). He also told them that being literal children of Abraham meant nothing to God unless they produced fruit.

Jesus picked up the tree metaphor in Luke 13:1-9. The fig tree and the vineyard were accepted symbols of Israel (cf. Hosea 9:10; Isaiah 5). In His parable of the fig tree, spoken by Jesus three years after John began to preach the message, the nation of Israel had not produced fruit. At this point only one year remained in the ministry of Jesus to the Jewish Nation and it remained to be seen if, during this last year, they would produce fruit.

In Matthew 21:18-19 (cf. Mark 11:12-14, 20) we meet the fig tree again. The event was taking place the Tuesday before the crucifixion. The fig tree (Israel), still had not produced fruit and therefore, Jesus cursed it (national Israel) and commanded that it should never produce fruit again. As a result, the fig tree dried up by the roots. Once a tree's roots have dried up there is no more hope for it.

Jesus then told the parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21:33-43). In this parable, Jesus reviewed the three stages of Israel's history:

- ✓ From Mount Sinai to the Babylonian Captivity (445-605 BC)
- ✓ From the Babylonian Captivity till John the Baptist (605 BC-27 AD)

✓ From John the Baptist till Christ's ministry (27-31 AD)

At each stage, Israel refused to bear fruit. The parable makes it clear that stage #3 was Israel's last chance to accept the Messiah. This is reflected in the words "***last of all*** he sent his son" (verse 35). At the conclusion of His parable, Jesus made the awesome announcement to the Jews:

*"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be **taken from you** and given to **a nation** [referring to believers from all nations] bearing the fruits of it."*
Matthew 21:43

The chief priests and the Pharisees understood that Jesus spoke these words about them (verse 45). In fact, in verse 44, Jesus had warned that if the religious leaders fell on the stone (Jesus), they would be broken, but if they did not, the stone (Jesus) would fall on them and crush them. The words of Jesus were fulfilled 40 years later when Jerusalem was destroyed.

Jesus taught the same basic lesson in the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14). In the parable, the King sent out two invitations for Israel to attend His Son's marriage. The first call was given in the Old Testament period and the second after the fatted oxen and cattle had been killed (representing the death of Christ). However, both calls were rejected. As a result, the King sent his armies to destroy the city.

The fulfillment took place when the Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem in the year 70 AD. The kingdom was taken away from those who had originally been invited and it was given to those who were gathered from the highways and the byways—believers from all nations. In Matthew 8:11-12, Jesus had already announced that many from east and west would enter the kingdom and sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob while the sons of the kingdom would be cast to outer darkness where there would be wailing and gnashing of teeth (cf. Luke 13:23-30).

In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounced woes upon the scribes and Pharisees for their superficial religion of externals. Jesus reached the climax of His woes in verses 29-38 where He referred to them as murderers of the prophets, serpents and

brood of vipers and told them that they would not escape the condemnation of hell (where they will be alive outside the New Jerusalem after the millennium).

Yet even then, the door of mercy did not close for the Jewish theocracy. Jesus told them that even after His death, He would send them wise men and prophets and they would kill and crucify them, scourge them and persecute them from city to city (Matthew 23:34). Then Jesus told them that the blood of all the martyrs from Abel to Zacharias would be demanded of that generation. Jesus told them that they had filled up the measure of their fathers' guilt (Matthew 23:32). When the measure of their guilt was full, the door of mercy closed. There was nothing more that God could do than send His Son and the nation rejected Him.

Jesus then concluded by telling them that He had repeatedly wanted to gather them to Himself, but they were unwilling. Then Jesus pronounced the solemn words *"See, your house is left to you desolate"* (Verse 38).

In the very next chapter Jesus proceeded to describe the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-2). When Jesus left the temple, it was left desolate and had no protection. It was no longer the "temple of God" or "My house" but your house! Jesus made clear that in rejecting Jesus, national Israel revoked the purpose of her existence. This is not to say that the State of Israel should not exist as a political entity or that individual Jews who accept Jesus are excluded from the blessings of the covenant.

When the Jewish nation, through its constituted leaders, rejected Jesus and proclaimed Caesar their king, they withdrew from the theocracy (John 19:15). Truly the blood of Jesus would be on them and their children (Matthew 27:25). The sad reality is that they were fulfilling prophecy and they didn't even realize it!

The Legacy of National Israel Continues?

When national Israel failed to accomplish the purpose for its election, God's plan did not fail. When Jesus, cried out on the cross, "it is finished" (John 19:30), the entire Old Testament system of shadows came to an end. This was

announced by the rending of the veil which divided the Holy and Most Holy Place of the temple (Matthew 27:51; cf. the book of Hebrews). That to which the Jewish economy pointed was fulfilled. The Old Testament system was related to the New as a shadow to substance, as a scale model to the finished project, as a photograph to that which was photographed, as the moon to the sun. Let's study now how the old has transitioned to the new.

From Literal/National Israel to Spiritual/Global Israel

According to the book of Revelation (which is a revelation of Jesus Christ—Revelation 1:1), there is only one true Israel during the Old and New Testament periods. As we shall see, Jesus affirmed that there was a faithful Israel within Israel:

“Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.² Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth....⁵ She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.⁶ Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days” Revelation 12:1, 2, 5, 6

Needless to say, the woman pre-existed the child and the woman represents the Old Testament church. Jesus was born from the Old Testament church. However, the same woman then fled to the wilderness for 1260 years. Thus, there is only one woman/church during both dispensations.

Having rejected national Israel, God would continue His plan through a new “nation” of spiritual Israelites—the Gentiles from all nations (Matthew 21:43). Instead of the Gentiles coming to this new “nation” to learn the truth as in the Old Testament, the followers of Jesus would go to all nations to teach them the truth (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8). It is hardly a coincidence that when Paul and Barnabas were rejected by the Jews at Antioch, they quoted Isaiah 49:6, the same verse at the beginning of this chapter:

*“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves **unworthy of everlasting life**, behold, **we turn to the Gentiles**.⁴⁷ For so **the Lord has commanded us**: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Acts 13:46-47*

To be a child of Abraham means to be baptized and have a personal relationship with Christ. There are two kinds of children of Abraham, the literal and the spiritual:

*“For you are all sons of God through **faith in Christ Jesus**.²⁷ For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all **one in Christ Jesus**.²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, **then** you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Galatians 3:26-29*

In the next two passages, the apostle Paul wrote that there are **two kinds of Jews**: those who are Jews outwardly (physically) and those who are Jews inwardly (spiritually). There are Jews who are not Jews and Israelites who are not Israelites:

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.” Romans 2:28-29

*“But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are **not all Israel who are of Israel**,⁷ **nor are they all children** because they are the seed of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’⁸ That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.” Romans 9:6-8*

Jesus had already made a marked distinction in John 8 between physical and spiritual Jews. In verses 37-38, Jesus told them that He knew that they were physical descendants of Abraham:

“I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. ³⁸ I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.” John 8:37, 38

However, in verse 44 Jesus identified their spiritual father:

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

In the Old Testament, Israelites came to worship at the literal Jerusalem Temple but now the temple is global—the Christian church:

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you [plural]? ¹⁷ If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you [plural] are.” 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17

Paul described the Corinthian church as the new spiritual temple:

“For you [plural] are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them [plural] and walk among them [plural]. I will be their [plural] God, and they [plural] shall be My people.” 2 Corinthians 6:16

The apostle Peter compared Jesus to a living stone and referred to Christians as a spiritual priesthood in a spiritual house:

“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 2:4, 5

Jesus had already told the Samaritan woman during His ministry that worship would no longer be in Jerusalem or Samaria:

“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and

now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” John 4:21-23

Worship after Pentecost would be where two or three are gathered together in Christ’s name:

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” Matthew 18:20

Thus, the literal temple of literal and local Israel was now spiritual and global. Also, he who does not gather to Jesus scatters. They were gathered in the land, but scattered from Jesus.

The new spiritual temple is composed of spiritual building materials. The Cornerstone of the new spiritual temple is Jesus (a person, not a literal stone). The apostles (persons, not literal stones) are the foundation stones which help hold up the new spiritual temple and believers become the living stones built upon the foundations (1 Peter 2:5). The Shekinah glory of this spiritual, global temple is the Holy Spirit:

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” Ephesians 2:19-22

The capital of Israel in the Old Testament was earthly, localized Jerusalem, but the capital of New Testament is the heavenly New Jerusalem. In fact, even Old Testament believers looked forward to the heavenly Jerusalem:

*“By faith he **[Abraham]** dwelt in the land of promise as in a **foreign country**, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose **builder and maker is** God....¹³ These all **[the Old Testament believers]** died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were **strangers** and **pilgrims** on the*

earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they **seek a homeland**. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire **a better**, that is, a **heavenly country**. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has **prepared a city for them**.” Hebrews 11:9, 10, 13-16

The apostle Paul even went so far as to say that believers were already spiritually on Mt. Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem by faith:

“But you **have come** to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the **heavenly Jerusalem**, to an innumerable company of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” Hebrews 12:22-24

Paul explained that believers are spiritually there because their citizenship is there:

“For **our citizenship is in heaven**, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” Philippians 3:20, 21

The apostle Paul even went so far as to compare the unbelieving Jews of his day as Mt. Sinai, Hagar and the earthly Jerusalem with Christians who were free and whose mother was the heavenly Jerusalem:

“For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—²⁵ for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — ²⁶ but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.” Galatians 4:24-26

Instead of many priests of the old system who offered many sacrifices and served only until death, Jesus now ministers one sacrifice as our High Priest forever:

*“Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He **always lives** to make intercession for them.²⁶ For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;²⁷ who does **not need daily**, as those high priests, to **offer up sacrifices**, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did **once for all** when He offered up Himself.” Hebrews 7:25-27*

Instead of offering the blood of lambs, Christians now have the efficacious blood of Jesus to atone for sin:

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29 (cf. 1 Peter 1:18-20; Isaiah 53:4-8; Revelation 5:11-13)

Instead of the many “seeds” of the old system, Christians become seeds of the one Seed, Jesus Christ:

“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” Galatians 3:16

Instead of the old covenant with faulty promises, Christians now have a better covenant with better promises that can truly forgive sin and write the Law in the heart:

*“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second...¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My **laws in their mind** and write them **on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people....¹² For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” Hebrews 8:7, 10, 12 (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-16)*

*“Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.²⁸ For this is My **blood of the new covenant**, which is shed for many for the **remission** of sins.” Matthew 26:27,28*

Instead of David and a succession of kings sitting on the earthly throne in Jerusalem, Christians now have the King of kings, Jesus Christ, sitting on the

heavenly throne at the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:34-36; Revelation 19:11-16; Ezekiel 34:23, 24).

Instead of literal geographical Babylon, the enemy of the church is spiritual and global Babylon (Revelation 17-18).

Instead of the literal rock, water from the rock and the manna from heaven, Christians have Jesus and the Holy Spirit (John 6:32, 33, 48-51; John 4:13-14; 7:37-39).

Instead of a literal serpent raised in a certain geographical location, Christians look to Jesus all over the world who neutralizes the venom of sin (cf. Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-16; Hebrews 2:14, 15).

Clearly, what was literal and local in the Old Testament becomes worldwide and spiritual in this age of the Holy Spirit. This means that if the antichrist is going to sit in the temple of God, he must be sitting in the Christian church. If Christians look for literal Israel for the rise of the Antichrist, they will be looking in the wrong place.

God's temple is no longer in literal Jerusalem. The church is the temple. Thus, the antichrist sits in the Christian church (see 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). And just as the Jewish nation fulfilled prophecy in crucifying Jesus, so the Christian world will fulfill prophecy by trying to destroy the body of Christ, the church. The Jewish nation did not realize that they had become antichrist and so the Christian world will not realize that it has become antichrist! At the end, in persecuting the body of Christ, people will be persecuting Christ (see Acts 9:4-5; Matthew 25:40).

Only One Israel: Believers in Christ

Jesus has only one fold today and they are those who hear His voice and follow Him:

"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd." John 10:16

Jesus has only **one seed** of Abraham today—Jesus. And those who receive Jesus become the Seed's seed:

"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ. . . ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:16, 26-29

Jesus has only one body today—those who have become members of Christ's church:

*"For He Himself is our peace, who has **made both one**, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself **one new man from the two**, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them **both to God** in **one body** through **the cross**, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him **we both** have access by **one Spirit** to the Father." Ephesians 2:14-18*

The followers of Christ are citizens of **one city**. The foundations of the city have the names of the twelve apostles and the twelve gates have the names of the tribes of Israel. According to Hebrews 11, even the patriarchs knew that earthly Jerusalem was not their home. By choosing **twelve apostles**, Jesus was indicating that the Christian church is the legitimate continuation and legacy of Old Testament Israel.

*"Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the **twelve tribes** of the children of Israel." Revelation 21:12*

*"Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the **twelve apostles** of the Lamb." Revelation 21:14*

Jesus is the husband of only one woman, comprising the redeemed of all ages. If Jesus has two wives, literal Israel and spiritual Israel, He would be a spiritual bigamist!

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” Ephesians 5:25-27

One olive tree symbolizes all of God’s people, both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 11:17-27). The key to being a branch on the tree is the connection with Jesus Christ:

*“You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.” ²⁰ Well said. **Because of unbelief** they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.... ²³ And they also, if they **do not continue in unbelief**, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.” Romans 11:19, 20, 23*

- ✓ Natural branches
- ✓ Natural branches cut off
- ✓ Natural branches grafted in
- ✓ Wild branches grafted in
- ✓ Wild branches cut off

God has only **one true temple** whose foundations are composed of the New Testament apostles and the Old Testament prophets with Christ being the Chief Cornerstone:

*“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom **you also** are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22*

We are all members of **one family** with **one Father**:

“But He answered them, saying, ‘Who is My mother, or My brothers?’ ³⁴ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers!’ ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.” Mark 3:33-35

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:12-13

“That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.” Romans 9:8

The redeemed will sing **one** and the same **song**—of Moses and the Lamb. There is a spiritual solidarity between the final generation and the Old Testament saints:

“And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. ³ They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” Revelation 15:2, 3

God does not have two mutually separable people with different plans for each. God has only one true people: those who have received Jesus as Savior and Lord!

The State of Israel was established in 1948. Israel, in the Six Day War in 1967, recovered the Sinai Peninsula and in 1973 the Israelis took over east Jerusalem, the site of the Temple Mount. There is a lot of talk about the possibility of building of a third Jerusalem temple. Is all of this indicative that prophecy is being fulfilled? Does God still have a plan for national Israel? In the light of what we have studied today, our answer must be no.

MESSIANIC PROPHECIES AND THEIR FULFILLMENT

EVENT	DATE	OLD TESTAMENT QUOTE	NEW TESTAMENT QUOTE
BIRTH IN BETHLEHEM	750 B.C.	MICAH 5:2	MATTHEW 2:5, 6
BORN OF A VIRGIN	750 B.C.	ISAIAH 7:14	MATTHEW 1:23
ANNOUNCED BY A STAR	1400 B.C.	NUMBERS 24:17	MATTHEW 2:1, 2
MASSACRE OF INFANTS	620 B.C.	JEREMIAH 31:15	MATTHEW 2:18
WOULD BE CALLED FROM EGYPT	700 B.C.	HOSEA 11:1	MATTHEW 2:15
EXACT DATE OF HIS BAPTISM	530 B.C.	DANIEL 9:24, 25	MARK 1:14, 15
THE POWER OF HIS PREACHING	730 B.C.	ISAIAH 9:1, 2; 61:1-4	LUKE 4:16-21; MATTHEW 4:14-16
THE JEWS DON'T BELIEVE HIS MESSAGE	730 B.C.	ISAIAH 6:9, 10	JOHN 12:37-41
WOULD BE HONORED ONLY BY THE LIPS OF THE JEWS OF HIS TIME	730 B.C.	ISAIAH 29:13	MATTHEW 15:7-9
TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM	520 B.C.	ZECHARIAH 9:9	MATTHEW 21:5
CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE	620 B.C.	JEREMIAH 7:11	MATTHEW 21:12, 13
ZEAL FOR GOD'S TEMPLE ATE HIM UP	950 B.C.	PSALM 69:9	JOHN 2:17
DISCIPLES FLEE WHEN JESUS WAS WOUNDED	520 B.C.	ZECHARIAH 13:7	MATTHEW 26:31, 56
JESUS' VICARIOUS DEATH	730 B.C.	ISAIAH 53:3-6	ROMANS 5:1; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21
JESUS' EXACT WORDS AT THE CROSS, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?"	1000 B.C.	PSALM 22:1	MATTHEW 27:46

HIS HANDS AND FEET WERE PIERCED	1000 B.C.	PSALM 22:16	JOHN 19:37
LOTS WERE CAST ON HIS GARMENTS	1000 B.C.	PSALM 22:18	MATTHEW 27:35
WATER POURED OUT FROM HIS SIDE	1000 B.C.	PSALM 22:14	JOHN 19:34
ENEMIES SPAT IN HIS FACE	730 B.C.	ISAIAH 50:6	MATTHEW 26:67
THE EXACT WORDS OF HIS ENEMIES AS HE HUNG ON THE CROSS	1000 B.C.	PSALM 22:8	MATTHEW 27:43
NONE OF HIS BONES WOULD BE BROKEN	1450 B.C.	EXODUS 12:46	JOHN 19:36
ON THE CROSS, HE WOULD SAY, "I THIRST"	1000 B.C.	PSALM 22:15; 69:21	JOHN 19:28
HE WOULD BE BETRAYED FOR 30 PIECES OF SILVER	520 B.C.	ZECHARIAH 11:12, 13	MATTHEW 27:9
HE WOULD REMAIN IN THE TOMB FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS	700 B.C.	JONAH 1:17	MATTHEW 12:40
HE WOULD BE BURIED WITH THE RICH	730 B.C.	ISAIAH 53:9	MATTHEW 27:57-60
HE WOULD RESURRECT	1000 B.C.	PSALM 16:10; ISAIAH 53:9-11	ACTS 2:27, 31
HE WOULD ASCEND TO HEAVEN	1000 B.C.	PSALM 24; 68:18	EPHESIANS 4:8
HE WOULD SIT AT THE FATHER'S RIGHT HAND	1000 B.C.	PSALM 110:1, 4	ACTS 2:33-35
HE WILL COME AGAIN	520 B.C.	ZECHARIAH 12:10	REVELATION 1:7
HE WILL ESTABLISH AN ETERNAL KINGDOM	600 B.C.	DANIEL 2:44, 45; ISAIAH 9:5-7	ALL OF REVELATION



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #15 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE RAPTURE OF THE SAINTS

John 14:1-3 is the great hope of Christians:

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

Satan has established **rival hopes** to sap the true hope of its **urgency** and **imminence**.

- ✓ **You go to heaven when you die** (eg. Genesis 35:18). If a person goes to heaven at death, then why feel an urgency for the second coming?
- ✓ **God wants to set up His theocracy on earth.** Roman Catholics and Protestants in the United States look forward to a political kingdom ruled by a cadre of religious leaders. This is similar to **Saint Augustine’s** vision in his book, **City of God**. The idea is that those who will not be persuaded must be compelled.
- ✓ **Amillennialism** teaches that we are **now in the millennium**. The idea is that at the first coming, God bound Satan to allow for the preaching of the gospel. This theory, embraced by the Roman Catholic papacy and picked

up by Lutheranism devastated the hope for the second coming during the dark ages.

- ✓ **Evolution or progressive creation.** This idea eliminates a sense of imminence and urgency for the second coming. If God used evolution as His method of creation, how long will it take the evolutionary process to reach its climax? In this context, the name of our church is vital.
- ✓ **Post-millennialism.** This is the idea that science, medicine, technology, industry, and education will eradicate the problems of the world and make it better and better. The Millerites had to fight against this idea.
- ✓ **New Age** teaches that we all have the “christ spirit” within. Supposedly at death this “christ spirit” leaves the body and returns to the universal essence. If this idea is true, there can be no personal, literal, bodily, visible second coming of Jesus.
- ✓ **This world is our home.** There are those who believe that this world is their home and at death people simply cease to exist. If this is the case, there is no hope in a second coming.
- ✓ **Re-incarnation:** The idea that when a person dies, how they lived this life will determine how they will come back in the next.
- ✓ **The Real Biblical Hope** (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Analyze this passage point by point in the light of the transfiguration and 2 Peter 1:19-21.

However, in our lesson today we want to study one dangerous view believed by millions of Christians.

Satan Hates the Second Coming

Let us go back in our minds to the time just before the first coming of Jesus. Among those who professed to be the people of God, there was much religious interest (cf. Matthew 3:5). The people were studying the prophecies attempting to pinpoint the time of Messiah’s coming.

There were many different religious sects or “denominations” among the Jews at the time. Some of them were the Herodians, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots, and the Essenes. The religious leaders were teaching the populace that the Messiah would come in power and glory to destroy the hated Romans and restore the Jewish nation to its former position at the top of the world. Their selective use of the Old Testament Scriptures seemed to sustain their optimistic view.

Because of their erroneous views, when Jesus came, they did not recognize or receive Him (John 1:11). Remarkably, they chose a false messiah, Barabbas, instead of Jesus (cf. Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:7; Luke 23:18-19; John 18:40). They became part and parcel of antichrist by killing Christ.

How could this happen? How could the leaders of God’s people, who studied and taught Bible prophecy to the people, have led the multitudes to believe such a deception? The answer is simple. The coming of Jesus did not fit in with their perspective of Bible prophecy. Although there were abundant prophecies that pinpointed every detail about the Messiah, their preconceived notions and misinterpretations resulted in a deception so vast, that only a small remnant were ready to receive Jesus as Messiah.

Ironically, Jesus really was a king. He claimed a kingdom which was not of this world, He wore a crown of thorns, His throne was a cross, His enemies put a reed (scepter) in His right hand, there was a procession which followed Him to the place of His “enthronement”, He was garbed in purple like a king, the multitudes rendered Him mock homage like to a king and the inscription above the cross read, *“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”* (see Matthew 27:27-31). But alas, Jesus was a different kind of king than they expected, so they rejected Him.

The vital point to underline here is that the overwhelming majority of leaders and people who professed to serve God, became antichrist by killing Jesus, the predicted Messiah. And why did this happen? Because they misinterpreted the prophecies about the manner of the Messiah’s coming.

The bottom line is that Satan hated the first coming of Jesus and he did all in his power to blind God's own people and leaders so that they would not be ready for His appearing!

Satan Hates the Second Coming

Now we must ask a sobering question: Does Satan hate the second coming of Jesus any less than the first? Is it perhaps possible that Satan will pull the same trick on God's professed people in the end-time? Is it possible that the leaders of Christendom and the people would expect Jesus to come in a certain way when in reality He will come differently than they expect?

Today, like just before the first coming, there is great interest in the study of Bible prophecy. Movies such as *The Omega Code* and *Left Behind* were box office hits. The *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins about the tribulation were on the New York Times best seller list for months. Preachers on Sunday morning television preach to full houses about the coming rapture, the tribulation for the Jews and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, and millions accept their teachings as gospel truth without question! Is it just possible that Satan is setting up the Christian world to do what the Jews did at Christ's first coming? Remember, in the days of Christ's first coming the overwhelming majority of those who professed to be God's followers were dead wrong and they crucified Christ.

Most conservative born-again Protestants, as well as many Catholics, are expecting Jesus to come back in what is known as the "Secret Rapture". The idea is that seven years before the glorious second coming of Jesus, He will come back and rapture (or "snatch away" to use Hal Lindsey's expression) his church to heaven just before the "Great Tribulation". Thus, the idea is that God's church will not go through the "Great Tribulation" because they will be in heaven with the Lord! The crucial question is this: Is this scenario Biblical? What arguments are used to sustain this view? Let's examine some of them.

Hal Lindsay, who believes in the rapture of the church before the tribulation, argues that the expression "falling away" of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 should be

translated “snatching away” or “departure”. The idea is that the church will be “snatched away” to heaven before the manifestation of the antichrist. However, the context clearly indicates that the departure is not of the church to heaven but rather a departure of the church from the faith. The entire context of the passage indicates that 2 Thessalonians 2 refers to a great apostasy which was to arise in the church before the second coming of Jesus. The Greek word for “falling away” is *apostasía* from where we derive the English word “apostasy”. In Acts 21:21 the word describes those who accused Paul of teaching people to forsake or depart from Moses:

*“... but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to **forsake** Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.” Acts 21:21*

The fact is that no reputable Bible version translates this word with “snatching away”. This is how several versions translate the word *apostasía*:

- **NIV, ESV**: “the rebellion”
- **NASB**: “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless **the apostasy** comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.”
- **KJV, NKJV**: “falling away”
- **Bible in Basic English**: “falling away from the faith”
- **Darby Bible**: “the apostasy”
- **Douay-Rheims**: “the revolt”
- **New Century**: “turning away from God”
- **New Living**: “great rebellion against God”

Only the Wuest Translation sees the word describing the departure of the church to heaven before the tribulation: “because that day shall not come except the aforementioned **departure** [of the Church to heaven] comes first.”

The secular world of New Testament times used the word **apostenai** to describe a boat that was not firmly anchored and was “drifting away” from port.

Not Appointed to Wrath

Another argument is based on 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10:

*“For God did not **appoint us to wrath**, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.”*

The argument goes like this: During the great tribulation the wrath of God will be poured out upon the world without mixture of mercy. This being the case, how could the church be on earth if they have not been appointed to God’s wrath?

In the book of Revelation, the seven last **plagues** are the final outpouring of God’s wrath **without mixture** of mercy (Revelation 15:1). The question is, how can God’s people be on earth during that period and **survive**? The answer is that **God will protect** them. Israel was in **Egypt** when the plagues fell, but God shielded them. The **three Hebrew worthies** went through the furnace but the fire did not burn them. **Daniel** spent a night in the lion’s den, but God preserved His life. And the stories in Daniel 3 and 6 portray, in miniature, the final tribulation described in Revelation 13. God’s people will go through the time of trouble but **Michael will protect them** (Daniel 12:1). Michael **stands watch** over the children of God’s people.

The “Tribulation Psalm” (Psalm 91) will inspire the faithful during this final time of trouble:

*“A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall **not come near you**. ⁸ Only with your eyes shall you look, and **see the reward** of the wicked. ⁹ Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, ¹⁰ No evil shall befall you, **nor shall any plague** come near your dwelling; ¹¹ For He shall give **His angels charge** over you, to keep you in all your ways”. Psalm 91:7-11*

The great tribulation will be intense (Matthew 24:21, 22) but short. During this time God will be the shelter of His people:

*“Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a **little moment**, until the **indignation is past**.²¹ For behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will also disclose her blood, and will no more cover her slain.” Isaiah 26:20, 21*

Isaiah 48:10 describes how God’s people will be refined in the furnace of affliction during this period:

“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”

A further argument is based on Revelation 3:10 where God promises His faithful people that He will keep them *“from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”* Those who believe in the rapture doctrine interpret the expression “keep them” as meaning that God will take believers out of the world during the tribulation.

The problem with this interpretation is that the identical expression appears in John 17:15 where Jesus prayed for His disciples and said to the Father:

*“I do not pray that You should **take them out** of the world, but that you should **keep them** from the evil one.”*

A similar expression appears in Galatians 1:3-5 where the apostle Paul wrote that Jesus *“gave Himself for our sins, that He might **deliver us** from this present evil age”*. Obviously, “deliver us” does not mean that Jesus takes us out of this world, but rather that He keeps us from the power of the evil one.

Coming with His Saints

Still another argument is based on 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 13 where Paul wrote that Jesus will come with all His saints. The argument is that if He comes with the saints from heaven, He must have taken them there before He came:

“And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,¹³ so that He may establish your hearts blameless in

holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

The question is, who are the saints that Jesus comes with? Are they the redeemed that were snatched up to heaven in the rapture seven years before Jesus' glorious coming? No. The answer is that the Bible not only calls the faithful believers saints, but also the angels. Jesus will come again with His holy angels (cf. Matthew 16:27). In fact, Paul takes the expression "coming with His saints" from Deuteronomy 33:2 where the angels accompanied God as He came to write His law on tables of stone at Sinai:

"The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints ["holy ones" in the NIV]; from His right hand came a fiery law for them."

The idea of Christ coming with His angels is described in Revelation 19:11-21 where Jesus comes back to the earth with the armies of heaven, which are the angels.

The use of the number "ten thousand" is a common designation for the angelic hosts:

"Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." Revelation 5:11 (cf. Daniel 7:9, 10)

The words "saint" and "holy" are interchangeable and mean the same thing:

*"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father [cf. **Hebrews 1:3**] with the holy angels." Mark 8:38*

Be Able to Stand

Luke 21:36 is another favorite text of those who believe the rapture theory. Jesus told His disciples that they should "*pray always that you may be counted*

worthy to escape all these things [*the great tribulation events*] that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

For those who hold to rapture theory, *escape* means “taken out of the world before these events happen”. But the word *escape* could very well mean that they escape because Jesus will shield them with His almighty power! When Jesus returns, there is a group that will not escape destruction:

“For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.”
1 Thessalonians 5:3

Did they fail to stand because Jesus did not take them to heaven in the pre-tribulation rapture? Of course not. Revelation 6:14-17 describes a group that will be able to stand through the outpouring of God’s unmingled wrath:

“And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷ For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”
Revelation 6:15-17

Come up Here

Those who believe in the rapture theory claim that when the angel invited John to come up to heaven, he was describing the rapture of the church:

“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.” Revelation 4:1

The fact is that prophets were transported in vision to distant places while they were still physically on earth! **Revelation 17:3** tells us that John was caught away in the spirit to the wilderness. He did not go there physically but in vision. Likewise, **Revelation 21:9, 10** describes how John was taken to see the holy city in vision. Once again, John went up to heaven in vision, not in person!

Taken or Left?

One of the most frequently heard arguments in favor of the rapture is that Jesus told His followers that when He comes some will be taken and the others left (Matthew 24:40-42). Rapture theorists assume that the ones taken go to heaven and the ones that are left remain on earth. However, we must be careful not to explain words in the light of our present meanings, but in the light of their original, Biblical meaning.

The fact is that the opposite is true. Those that are left are the surviving remnant when Jesus comes and those who taken are destroyed. Let us look a closer look at the evidence for this interpretation. The argument of Jesus in verses 40 and 41 regarding the taken and the left is based on the flood in Noah's day (verses 37-39). Genesis 7:23 tells us that when the flood destroyed the wicked pre-flood race (Luke 17:27, 29) only Noah and his family were **left**:

*"Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. **Only Noah was left**, and those with him in the ark." Genesis 7:23, NIV*

The fact is that Jesus well knew the meaning of the word *left* and the word *taken*. Study carefully the following texts on the meaning of the word *taken*: (Ezekiel 33:4, 6; 2 Chronicles 17:2; Judges 1:8; Jeremiah 50:9 [here translated, *captured*]; Joshua 10:1; 2 Kings 18:10; Jeremiah 38:28; 48:1, 7, 44; 50:2; 51:31, 41, 56). In all these texts wicked men are "taken" in a military conquest. Notice the following texts on the meaning of the word *left*: Jeremiah 50:20 [translated *preserve*]; Isaiah 1:9; 4:3; 11:11, 16; Judges 4: 16; Isaiah 24:6; Haggai 2:3.

A comparison of Matthew 24:39 with Luke 17:27 clearly indicates that the ones who were taken were destroyed. That is to say, the flood took away those who were destroyed! Even today we often say, after a devastating flood, "Did the flood take everyone away, wasn't anyone left?" In this expression the ones who are left are alive whereas the ones that are taken have died! (For a fuller explanation of the words *taken* and *left* I recommend reading the book, *Taken or Left?* available from Secrets Unsealed)

He Shall Bring with Him

The final misused text that we will examine is 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

Jesus made **two promises** to His disciples regarding their final dwelling place:

- He promised to take them to His **Father's house** in heaven (John 14:1-3).
- He promised that the meek will **inherit the earth** (Matthew 5:5)

The question is, how can Jesus **fulfill both of these promises?**

The futurist answer:

- ✓ Jesus will rapture the faithful to heaven before the great tribulation and they will spend seven years there.
- ✓ After the seven years, Jesus returns to the earth and the meek will inherit it.

The biblical answer:

- ✓ At the second coming, Jesus will take the saved to heaven where they will dwell for a thousand years.
- ✓ After the thousand years, the meek will inherit the earth as their eternal home.

Let's look at the entire context of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. As we examine this passage let us remember the directional movement of the passage. Let's begin directional movement of Jesus. He died, He was buried, He resurrected and was caught up to heaven by the angels sent by the Father (Acts 1:9-11).

*"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus **died and rose again, even so God** will **bring with Him** those who sleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are **alive and remain** until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are **asleep**. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will **descend** from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God and the **dead in Christ will***

rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord **in the air**. And thus we shall **always be with the Lord**. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

The problem of verse 14:

“For if we believe that Jesus **died and rose again, even so** God will **bring with Him** those who sleep in Jesus.”

Those who believe in the pre-tribulation rapture argue that Jesus cannot bring the saints with Him from heaven to earth unless He took them to heaven previously. Let’s examine this argument more carefully.

Verse 14 tells us that Jesus died and resurrected and then was caught up in a cloud of angels that took Him to His Father’s house:

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He **was taken up [passive voice]**, and a **cloud received Him** out of their sight.” Acts 1:9

“She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron and her Child was **caught up [passive voice]** to **God** and His throne. ⁶ And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.” Revelation 12:5-6

In summary:

After Jesus died and resurrected, the Father sent a cloud of angels to transport Him to heaven. The resurrected saints at the second coming will replicate the experience of Jesus. They died, resurrected, and a cloud of angels (Revelation 1:7; Mark 8:38) will come to earth and the dead in Christ will be caught up in the cloud to be transported to the Father’s house:

“And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel.... ¹¹ This same Jesus, who **was taken up [passive voice]** from you into heaven, will so **come in like manner** as you **saw Him go into heaven**.” Acts 1:10, 11

*“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are **alive and remain** until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede **[to heaven]** those who are **asleep**,¹⁶ for the Lord Himself will **descend** from heaven **[where He went]** with a **shout**, with the **voice** of an archangel, and with the **trumpet** of God and the **dead in Christ will rise** first,¹⁷ then we who are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the **clouds** to meet the Lord **in the air** and thus we shall **always be with the Lord**.” 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17*

Here is the Summary

*“For if we believe that Jesus **died and rose again** **[and then caught up in a cloud to go to heaven]**, **even so** **[in the same way]** God **[the Father who sent Jesus—Acts 3:18]** will **bring with Him** **[with Jesus to heaven]** those who sleep in Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 4:14*

Conclusion: Jesus does not bring the righteous dead from heaven to earth but rather the Father brings the righteous dead with Jesus to heaven.

The Imminence of Christ’s Coming

Those who believe in the secret rapture, teach an any-moment coming of Jesus, that is, an imminent coming. They say that no sign must necessarily transpire before the rapture except the reestablishment of Israel to their land in 1948. Their argument is, that if there were clear signs which must take place before the rapture, then there could be no element of surprise. However, this overlooks the fact that people could be surprised, even Christians, if they chose to ignore or reject the signs.

Virtually all who believe in the rapture doctrine teach that the blossoming of the fig tree in Matthew 24:32-33 represents the reestablishment of the nation of Israel in 1948. However, this overlooks the fact that in the parallel passage in Luke 21:29-30 Jesus speaks of the budding of the fig tree and all the other trees.

The All-Important Question: How will Jesus Come?

The New Testament leaves no doubt that the coming of Jesus will be noisy, literal, visible, and personal (cf. Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; Matthew 24:29-30; Luke 21:27; Revelation 1:7). This coming is referred to as the “second time” (Hebrews 9:28). If the rapture were true, then there would be three comings!

Will Jesus set up His kingdom on earth when He comes the second time? The answer is a resounding no! Shortly before the second coming, seven plagues will devastate the earth. Everything will be in shambles. People will not be able to live on the planet because it will return to pre-creation chaos (cf. Jeremiah 4:23-27; Isaiah 4:18-23).

The New Testament testifies that Jesus will take His people to heaven at His second coming. John 14:1-3 tells us that Jesus promised to take His people to the Father’s house when He comes again and 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 adds that God’s people will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air. Matthew 24:31 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1 inform us that God’s people will be gathered to Jesus—not Jesus to the people. When Jesus comes for the second time, His feet will not touch the earth. Jesus warned his followers about false prophets and false christs who would say that Christ had come and could be located walking in different parts of the earth (Matthew 24:23-27).

The Bible fact is that God’s people will go to heaven with Jesus for one thousand years, then Jesus will create a new heaven and a new earth and God’s people will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

Three Ways to be Deceived

In 1948 the State of Israel was formed. This has been seen by Protestants as a fulfillment of prophecy. Then, in 1967 the Israelis took over the Sinai Peninsula. Finally, in 1973 they gained possession of East Jerusalem, the location of the Temple Mount. The eyes of most Protestants are focused on the Middle East for the fulfillment of prophecy. In this way, prophecy fulfills before their very eyes

and they cannot see it because they are looking in the wrong place: east instead of west!

Many Christians are expecting to go to heaven at the rapture before the tribulation. But when there is no rapture, they will be found in the midst of the greatest tribulation in the history of the world and they will not be prepared. If we know that we must go through the tribulation, then we will prepare for it. You would not prepare for it if you don't think you are going to go through it! Thus, many Christians will be found without shelter because they did not build upon the Rock (see Matthew 7:24-27).

Most conservative Christians expect Jesus to set up His earthly kingdom when He comes the second time. In this concept, they leave themselves open to Satan's counterfeit second coming. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-13 tells us that Satan will walk upon the earth with power, signs and lying wonders. These three words are used in only one other text of the Bible: Acts 2:22 where Jesus performed them. This means that Satan will perform the same things that Jesus did when He was on earth. 2 Thessalonians 2:9 clearly calls this Satan's coming [the same word which is used to describe Christ's coming].

The Close of Human Probation

In closing, I would like to say that there will be an event that will take place just before the beginning of the tribulation. It will not be the rapture but rather the close of human probation. You see, during the tribulation nobody will be saved. All decisions will have been made in the heavenly court before this.

This close of probation is foreshadowed by the flood in Noah's day. Matthew 24:37-39 mentions three points of time: the closing of the door, the seven days in the ark, and the coming of the flood. After the door of the ark closed, there was no more mercy available. The lost were lost and the saved were saved. So, at the end of time, the door of mercy will close and all cases will be decided. Then there will be a waiting period (the tribulation) and finally destruction will come.

Jesus said that as it happened in Noah's day it will happen in connection with His coming. Revelation 22:10-12 refers to this same moment when probation closes. Folks, if you are not ready for the closing of the door, you will not be ready for the tribulation or for the visible coming of Jesus. You will be overtaken like the visit of a thief in the night.

The book of Revelation makes it clear that the church will be on earth during the period of plagues and the tribulation. In Revelation 16:15, Jesus gives a warning which is really a pick up on Revelation 3:18. There is no doubt that Revelation 3:18 is a message to the church (Revelation 3:22). So, the warning of Revelation 16:15 is for Christians!

The Necessary Preparation

What must we do in the light of what we have studied? Jesus said that we must **pray** (Mark 13:33), we must be **ready** (Luke 1:17; Matthew 25:10; 24:44; Titus 3:1; Revelation 19:7), we must **watch** (Revelation 3:3; Matthew 26:38-41; Mark 13:34-37; Matthew 24:42), we must be careful with **the way we live** (Luke 21:34-36) and we must **keep busy** until He comes. Time goes by faster when we are busy. When I travel, I make sure that I have a lot of work with me so that if a flight is delayed, I will keep busy. Time flies by when we have something to do.

Do not forget the end of John 13 and 14:1-3. The main thing is that Jesus wants us with Him.

Let us get ready for the coming of Jesus. Let us purify ourselves even as He is pure (1 John 3:2-3). *"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"* (Matthew 5:8).



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #16 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE GREAT CONTROVERSY AND THE JUDGMENT

Backdrop to the Judgment: the ‘Great Controversy’

The great controversy between good and evil has its origin in heaven. Lucifer aspired to occupy God’s throne and claimed that he could rule the universe better than God (Isaiah 14:12-14). At the center of the controversy was the Law of God. Lucifer stated that the Law restricted the freedom of angels, that they needed no Law to govern them. His arguments must have been very powerful because he was successful in persuading a third of the angels to buy into his arguments (Revelation 12:3, 7-9).

Lucifer lied about God and smeared His character (cf. John 8:44; Ezekiel 28:16, 18; 22:9; Leviticus 19:16). God did not destroy Lucifer immediately because doubts would have remained in the minds of the heavenly hosts. It was necessary to give Lucifer the opportunity to reveal, in actual history, where his type of lawless government would lead. God had a cosmic mess on His hands.

The problem got even more complicated when Satan successfully led Adam and Eve into sin. To Eve, he sold the idea that God’s commands are arbitrary and restrictive of human progress (Genesis 3:1-6). After sin entered the universe, there were questions in the minds of God’s creatures that needed to be answered to the satisfaction of all created beings—heavenly and earthly! The

apostle Paul expressed it this way: *"We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men."* 1 Corinthians 4:9, NIV. When Adam fell into sin, Satan usurped the throne of the world that God had delegated to him (Luke 4:5-8; John 12:31; Job 1:6; 2:1).

During the ministry of Jesus, Satan was judged because Jesus bore the sins of the whole world, and the world was judged because Satan could no longer claim the world as his kingdom (John 16:11; 12:31). Satan was cast out as the ruler of this world (Revelation 12:10, 12).

When Satan instigated human beings to crucify Jesus, the heavenly realm saw Satan for who he really was. His mask was torn off and he lost the last bit of sympathy that the heavenly universe might have had for him. Satan was no longer the ruler of this world and no longer enjoyed the sympathy of the heavenly beings. The heavenly beings had a clear conception of the character of God. God had showed His love and justice by punishing sin and His mercy by providing the means to save the sinner. The cross revealed the justice and mercy of God.

God's judgment against Satan occurs in three stages:

- ✓ The investigative stage: The universe saw and evaluated his character during the ministry of Jesus.
- ✓ The sentencing stage: Jesus pronounced the sentence against him at the cross.
- ✓ The execution stage: Satan will be executed at the end of the 1000 years.

A big question remains to be answered: If the world and Satan were judged at the cross, then, why does the great controversy continue? The answer is that it still remains to be seen who will claim the benefits of what Jesus did in His life and death. So to speak, Jesus deposited enough merit in the heavenly bank to cancel the debt of sin of every person on planet earth. However, in order to be saved, individuals must come to Jesus, and through repentance, confession and faith in Jesus make the capital withdrawal personally. At the cross, Jesus removed the kingdom from the hands of Satan but only legally. It still remains for Jesus to come and take it back physically (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:22-24).

In the Old Testament sanctuary service, the sinner brought the sacrificial animal, confessed his sin on it and then slew it. The priest then took the blood and sprinkled it on the veil in the Holy Place. In this way, the sinner was forgiven and the sin was transferred into the sanctuary. Thus, the sanctuary was defiled by the record of sin and needed to be cleansed. At some point, it was necessary for the sanctuary to be cleansed and this happened in the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement at the end of the year (Hebrews 9:23; Daniel 8:14).

You see, not all who claimed the benefits of Christ's life and sacrifice were sincere. How do we know if a person is truly sorry for sin and not its consequences? The change in the conduct reveals whether repentance is genuine or not. For this reason, salvation is by grace through faith, but the judgment is according to our works. In other words, we are saved by **grace through faith** (Ephesians 2:8-10), but we will be judged by works because works reveal whether faith is genuine (Revelation 22:12; Matthew 16:27; Matthew 12:36, 37; Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14; James 1:25; the **parables of Jesus** in Matthew 24, 25). Faith is not something abstract but very concrete. James compared faith to the spirit and works as the body. There is no such thing as a bodiless spirit or a spiritless body! All the heroes of Hebrews 11 not only believed in their brains but actually acted on their faith.

It is important to underline that only the names of those who have claimed Jesus as their Savior come into review in the pre-advent investigative judgment (1 Peter 4:17; 1 Timothy 3:15). When the apostle wrote that *"we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10), he was referring to believers in the church of Corinth. The cases of those who rejected Jesus will come into view during and after the millennium (Revelation 20:11-13).

There is no special urgency to judge the cases of the lost before the second coming because Jesus is not going to take them to heaven when He comes. However, it is necessary to examine the lives of those who claimed to receive Jesus because Jesus is going to take the faithful to heaven when He comes. If Jesus is going to take them to heaven when He comes, their judgment must have

taken place before. There is **no urgency** to judge the cases of the wicked before the second coming because they will remain dead on earth, to be judged during and after the millennium.

Christians generally believe that persons are judged when they die (they go to heaven or hell) or at the second coming (The Creed: “He will come to judge the living and the dead”). However, neither is true. The apostle Paul placed the judgment in the future:

*“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,³¹ because He has **appointed a day** on which He **will judge** the world in righteousness **by the Man** Whom He has ordained. He has given **assurance of this** to all by raising Him from the dead.” Acts 17:30, 31*

Clearly, Paul placed the judgment in the future and taught that Jesus will be the Judge. Jesus Himself said as much:

*“For the **Father judges no one**, but has committed **all judgment to the Son**,²³ that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who **sent Him**.²⁴ “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who **hears My word** and **believes in Him** who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment [**condemnation**], but **has passed** from death into life.²⁵ Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.²⁶ For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,²⁷ and **has given Him** authority to **execute judgment** also, because He is the Son of Man.” John 5:22-27*

In the biblical times there was no defense attorney as such; there was a plaintiff, a defendant, and the witnesses. The judge served both as judge and defense attorney. Jesus is the defense attorney (cf. 1 John 2:1). Only One who is fully God and fully man can serve as judge for two reasons:

- ✓ The judge must be fully God because He must know every intricate detail of the lives of the ones He is judging. He must be able to read emotions,

feelings, motives, and thoughts of the heart. He must be omniscient (cf. Hebrews 4:12, 13).

- ✓ But the judge must also be fully man in order to sympathize with those He is judging. Defendants must have the assurance that the judge understands them because, so to speak, he has walked in their shoes. He also must be man so that there can be **no excuse** in the judgment. No sinner will be able to object that the judge does not know how enticing and powerful temptations are.

Does God Really Need a Judgment?

Of course, the question is, why does an omniscient God, who knows the end from the beginning, need a judgment? Why would God even bother to investigate records or, for that matter, even keep them? The fact is that the judgment is not to inform God. It is for the benefit of the beings of the universe who are not omniscient. It is critical that beings who are not omniscient see clearly that God has been loving and just in His dealings with every single person in His creation. In a certain sense, the cross not only reconciled human beings with God but reconciled the heavenly universe with God as well (cf. Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:19-20).

The parables of Jesus clearly taught that there are genuine and counterfeit believers in the church:

- There is **wheat** and there are **tares** in the church.
- The casting of the **gospel net** gathers both good and bad **fish** into the church.
- The church has both wise and foolish **virgins**.
- The **wedding hall** gathers guests who have the wedding garment and others who do not.
- Among those who claim to follow the Lord are those who say “**Lord, Lord**” but do not do His will.
- Even among the **clergy**, there are those who disguise themselves as **ministers of righteousness**.

- There are people who have a **form of godliness** without the power.

The Bible does not teach “once forgiven always forgiven,” or “once saved always saved” (Ezekiel 3:20). According to **Ezekiel 33** and the story of the **two debtors**, if repentance is not genuine, it is possible that the judgment will revoke forgiveness.

Why Three Stages to the Judgment?

When the Sanhedrin was considering condemning Jesus without due process, Nicodemus stepped in and argued that a person could not be condemned unless he could speak for himself: *“Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?”* John 7:51. Nicodemus was saying that a person could not be condemned unless he could speak for himself. Would we expect anything less from God?

God’s method of judgment consists of **three stages**:

- ✓ Investigation
- ✓ Sentencing
- ✓ Execution of the sentence

The key to understanding the process of the judgment is in John 5:28-29. According to Jesus, there will be two resurrections, one of the just and the other of the wicked (cf. Luke 14:14). We know that the righteous will resurrect at the second coming in what the Bible refers to as the first resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; Revelation 20:4-6). Both the righteous dead and the righteous living will be rewarded at the second coming (Matthew 16:27; Luke 14:14; Revelation 22:12; Luke 20:35). If Jesus brings His reward, then the reward must have been determined in a heavenly judgment before His coming.

However, another question surfaces. How could the righteous have appeared before Christ’s judgment seat in heaven if they lived on earth? As stated before, the Bible makes it clear that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to render an account of our lives (2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 17:30-31). The question is, how do we stand there? The answer is that God keeps a precise

transcript in heaven of the lives we lived on earth. In other words, we are personally on earth, but in heaven we are in a book. In the heavenly judgment, those who claimed Jesus as Savior will appear by the record of their lives. Jesus taught that the names of the righteous are written in heaven and our citizenship is there (Luke 10:18; Philippians 3:20-21; Ephesians 2:6). When our name comes up in the judgment, Jesus examines the record of our lives and confesses our name before His Father and the holy angels (Matthew 10:32; Luke 12:8-9; Revelation 3:5). This is the scene depicted in Daniel 7:9-10 [notice the links with John 5:22, 27] and Revelation 14:6-7.

In this judgment, Jesus reveals who truly trusted in Him and is worthy to be taken to heaven. The investigation must take place before Jesus comes because God must reveal to the heavenly universe who He has a right to bring home. This process of investigation is described vividly in Daniel 7 and the kingdom parables of Jesus. Let's turn first to the judgment scene in Daniel 7.

*"I watched till thrones were put in place, and the **Ancient of Days** [God the Father] was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; ¹⁰ A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him [the angels]. The **court was seated**, and the **books were opened**.... ¹³ I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like **the Son of Man**, coming with the clouds of heaven! [not to the earth but to the Ancient of Days] He came **to the Ancient of Days**, and they [the angels] brought Him near before Him. ¹⁴ Then **to Him was given** [by the Father] dominion and glory and **a kingdom** that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14*

Jesus receiving the kingdom from the Father is another way of describing the wedding between Jesus and the **totality** of the faithful members of His church. Certain parables of Jesus teach that He will receive the kingdom from the Father or marry His church **in heaven** to then return to the earth where the subjects

of His kingdom/His bride are waiting for Him to take them to heaven for the reception. This is clearly taught in the gospel of Luke.

*“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; ³⁶ and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will **[1] return from the wedding**, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. ³⁷ Blessed are those servants whom the master, **when he comes**, will find watching. **[2]** Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them **sit down to eat**, and will **come and serve them**.” Luke 12:35-37*

In the parable of the pounds, Jesus informed his followers that he was going to a **far country** to receive the kingdom **after which He would return** to this earth:

*“Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. ¹² Therefore, He said: ‘A certain nobleman went into a **far country** to receive for himself **a kingdom** and to **return**.’” Luke 19:11, 12*

The same is taught in the parable of the wedding garment in Matthew 22:1-14. There, the garments (character) of the believers are examined before the second coming. It is inconceivable that the garments of believers will be examined after the redeemed are in heaven and that some will be expelled from the wedding chamber at that time! We could also refer to the parable of the dragnet where the fish in the boat are separated on the shore.

Most Christians **reject** the idea of a heavenly judgment before the second coming because they believe that a person’s soul goes to heaven or to hell at the moment of death. If this were the true, all cases are decided at death and not in a heavenly judgment before the second coming. The **so-called “Apostles Creed”** is also wrong when it states that Jesus **will come** to judge the living and the dead. He does not come to judge; He comes to give out rewards based on the judgment (Revelation 22:12).

The “sons of the kingdom” are those who are thrown into outer darkness, so they must have claimed to be members of the kingdom. There are true children

of the kingdom and counterfeits, so a work of separation must take place (Matthew 13:38, 47; 21:31; Matthew 24:51; 25:30).

Jesus referred to those who will be expelled from the kingdom as hypocrites (Matthew 24:41). A hypocrite is a role player, an actor, a pretender, a counterfeit. Matthew 23:23-28 describes the Scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites because they claimed to be pious on the outside but had rotten hearts.

The angels will gather out the tares from Christ's kingdom. That said, they must have claimed to be members of the kingdom. If the angels gather them out, they must have been in (Matthew 13:41)! According to Jesus, their places will be taken by those who come from the east and west and north and south who are true members of the kingdom (Matthew 8:11, 12; Luke 13:28, 29).

It bears noting that no sinful human being is worthy of salvation, only Jesus is worthy (Revelation 5:2, 4, 9, 12; Luke 15:21). However, if we are in Christ and are clothed with the robe of His righteousness, He will serve as our High Priest and Advocate (1 John 2:1; Hebrews 8: 1, 2) and also as our Judge (John 5:22, 27).

If we have retained Jesus as our Attorney, He will stand in our place. We will be accepted by virtue of the righteousness of the Beloved. In the judgment, Jesus will reveal before the universe that He has the legal right to take His bride home.

When the door of mercy closes, Jesus will remove his priestly garments and clothe Himself with His garments as King of kings (Revelation 19:11-21). When Jesus begins to reign, the great tribulation will begin (Matthew 24:21, 22) and at the end of it He will return to the earth and deliver His people—everyone whose name is in the Book of Life (Daniel 12:1). At this time, He will bring His reward with Him and take His faithful to heaven (Revelation 22:12; Matthew 16:27; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55).

Jesus also spoke of the second resurrection as the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29). Jesus did not describe that a thousand years will pass between both resurrections, but the Revelation of Jesus Christ does. The resurrection of

damnation occurs after the millennium. During the millennium, Christ—in union with His people—will examine the records of the wicked in heaven (1 Corinthians 6:1-3; Revelation 20:11, 12) to reveal to the universe that they rejected salvation by their own choice. Then the sentence of death will be pronounced against them in the heavenly court.

After the millennium, the wicked will resurrect and they will see the same records that Jesus and the saints examined (Revelation 20:13). The wicked will have their day in court. At the conclusion of the judgment, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that God was loving and just in his dealings (Isaiah 43:23; Philippians 2:9-11). The wicked will then be punished with second death (Revelation 20:14, 15). This is what Jesus referred to in John 12:48.

The important point here is that even the wicked will have the opportunity to see the record of their lives (Revelation 20:11-15). Some who claimed to be followers of Jesus will complain and appeal their sentence (Matthew 7:21-23; Matthew 25:44) but it will be in vain; the records will condemn them. As they see the record of their lives, it will be like looking in a mirror. Mirrors do not lie. They will see themselves as they were in life and they will have no excuses. The entire universe, both loyal and disloyal will bow before the majesty of the Father and the Son and confess that everything God did was righteous and true (see Philippians 2:6-11; Isaiah 45:22-25). Then, Jesus will take over the kingdom, return it to the saints (Matthew 5:8; Daniel 7:14, 22, 26-27) and Christ with His people will enjoy eternity with *“no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying and no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”* Revelation 21:4.



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #17 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE END OF EVIL

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

How does the life of those who rejected Christ finally end? There are three main possibilities:

- ✓ Reincarnation
- ✓ Eternal soul survival in hell
- ✓ Annihilation

Christians reject the first possibility, so we will focus on the last two. Those who believe in the eternal existence of the soul in the fires of hell, generally use a parable of Jesus to support their view: the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Therefore, we must carefully examine this story to determine whether it can be taken as historical fact.

We know that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is a parable because Luke used a distinctive opening formula for the parables of Jesus. The phrase, “**there was a certain...**” was the way Christ introduced His parables in the gospel of Luke (see Luke 15:11; 7:41; 19:2; 20:9).

*“He also said to His disciples: ‘**There was a certain** rich man who had **a steward**, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods.’” Luke 16:1*

The Pharisees had a similar story to this one, and Jesus used it but gave it a surprising twist to teach a deep spiritual truth.

Certain Bible expositors claim that the story of the rich man and Lazarus **cannot be a parable** because Jesus used the **proper name “Lazarus”** and Jesus never used proper names in His parables—the actors in the parables are always **anonymous**. Later in our study, we will see that Jesus purposely used the proper name “Lazarus” in this particular parable for a **very good reason**.

Addressed to the Pharisees

It is important to remember that Jesus addressed this parable to the **Pharisees** as we can see from the preceding context:

*“Now the **Pharisees**, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they **derided Him**.” Luke 16:14*

Scholars agree that Luke wrote his gospel for a **Greek audience**. This fact makes it easier to understand **why** Luke is the only gospel writer that included this parable in his book. When Jesus originally told the parable, the Pharisees were His target audience. However, it would also have resonated with a Greek audience. If Jesus had been addressing the **Sadducees**, however, He would never have used this parable for they did not believe in the afterlife.

Flavius Josephus (who was a **Pharisee** himself, born in the year 37 AD) described the anthropology of the Pharisees:

*“They [**the Pharisees**] say that **all souls are incorruptible** but that the souls of good men only are removed into other bodies—but that the **souls** of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. But the Sadducees . . . **take away** the belief of the **immortal duration of the soul**, and the punishments and rewards in **Hades**.”*
Flavius Josephus, Wars of the Jews, II, p. 14

The Bible confirms the words of Josephus regarding the beliefs of the Pharisees and Sadducees on death and the afterlife:

*“For the **Sadducees** say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the **Pharisees** confess both.” Acts 23:8*

Jesus frequently used parables of His day and gave them an unexpected twist. In fact, many times He turned the stories of the rabbis upside down! Notice the following rabbinical parable which already existed in Christ's day and which Jesus echoed, giving it a surprising twist (cf. Matthew 20:1-16):

“They parable a parable. Unto what is the matter like: It is like a king who hired many laborers. And along with them was one laborer who had worked for him many days. All the laborers went to receive their pay for the day, and this one special laborer went also. He said to this one special laborer: I will have regard for you. The others, who have worked for me only a little, to them I will give small pay. But you will receive a large recompense.

“Even so both the Israelites and peoples of the world sought their pay from God. And God said to the Israelites: My children, I will have regard for you. The peoples of the world have accomplished very little for me, and I will give them but a small reward. But you will receive a large recompense. Therefore, it says: “And I will have regard for you.” Robert M. Johnston, Ministry, “Twisting their Tales”, October, 1985.

This parable shows a striking similarity to one Jesus told in Matthew 20:1-16. However, Jesus turned the parable upside down because at the end of the day, everyone was paid the same amount! The Jews whom God called first and the Gentiles whom He called last would be rewarded, not according to their works, but according to God's grace.

Flavius Josephus, the Pharisee, wrote a work called “***Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades***”. Some scholars these days attribute the work to the church father Hippolytus, but the fact that Jesus told a very similar parable indicates that the story existed long before the church father.

In his work, Josephus explained that Hades was a **subterranean region** that has **two compartments**. One compartment or region contained a lake of unquenchable **everlasting fire** and the other the '**Bosom of Abraham**'.

According to this view, when the wicked and the righteous died, they were taken down a descent where there was a gate guarded by an archangel accompanied by a host of angels. At the gate, the angels took the wicked to the compartment on the **left side** where there was a lake of unquenchable fire. There they were to suffer **everlasting punishment**.

On the other hand, the angels guided the righteous to the compartment on the **right side** where the **Bosom of Abraham** was located. There was a **great gulf between** the two regions that made it impossible for the righteous to pass to the region of the wicked or the wicked to the region of the righteous. Clearly, Jesus was referring to the beliefs of the Pharisees.

Jesus elsewhere made it clear that He did not believe in the theology of His parable. According to Jesus, both the righteous and the wicked **remain in the tomb** until the resurrection. If the righteous go to heaven and the wicked go to hell at death, **why** would Jesus call them forth **from the grave** when He comes?

*"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are **in the graves** will hear His voice ²⁹ and **come forth**—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."* John 5:28, 29

According to the Scriptures, the wicked will suffer the **punishment of fire** at the **end of the age** and never at the **moment of death**. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is the **lone exception** because Jesus was using the beliefs of the Pharisees to make a point.

Jesus did not contradict His own testimony in other parables or the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. Notice the following examples.

*"As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the **end of this world**. ⁴¹ The Son of man shall **send forth his angels**, and they shall gather [**the angels gather the wicked, not at death, but at the end of the***

world] out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity⁴² and shall **cast them into a furnace of fire**: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ **Then [not at death]** shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Matthew 13:40-43

According to **Josephus**, the angels gather the righteous and wicked when they die. However, Jesus said it happens at the **end of the age**. At the end of the age, there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth, not the moment of death.

“When the Son of Man **comes in His glory**, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will **separate them** one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. ³³ And He will set the sheep on His **right** hand, but the goats on the **left**. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.... ⁴¹ Then He will also say to those on the **left** hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the **everlasting fire** prepared for the **devil and his angels**'.... ⁴⁶ And these will go away into **everlasting punishment** [we will discuss this in our next lesson], but the righteous into **eternal life**.” Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46

Josephus contradicted the testimony of Jesus by saying that the angels take the righteous and the wicked to the right or to the left side when they die and not at the end of the age.

“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars **shall have** their part in the **lake which burns with fire and brimstone**, which is the **second death**.” Revelation 21:8

Clearly, God casts the wicked into the fire, not when they **die the first** (physical) **death** but when they suffer the **second death** after the millennium.

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away and there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, **standing before God**, and **books were opened**. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life and the **dead were judged** according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea

*gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them and **they were judged**, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And **anyone not found written** in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”*
Revelation 20:11-15

These verses describe the millennial and post-millennial judgments of the wicked. God judges them and then casts them into the lake of fire. If He cast them into the fire at death, then He punished them without due process. Everyone deserves his or her day in court. God does not punish any of the wicked without first judging them and He will judge them after the millennium, not at death.

There are other texts as well that describe the destruction of the wicked in the lake of fire at the end of the age: Mark 9:43-48; Revelation 20:7-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 2:8; 2 Peter 3:1-13.

Do the angels **literally carry** the righteous to **Abraham's Bosom** when a person dies? Matthew 24:31 (as well as 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:1; John 14:1-3) tells us that the angels will gather God's elect at the second coming—not at death—to take them to heaven:

*“And He will send **His angels** with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will **gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”* Matthew 24:31

There is another insurmountable problem with the Protestant view of this parable. In the Bible, God strictly forbids the living from attempting to communicate with the dead. However, in the parable, Abraham and the dead rich man are conversing. The rich man even pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers from the dead!

The Mosaic legislation strictly forbade the attempt to communicate with the dead:

*"A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be **put to death**; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them."*
Leviticus 20:27

To consult the spirits of the dead means not to consult God:

*"And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people **seek their God**? Should they seek **the dead on behalf of the living**? ²⁰ To the **law** and to the **testimony**! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is **no light in them**."* Isaiah 8:19, 20

So why does the rich man speak with Abraham, and Abraham with the rich man, while both were dead? Why does the rich man ask Abraham to send Lazarus from the dead to speak to his five brothers?

The Dead are in the Grave

The Bible clearly teaches that the dead are in their graves and they know nothing:

*"For the living know that they will die; but the **dead know nothing**, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten."* Ecclesiastes 9:5

The rich man **died** and was **buried**. If he were dead and knew nothing, how could he carry on a conversation with Abraham?

*"So it was that the beggar **died**, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man **also died** and was **buried**."* Luke 16:22

Body Parts

When someone dies, they go to the grave with all their body parts and then return to dust.

*"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for **dust** you are, and to **dust** you shall **return**."* Genesis 3:19

I have done **dozens of funerals** and can vouch for this fact! That being the case, what was the rich man doing in hell with all his body parts? Furthermore, what was Lazarus doing in the bosom of Abraham with all his body parts?

*“And being in torments in **Hades**, he lifted up his **eyes** and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.” Luke 16:23*

*“Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his **finger** in water and cool my **tongue**; for I am tormented in this flame.’” Luke 16:24*

The Bible refers to body parts in hell only at the **end of the age**:

*“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your **whole body** to be cast into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your **whole body** to be cast into hell.” Matthew 5:29, 30*

The fact is that if both the rich man and Lazarus had body parts after death. If the body is not cast into the fire until the end of the age, then this story **must be describing what will happen at the end of the age** and not something that happened immediately after death.

A Startling Admission

The late **Robert Morey**, a close associate of Walter Martin and a staunch believer and defender of the immortality of the soul, made a remarkable admission:

“Everyone understood that these parables and dialogues did not literally take place. It was understood that the rabbis used imaginative stories and dialogues as a teaching method. It was understood by all that these dialogues never took place... He [Jesus] was merely using the dialogue method to get across the concept that there is no escape from torment, no second chance, and we must believe the Scriptures in this life unto salvation.” Robert Morey, Death and the Afterlife, p. 85.

What a candid admission. The only story in the Bible that appears to teach conscious torment in the flames of hell at the very moment of death and it never actually took place!

The Rich Man

In the parable, both the rich man and Lazarus symbolize groups of people. The rich man represents the Jewish nation and Lazarus represents the Gentiles.

The rich man represents the Jewish nation—more specifically, the Pharisees. The bosom represents closeness and intimacy (see John 13:23; Deuteronomy 13:6). The Pharisees, more than any other Jewish sect, claimed a particular closeness to Abraham as their father. The intimacy of Jesus with His Father is described as Jesus being in the bosom of the Father:

“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” John 1:18

The rich man, representing the Pharisees, claimed an intimate closeness to Abraham. In fact, all his hopes were centered on Abraham and not in God.

If this story is taken literally, then the Bosom of Abraham must be taken literally. How big must that bosom be for all the righteous to fit in it. Of course, we know that this bosom is figurative. This being the case, why are the other elements not also figurative? Why pick and choose? Actually, the Bosom of Abraham is a figurative expression which the Jews used to express their particular closeness to Abraham (for the meaning of the bosom, see, Isaiah 40:11; John 1:18; John 13:23; Deuteronomy 13:6; 28:54, 56). Later we will see that those who professed to be close to Abraham were really not close to him at all!

It is clear that Jesus is using satire and irony when the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water that he might cool his tongue in the raging fires of hell (verse 24). Come on, be real! What good would a little water on the tip of a finger do in the raging fires of hell?

These brothers **had Moses and the prophets**, so they must have been Jews (John 5:45-46). Contrary to the explicit legislation in the writings of Moses, the rich man representing the Pharisees, believed in the immortality of the soul. The details of the parable indicate that the rich man represents the Jewish nation generally and the Pharisees specifically:

*"Then he cried and said, '**Father Abraham**, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'* ²⁵ But Abraham said, '**Son**, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented....' ²⁷ Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, **father**, that you would send him to **my father's house**, ²⁸ for I have five brothers that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ Abraham said to him, 'They have **Moses and the prophets**; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, **father Abraham**; but if one goes to them **from the dead**, they will repent.'" Luke 16:24, 25, 27, 30

A group of Jews told that Jesus that Abraham was their father:

*"They answered and said to Him, '**Abraham is our father**.'"* John 8:39

Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection

The rich man believed in the immortality of the soul because he begged Abraham to send Lazarus **from the dead** to speak to his five brothers:

*"And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them **from the dead**, they will repent.'" Luke 16:30*

However, **Abraham** believed in the **resurrection of the dead**:

*"And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them **from the dead**, they will repent.' But he **[Abraham]** said to him **[to the rich man]**, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one **rise from the dead**.'" Luke 16:31*

The expression “rise from the dead” refers to the resurrection. The rich man wanted Lazarus to go to Abraham **from the dead**, but Abraham told him that Lazarus could only go if he **rose** from the dead. This word *rise* is commonly used by Luke to refer to the resurrection of Jesus (see, Luke 18:33; 24:7, 46; Acts 26:23). It is also used by Jesus Himself in John 11:24, 25 to describe His resurrection. In all these verses, the verb is translated “rise again”. Thus, Jesus directs the minds of His hearers from the immortality of the soul to the resurrection of the dead!

*“Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to **rise from the dead** the third day.’” Luke 24:46*

Lazarus Represents the Gentiles

The Jews considered the Gentiles “stones” (Matthew 3:9-10), “swine” (Matthew 7:6), and “dogs” (Matthew 15:26). Several terms in the parable which are used to describe Lazarus, are used also to describe a Gentile woman who came to Jesus for healing:

*“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰ But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹ desiring to be fed with the **crumbs** that fell from the **rich man's table**. Moreover, the **dogs** came and licked his sores.” Luke 16:19-21*

On a certain occasion, a Canaanite woman begged Jesus to heal her daughter who was gravely ill. The key words of the parable appear in the woman’s response to Jesus:

*“But He answered and said, ‘It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little **dogs**.’ ²⁷ And she said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the little **dogs** eat the **crumbs** which fall from their **masters' table**.’” Matthew 15:26, 27*

Adding to the Biblical Text

We must beware of adding our own words to the parable. Notice that Jesus did not say: “and immediately after he died” (verse 23). Neither does He say: “his body was buried” (verse 23), “his soul being in everlasting torments” (verse 23), “send the soul of Lazarus” (verse 24), “being in the everlasting torments of hades” (verse 23), “in this eternal flame” (verse 24), “his soul is comforted” (verse 25). In fact, not once is the word *soul* or the words *everlasting* or *immortal* used. These words are simply assumed by those who believe in the immortality of the soul.

The Purpose of the Parable

We are now ready to explain why Jesus used a proper name in just this one parable. Jesus said that the rich man’s brothers would not be persuaded even if one rose from the dead (verse 31). The question is, persuaded of what? A short while later Jesus resurrected a man named Lazarus from the dead. This was the greatest miracle of Jesus and the one which proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that He was the Messiah sent of God and God in the flesh! Yet, the Jewish leaders were not persuaded of this great reality. They did not ever believe because they did not believe Moses and the prophets:

“But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’” Luke 16:31

Less than a month later, Jesus resurrected a man named Lazarus:

“Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth!’”⁴⁴ And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Loose him, and let him go.’” John 11:43, 44

How did the Pharisees react when they heard that a man named Lazarus resurrected from the dead? Did they believe in Jesus? The answer is that they refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and even pronounced a death decree against Him. It is of particular significance that the Pharisees were the

ones who particularly refused to believe in Jesus and sought to kill Him (see, John 11:46, 47; 12:9-11, 19):

*“But some of them went away to the **Pharisees** and told them the things Jesus did.⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the **Pharisees** gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.⁴⁸ If we let Him alone like this, everyone will **believe in Him**, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.’⁴⁹ And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all,⁵⁰ nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that **one man should die** for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.’” John 11:46-50*

The Pharisees also plotted to kill Lazarus:

*“Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.¹⁰ But the chief priests plotted to **put Lazarus to death also**,¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews went away and **believed in Jesus**.” John 12:9-11*

*“The **Pharisees** therefore said among themselves: ‘You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the **world has gone after Him!**’” John 12:19*

In the woes on the scribes and **Pharisees**, Jesus asked how the scribes and Pharisees would ever escape the condemnation of **hell**:

*“**Serpents**, brood of **vipers!** How can you escape the condemnation of **hell?**” Matthew 23:33*

The wailing and gnashing of teeth was fulfilled literally when Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 70 AD. Jerusalem was burned (Matthew 22:7). As the populace wailed and gnashed their teeth. This affliction is described in Luke 19:41-44. The tree that John the Baptist spoke of was cut down and cast into the fire (Matthew 3:10). The kingdom was taken from the Jews (Matthew 21:43) and given to a nation which produced the fruits thereof (Acts 13:46-47):

*“But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and **burned up their city**.” Matthew 22:7*

However, the parable is to have a greater fulfillment. Jesus predicted that at the **end of the age** the sons of the kingdom would be cast out into outer darkness where there will be **wailing** and **gnashing of teeth**:

*“And I say to you that many **will** come from east and west, and sit down with **Abraham**, Isaac, and Jacob in the **kingdom of heaven**.¹² However, the **sons of the kingdom** will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**.” Matthew 8:11, 12*

*“There **will** be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see **Abraham** and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets **in the kingdom of God**, and yourselves **thrust out**.” Luke 13:28*

The central lesson of this parable is clear. The Jews claimed to be children of Abraham. They were full of the riches of God's blessings and they looked upon the Gentiles as outcasts from the grace of God. Jesus explained that the roles would be reversed. God would adopt the Gentiles as His chosen people and He would reject the Jewish nation. This theme is fully developed in John 8:37-44. There we are told that Abraham looked forward to Christ's day and rejoiced (8:56). That is to say, if Abraham had been alive in Christ's day he would have gladly received Him. But the Jews, who claimed to be children of Abraham wanted to kill Jesus. How could they claim to have a closeness to Abraham and yet want to do what Abraham would never have thought of doing? By despising Jesus, they showed that they were not really the children of Abraham but rather the children of the devil. Jesus therefore called them children of hell (Matthew 23:33). They were to end up in the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels while the Gentiles would end up eating at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matthew 8:11-12; Luke 13:28).

Incidentally, as we've already seen, the Jewish nation was burned (Matthew 22:7). When their city was burned with fire, they wailed and gnashed their teeth. This affliction is described in Luke 19:41-44. The tree that John the Baptist spoke of was cut down and cast into the fire (Matthew 3: 10). The kingdom was taken from the Jews (Matthew 21:43) and given to a nation which produced the fruits thereof (Acts 13:46-47).

The End of Evil

If the wicked are not cast into the fire when they die, then when will it happen? The Bible makes it as clear as day that the wicked will be cast into hell after the thousand years of Revelation 20. Let's take a closer look at this.

After the thousand years, the wicked will be resurrected (Revelation 20:6) and God will open the books and show them the record of their lives (Revelation 20: 11-13) and they will have the opportunity to understand the justice of their sentence. Then, for the first time in history, heaven and earth, the living and the dead, will bow before the sovereignty of Jesus and every tongue will confess Him (Philippians 2:5-11; Isaiah 45:23-25; Revelation 5: 11-14). Then, and only then, can God destroy sin and sinners and cleanse the universe—and He will do it with fire. Let's see how this will happen.

In Luke 17:28-30 Jesus said that the fate of the wicked will be like that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 13:10 informs us that the Jordan Valley used to be like the Garden of Eden. However, when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, fire and brimstone fell from heaven upon the cities (Genesis 19:24) and the fire was so powerful that it dug a hole 1,500 feet deep in the valley of the Dead Sea!

The result was smoke which ascended to heaven like a furnace (Genesis 19:28). Jude 7 tells us that the fire which destroyed the cities was “eternal fire” and yet Peter 2: 6 informs us that the cities were reduced to ashes. Obviously the cities are no longer burning if they were reduced to ashes. How, then, are we to understand the meaning of the expression “eternal fire”? The fire is eternal in its results or consequences but not in its process. Matthew 25:41 tells us that the wicked will be destroyed with eternal fire. But it is eternal in the results it produces not in the process of destruction. Even when a person goes to the electric chair, the punishment is perpetual because the person is deprived of life once and for all!

Revelation 20:7-9 describes this fire; it devours the wicked. Malachi 4:1-3 underlines the fact that both root (Satan) and branch (the wicked) will be consumed. Even Ezekiel 28:18-19 tells us that Satan will be reduced to ashes and that he will never be anymore! 2 Peter 3:7, 10-13 says that the world will

be dissolved by fervent heat. The world will be cleansed from sin and sinners and then God will make a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

The fire in Revelation 20:7-9 falls upon the earth where the wicked have surrounded the city so hell will be on earth, not some place under the earth. If hell were to burn forever, then God could not make a new heaven and a new earth. The fact is that no trace of sin will remain. If sinners lived on forever in a fiery hell in some corner of the universe, the problem of sin would never really have been resolved. The Bible says that only the righteous will be able to live amidst the everlasting flames. God is a consuming fire. It would be impossible for the wicked to live in His presence. Are you preparing a fire-proof character which will be able to live in the presence of God? Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8; Isaiah 33:12-16).



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #18 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT LIVING A LIFE OF SERVICE

The Bible describes two great mysteries: the mystery of godliness and the mystery of iniquity. The mystery of iniquity is characterized by self-love, greed, selfishness, self-centeredness, covetousness and self-service. On the other hand, the mystery of godliness is characterized by love for others, altruism, other-centeredness, self-sacrifice, and service to others. Lucifer was the first being in the universe who manifested the spirit of the mystery of iniquity (Isaiah 14:12-14). He committed the four sins of pride. He was filled with self-satisfaction because of his beauty, wisdom, power and position (see Ezekiel 28:12-17).

According to 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, the mystery of iniquity is characterized by a desire to **ascend** above the position which God has allotted us, to lord it over others. Those who live according to the principle of the mystery of iniquity reflect the character of Satan *“who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”* 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

However, the end result of this desire and attempt to **ascend** is a **descent** into the pit of destruction (Ezekiel 28:17-19; Isaiah 14:15). The mystery of iniquity leads to death. As Jesus expressed it on multiple occasions, “He who exalts himself will be humbled”!

On the other hand, the mystery of godliness characterizes the Godhead. The Father gives His Son, the Son gives the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit commands the angels and they minister to the needs of the human race. The mystery of godliness finds its delight in **descending** to serve others.

There are several New Testament texts which teach giving as the fundamental law of the abundant life.

*“And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to **be served**, but to **serve**, and to **give** His life a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:27, 28*

*“For God so **loved** the world that He **gave** His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16*

The Apostle Paul encourages us to remember the words of Jesus, *“It is more blessed **to give** than to receive.” Acts 20:35*

Jesus admonished us, *“Freely you have received, **freely give**.” Matthew 10:8.*

On another occasion Jesus taught that the measure we use to give is the same measure that we will receive:

*“**Give**, and it **shall be given** to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the **same measure** that you use, it will be measured back to you.” Luke 6:38*

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 the apostle Paul wrote:

*“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one **give** as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a **cheerful giver**.”*

As we saw in the lesson on the Holy Spirit, Jesus expressed the same basic principle (John 14:13-14; 7:37-39). We receive the Holy Spirit so that we can then impart it to others. We drink the water to become fountains of water to others. We receive in order to give. When we empty a glass, the glass then has

the capacity to receive. The Holy Spirit flows through us to others. Thus we are channels of God's blessings. The receiver becomes a giver.

There are many illustrations of this principle in nature. The sun **consumes itself** to **give** us light—to the tune of 1.5 million tons a second! The moon **receives** the light of the sun and **imparts** it to the earth. The cycle of water is a perfect illustration of the law of service in nature. The clouds **give** their snow to the mountains. In the spring, the snow melts and the mountains **give** their water to the brooks, the brooks to the streams, the streams to the rivers and the rivers to the ocean. The ocean then gives its water back to the clouds and the cycle begins all over again. If at any point the process is interrupted, life would cease to exist. The law of giving perpetuates life. By giving, nature safeguards its own existence.

Trees are another illustration of the law of service. The trees beautify the landscape. The sun beats down on trees to **give** us shade. The tree **gives** fruit so that we can eat it. Trees remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and reduce the greenhouse gas effect, all while giving us clean air to breathe. Trees give us wood so that we can build houses. Trees provide a place in their branches for birds to build nests. Trees exist to give!

Honey bees also provide a vivid illustration of this law of service. They work incessantly so that we can enjoy the honey they produce. They help the plants to pollenate so that they can produce fruit. Their work is vital for agriculture. Without bees, what would we eat?

In that classic work on the life of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*, the writer described the great principle which is the law of life and happiness:

“All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.” p. 21

We could provide countless illustrations of this principle but one more will suffice. In Israel there are two seas. One is the Sea of Galilee and the other is the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by lush vegetation. Birds make glad the air with their songs. Fish flourish in its waters. Why is the Sea of Galilee teeming with life? Because it **receives** its water from the Jordan River in the north and then gives its water in the south. It **receives** to **give**. The water is constantly flowing and so life is also continuously flowing. But south of the Sea of Galilee is the Dead Sea. This body of water receives but **does not give**. The result is an area which is arid, dry and lifeless. No lush greenery adorns its banks. No fish flourish in its waters, no birds fill the air with their songs. The sea is well named—DEAD!

The area of life where people find it most difficult to apply the law of service and selflessness is money. The apostle Paul, perceptively stated:

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” 1 Timothy 6:6-10

It is so difficult for us to realize that God gives us all the necessary resources to make money (Deuteronomy 8:18). He gives us life, time, health, talents, and intelligence with which we make money. Sadly, most people hoard the money and use it for selfish purposes. Jesus had more to say about money than any other subject because He knew that money has the potential to be a great blessing or an incredible curse!

The masses today are living out the parable of Jesus about the man who built ever larger barns to house **his** grain. Like the rich man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, this man lived sumptuously while the needy suffered want:

*“And He said to them, ‘Take heed and **beware of covetousness**, for one’s life does not consist **in the abundance** of the things he possesses.’”¹⁶ Then He spoke a*

parable to them, saying: The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' ¹⁸ So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then who's will those things be which you have provided?' ²¹ "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Luke 12:15-21

Today the barn is the stock market, the bank, or the mattress. The future plans of this man were dashed when he lost his soul. Jesus rightly said:

"For whoever saves his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:25-26

Jesus encouraged us to lay up treasures in heaven with the following words:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where the moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:19-21

How do we lay up treasures in heaven? How can we send our money up there if we live on earth? I think you know the answer. We can invest in His cause here on earth which will pay dividends in souls that will shine as the stars for eternity.

Jesus reaffirmed the law of the tithe in the New Testament. Jesus assailed the scribes and Pharisees for their external and ostentatious religion (Matthew 23:23-28). Everything they did had the purpose of exalting themselves and earning salvation. There is nothing wrong with proper external behavior, as long as it comes from the heart.

Jesus told the Pharisees:

*“Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These **[justice, mercy and faith]** you ought to have done, without leaving the others **[tithing the mint, dill and cumin]** undone.” Matthew 23:23*

During his ministry, Jesus did not give explicit commands to keep the Sabbath or to tithe. Does this mean that we are no longer required to keep the Sabbath or return the tithe? Of course not! The reason why Jesus did not give an explicit command, is all the Jews claimed to be keeping the Sabbath and to be tithing. However, they were doing it with the wrong spirit! Jesus attempted to restore the Sabbath and the tithe to their original meaning. The New Testament explicitly repeats the law of the tithe in other passages (see 1 Corinthians 9:1-14; Hebrews 7:7, 8).

The same can be said about Jesus' attitude toward offerings in Mark 12:41-44:

*“Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were **rich put in much**.⁴² Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.⁴³ So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow **has put in more** than all those who have given to the treasury;⁴⁴ for they all put in out of **their abundance**, but she out of her poverty put in **all that she had**, her **whole livelihood**.”*

Sacrifice is not measured by how much we give but by how much we have left after we have given. God considers the quality of the gift more important than the quantity. Proportionately, this widow gave more than all the rest of them because she gave all that she had. In Luke 4:25-26 Jesus spoke approvingly of another widow. As she was preparing her last meal, the widow gave a small portion first to God's prophet and she received far more than she gave. The oil and flour in her barrels did not cease until rain fell upon the earth once more:

*“But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a **great famine***

throughout all the land; ²⁶ but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.” Luke 4:25, 26

This is the same principle of giving and receiving is expressed in Malachi 3:10:

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.’”

When we are faithful in **giving** our tithes and offerings, we **receive** blessings so great that we have no room to receive them.

Jesus said it was extremely difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, not because it is sinful to be rich, but because the rich fall in love with their riches and neglect the needs of our fellow human beings who are less fortunate than them. Please study carefully and prayerfully Mark 10:17-31. The central lesson we are studying in this lesson is found repeatedly in this passage. Will you not plan to invest in the universal bank of heaven by being faithful to God with your time, talents, material possessions and physical strength? May God give each of us such a heart!

The relationship between the Father and the Son is a striking illustration of not aspiring to the highest position but being willing to descend to serve. Let’s follow the trajectory of Christ’s self-giving from creation to eternity future. Both the Father and the Son are equally God and yet the Father takes the initiative and the Son submits to the will and authority of the Father.

Jesus at Creation

Revelation 4:11 describes a hymn sung by the living creatures and the 24 elders in honor of the Father sitting on the heavenly throne:

*“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for **[because]** **You created** all things, and **by Your will** they exist and **were created.**”*
Revelation 4:11

The Son executed the Father's will in the creation of all living beings:

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was **with God**, and the **Word was God**.² He was in the beginning with God.³ All things were made **through** Him, and without Him **nothing was made** that was made." John 1:1-3*

*"Yet for us there is one God, the Father, **of whom** are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom** are all things, and **through whom** we live." 1 Corinthians 8:6*

*"He is the **image** of the invisible God, the **firstborn** over all creation.¹⁶ For **by Him** all things were created that are in **heaven** and that are **on earth, visible** and **invisible**, whether **thrones** or **dominions** or **principalities** or **powers**. **All** things were created **through** Him and **for** Him.¹⁷ And He is **before all things**, and in Him all things consist [**hold together**]." Colossians 1:15-17*

*"**God**, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,² has in these last days spoken to us by **His Son**, whom He has appointed heir of all things, **through whom** also **He [the Father]** **made** the worlds." Hebrews 1:1, 2*

The Father Sent Jesus

It was the Father's initiative to send Jesus to this world and Jesus consented:

*"For God so loved the world that **He gave His only-begotten Son**, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16*

The Father Prepared His Body

*"Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body **You have prepared for Me [for me to offer]**."⁶ In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me —**To do Your will**, O God.'" Hebrews 10:5-7*

Jesus Exalted the Glory of the Father During His Ministry

*"You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for **My Father is greater than I.**" John 14:28*

*"I can of **Myself do nothing.** As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but **the will of the Father** who sent Me." John 5:30; 6:38*

*"For I have come down from heaven, not to do **My own will**, but the **will of Him who sent Me.**"*

Jesus did the Father's Will in the Garden

*"He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, **if it is possible,** let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but **as You will.**'... ⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, **Your will be done.**'.... ⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the **third time**, saying the same words." Matthew 26:39, 42, 44*

Jesus Glorified the Father and the Father Glorified Him

"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵ And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." John 17:4, 5

The Father Resurrected Jesus

*"And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, **into Your hands** I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last." Luke 23:46*

*"But **God raised Him** from the dead." Acts 13:30*

*"... but He Whom **God raised** up saw no corruption." Acts 13:37*

“...because He [the Father] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” Acts 17:31

“Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise.” 1 Corinthians 15:15

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.¹⁸ No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power [authority] to lay it down, and I have power [authority] to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” John 10:17, 18

The Father Exalted Jesus to Heaven

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, [did not consider equality with God as something to cling to]⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:5-11

“Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” Acts 5:31

“And without controversy [by common consent, according to the agreement of all, without any room for dispute] great is the mystery of godliness” 1 Timothy 3:16

- ✓ **Came down**: God was manifested in the flesh (the incarnation)
- ✓ **Justified** in the Spirit (the resurrection)
- ✓ Seen by angels (the ascension)

- ✓ Preached among the **Gentiles** (the mission to the Gentiles)
- ✓ Believed on in the **world** (those who believed the message)
- ✓ Received **up in glory** (at the second coming)

Jesus Subject to the Father Now

*"But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the **head of Christ is God.**" 1 Corinthians 11:3*

The Father Appointed Jesus as Judge

*"...because **He [the Father]** has **appointed a day** on which **He will judge** the world in righteousness **by the Man** Whom **He has ordained.** **He has given** assurance of this to all by **raising Him** from the dead." Acts 17:31*

*"For as the Father has life in Himself, so **He has granted** the Son to have life in Himself, ²⁷ and **has given Him authority** to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man." John 5:26-27*

Jesus will Receive the Kingdom from His Father

*"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came **to the Ancient of Days,** and they brought Him near before Him. ¹⁴ Then **to Him was given [by the Father]** dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." Daniel 7:13, 14*

Jesus will Return in the Glory of His Father

*"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, **the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,** full of grace and truth." John 1:14*

*"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes **in the glory of His Father** with the holy angels." Mark 8:38*

*“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³ who being the **brightness of His glory** and the express **image of His person**, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Hebrews 1:1-3*

*“And now, O **Father, glorify Me** together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” John 17:5*

Jesus will be Eternally in Submission to the Father

*“The **last enemy** that will be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For ‘**He [the Father]** has put all things under **His [Jesus]’** feet.’ But when **He [the Father]** says ‘all things are put under **Him [under Jesus]**,’ it is evident that **He [the Father]** who put all things under **Him [Jesus]** is excepted. ²⁸ Now when all things are made subject to **Him [to Jesus]**, then the Son Himself will **also be subject to Him [to the Father]** who put all things under Him, that **God [the Father] may be all in all.**” 1 Corinthians 15:26-28*

The First and the Last

*“Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, ‘What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?’ ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves **who would be the greatest.** ³⁵ And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘If anyone desires to be **first**, he shall be **last** of all and **servant** of all.’” Mark 9:33-35*

Humbling and Exalting

*“So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: ⁸ ‘When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the **best place**, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; ⁹ and he who invited you and him come and say to you, “Give place*

to this man," and then you begin with shame to take the **lowest place**.¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit down in the **lowest place**, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, "Friend, **go up higher**." Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.¹¹ For whoever **exalts himself will be humbled**, and he who **humbles himself will be exalted**." Luke 14:7-11

The Problem with the Religious Leaders:

- ✓ They sit on **Moses' seat**.
- ✓ They bind **heavy burdens** on the populace.
- ✓ They show off their piety by their **phylacteries**.
- ✓ They take the **best places** at feasts and the synagogues.
- ✓ They love to be **greeted** in the market places.
- ✓ They love to be called "**rabbi, rabbi**".

"But he who is **greatest among** you shall be your **servant**.¹² And whoever **exalts himself will be humbled**, and he who **humbles himself will be exalted**." Matthew 23:11, 12

People today tend to rank people by their:

- ✓ Looks
- ✓ The cars they drive
- ✓ The house they live in
- ✓ Their educational degrees
- ✓ Their rank
- ✓ Social status (the haves and the have nots)
- ✓ Their political party association
- ✓ Their gender
- ✓ Their nationality
- ✓ Their race
- ✓ Their caste

The Central Lesson

"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." James 4:10

"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." 1 Peter 5:6

Back to Lucifer

As mentioned at the beginning of this lesson, there is another mystery besides the mystery of godliness: the mystery of iniquity. We can clearly identify the characteristics of this mystery (self-love, greed, selfishness, self-centeredness, covetousness and self-service) and its fruit (death) in the experience of Lucifer:

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! ¹³ For [because] you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' ¹⁵ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit." Isaiah 14:12-15



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #19 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE RETURN OF ELIJAH

The Old Testament ends in expectancy. Elijah will come as a forerunner of the Messiah to prepare the people for His arrival:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” Malachi 4:5, 6

We shall find that this Elijah prophecy has a **dual fulfillment**, one leading up to the first coming of Jesus and the other to the second. Thus, there are three Elijah’s in Scripture:

- ✓ The historical Elijah
- ✓ The New Testament Elijah
- ✓ The end-time Elijah

The Old Testament historical Elijah story is foundational for the two Elijahs that follow. The protagonists and elements of the Elijah story in the Old Testament are:

- ✓ **Ahab**: A weak and easily influenced civil ruler with no moral backbone.
- ✓ **Jezebel**: A strong-willed, manipulative, conniving murderess, harlot, witch (1 Kings 18:4; 19:1, 2; 2 Kings 9:22) who exerted her strong

influence to get the king to accomplish her objectives (1 Kings 21:25). She was the shadow ruler in Israel and a deadly enemy of Elijah.

- ✓ The **false prophets** of the **sun god Baal** who ate at Jezebel's table (and you do not bite the hand that feeds you) (1 Kings 18:19).
- ✓ **Elijah**: Denounced this three-fold apostate union.
- ✓ **The people**: Deceived by the religious and political rulers
- ✓ A **syncretistic religion** of Yahweh and Baal worship (1 Kings 18:21).

The mission of the historical Elijah:

- ✓ Restore the truth and bring the people back to the religion of the fathers (1 Kings 18:36, 37; cf. Luke 1:16; Matthew 17:11).
- ✓ Restore the altar of sacrifice—gaining favor with God, not by works but by the sacrifice of the lamb (1 Kings 18:30-32, 36).
- ✓ Rebuked false worship to the sun god and restored true worship to the creator God (1 Kings 18:17, 18). Worship and creation are closely linked in Scripture (Psalm 95:6; Nehemiah 9:6) and worship, creation and the Sabbath are intimately intertwined (Isaiah 66:22, 23; Revelation 14:6, 7)
- ✓ Restored the commandments of God (1 Kings 18:17, 18).
- ✓ Rebuked the “fornication” of the political ruler for imposing the false worship of the harlot Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31).

The development of the story:

- ✓ “Natural” calamities came because of the apostasy (1 Kings 18:5; 2 Chronicles 7:13, 14).
- ✓ Elijah was blamed for the drought, famine and disease (1 Kings 18:17) and Jezebel pronounced a death decree against him (1 Kings 18:10; 19:1, 2).
- ✓ Elijah fled to the wilderness and was protected and fed by God (1 Kings 17:1-7).
- ✓ Elijah was on earth during the tribulation and the death decree (1 Kings 18:4). He was “raptured” only after his flight to the wilderness, the tribulation and the death decree (2 Kings 2:11, 12).

- ✓ Elijah called for a clear-cut decision to serve the LORD or Baal. The people could not claim to worship the LORD and Baal (1 Kings 18:21).
- ✓ The fire from heaven along with the message of Elijah finally brought conviction to the people (1 Kings 18:38, 39).

The New Testament Elijah

The Elijah prophecy was partially fulfilled in John the Baptist. As we shall momentarily see, three times in the New Testament, John the Baptist is identified as Elijah. John was similar to Elijah in several ways: he lived in the wilderness like Elijah, he was persecuted and hated like Elijah, he ate like Elijah, dressed like Elijah, he got discouraged like Elijah and he called God's own people to repentance like Elijah.

Luke 1:16, 17 compares the mission of John the Baptist with that of Elijah:

*"And he **[John]** will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He **[John]** will also go before Him **[before Jesus]** in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

When the priests and Levites asked John if he was Elijah, he said no (John 1:19-21) and yet Jesus said that John was Elijah. How are we to understand this? The answer is that John was not Elijah in person but came to fulfill a similar mission with the same power that Elijah had (cf. John 1:21, 24).

In Matthew 11:14, Jesus explicitly identified John the Baptist as Elijah:

*"And if you are willing to receive it, he **[John]** is Elijah who is to come."*

In Matthew 17:10-13, Jesus once more identified John the Baptist as Elijah:

"And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' ¹¹ Jesus answered and said to them, 'Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. ¹² But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise, the Son of Man

*is also about to suffer at their hands.’¹³ Then the disciples understood that **He spoke to them of John the Baptist.**”*

What was the mission of John the Baptist?

Like Elijah, John the Baptist was sent to Israel, God's own chosen people who were in apostasy. His mission was to bring Israel back from apostasy and to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist was not an innovator nor a proclaimer of new truths. His main role was to restore what had been lost by Israel. This is made clear in Luke 1:16 where we are told:

*“And he will **turn** many of the **children of Israel** to the Lord their God.”*

It is of critical importance to realize that John's mission was not to convert the world to God. His mission was to return and restore an apostate people to their God so that they would be ready for the coming of Messiah (Luke 1:17). We can see the role of John the Baptist as **restorer** in the words of Jesus:

*“Elijah truly is coming first and will **restore** all things.” Matthew 17:11*

Their hearts needed to be turned to the faith of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The mission of John was to bring God's own people back to the “straight and narrow”.

The message of John the Baptist was similar to the message that Elijah preached.

John the Baptist called the people to repentance (Matthew 3:1-3). Preaching repentance involves the Law because we repent from sin and sin is the transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4). It is impossible to preach against sin and not preach the Law. John preached the seventh commandment, rebuking the adulterous relationship between Herod and Herodias (Mark 6:17, 18).

As Elijah restored the sacrifice of the lamb on the altar, John introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 1:36). John not only preached against sin, but he also pointed out the solution for sin—the Lamb of God. In 1 John we are told that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1: 7) and in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the

multitude of the redeemed “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb” (Revelation 7:14).

But John not only preached a message of repentance from sin and forgiveness by the blood of the Lamb. He also preached a message of power to overcome sin. Notice Matthew 3:11 where John preached:

*“I indeed baptize you with water unto **repentance**, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit and fire**.”*

John not only spoke of remission of sin but also of the importance of bearing fruit for the glory of God (Matthew 3:10). The Bible, elsewhere, identifies the fruit as “the fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23), “abiding in Christ” which means to “abide in His Word”, and to “keep His commandments” (John 15:1-8). The apostle Paul described the fruit as “holiness” (Romans 6:22) without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). This fruit flows from repentance and forgiveness (Matthew 3:8, 10). So, John preached that we need forgiveness, but we also need the power of the Holy Spirit to live victorious Christian lives.

The message of John was also a message of judgment. John preached that we must repent and bear fruit because God will judge and separate those who bear fruit from those who do not. In other words, that which will determine our status in the judgment is our fruit, not our profession. John preached a judgment-hour message where Jesus would separate the righteous from the wicked, like the wheat from the chaff:

*“His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His **wheat** into the barn; but He will burn up the **chaff** with unquenchable fire.” Matthew 3:12*

It is impossible to speak about the judgment without speaking of the Law because we “shall be judged by the perfect law of liberty” (James 2:12). According to John, the result of the judgment would yield only two groups—the righteous and the wicked. The righteous would be gathered into God's barn but the wicked would be cast into the fire which cannot be quenched.

The entire purpose of John's message was to prepare a people for the judgment and for the first coming of the Messiah (Luke 1:17). In this way, every mountain and hill would be brought low, the crooked places would be made straight and all the rough ways would be made smooth (Luke 3:4-5). Then, the hearts of God's people would be ready to receive the Messiah.

It is important to underline that whenever Elijah is mentioned in Scripture, he never appears alone. In the Old Testament, Elijah had three enemies: Ahab, the vile king, Jezebel, the cunning harlot, and the false prophets of Baal (cf. 1 Kings 16-18). The dangerous figure in the Old Testament Elijah story was Jezebel. The king provided the executive power that Jezebel needed (1 Kings 21:25) and the false prophets of Baal gave her the way to extend her religious influence throughout the kingdom (1 Kings 18:19). She was also the murderer of God's faithful prophets (1 Kings 18:4). Now, if John the Baptist is the New Testament Elijah, then we would expect three enemies to appear in the story with him.

John the Baptist did indeed have three enemies. The three are, interestingly enough, a spineless king, a crafty harlot and a daughter who performs the bidding of her mother. Let's consider the characters of the actors in the story (Mark 6: 14-28).

The Character of Herod, the Civil Ruler

Herod was a spineless, wimpy king. When he wrongfully promised Salome up to half of the kingdom for a dance, he did not have the moral character and courage to change his decision. His character was just like that of Ahab. It is important to keep in mind that Mark 6:14, 25-27 refers to Herod as **KING**. No doubt there was much wine drinking at the king's birthday party that impaired his ability to think straight.

The Character of Herodias, the Conniving Adulteress

Herodias was the shameless harlot who lived in adultery with the king (Mark 6:17). She had a mind of her own and knew exactly what she wanted. She was strong willed and determined to get rid of her prime enemy, John. Herodias

hated John because he denounced her adultery with King Herod. The king was not John's primary enemy. John's life was in danger only when the king joined Herodias in an adulterous relationship. John got in trouble because he preached the seventh commandment of God's Law, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Elijah is always hated because of the message he delivers.

Herodias had what we might call a "deadly wound". She could only accomplish her objective by deceiving the king to make an illegitimate oath (6:19); she had to use her daughter to accomplish her purposes. Notably, the story refers to Herodias as the MOTHER (6:24, 28). She was the dangerous figure in the story—she pulled all the strings. She has the same type of character as Jezebel.

The Character of Salome, the Obedient Daughter

Salome was the harlot's daughter. She did not have a mind of her own. In the story she existed merely to accomplish her mother's desires. So to speak, she was an image of her mother and her spokesperson. The story explicitly refers to her as the DAUGHTER (6:22). The mother spawned a daughter just like herself in order to accomplish her purposes. Like mother, like daughter!

The Message of End Time Elijah

As we have seen, the Old Testament ends with God's promise to send Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD (Malachi 4:5-6). This promise was only partially fulfilled by John the Baptist because the great and terrible day of the LORD did not transpire in his lifetime. John prepared the way only for the first coming of Christ. However, the Elijah prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6 clearly indicates that God will send Elijah before the "great and terrible day of the Lord", to prepare a people for the second coming (Malachi 4:1-3). We are therefore to expect another Elijah before Jesus comes in power and glory.

Is this Elijah on earth today? If so, where can we find him? Before we identify the final Elijah and his message we must keep in mind a very important prophetic principle. In the Old Testament period leading up to the first coming of Christ, we are dealing with literal and local Israel. Elijah was a literal person

and his enemies were literal individuals. Likewise, the protagonists of the Elijah story in the New Testament are individual persons because God was still dealing with literal Israel in the literal holy land.

However, in this dispensation of the Spirit, prophecy has moved to an Israel which is spiritual and worldwide. Thus, Elijah today is not an individual person but rather a worldwide movement with the same mission and message as the historical Elijah. Likewise, the enemies of the end time Elijah are not literal individual persons but rather worldwide movements or systems that oppose his message and will eventually pronounce a death decree against him.

Revelation 17 portrays a **harlot** who will manipulate the **kings** of the earth. The harlot has **daughters** (Revelation 17:1, 2, 5) who reflect her image, do her bidding and speak for her (Revelation 13:15; 16:15). This threefold union will deceive God's own professed people and it is the role of the end-time Elijah to awaken God's own people from this deception. The end time Elijah will rebuke this triple alliance and open the eyes of the people. Revelation 16:19, 13 describes this three-fold union of Babylon as the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. Why three? Because this will be a worldwide repetition of the Elijah story!

Notice the characters of the protagonists in the final Elijah story:

THE DRAGON

In the primary sense, the dragon represents Satan, but in a secondary sense it represents the kings of the earth. The great red dragon—Satan—attempted to kill Christ when He was born (Revelation 12:3, 4), but he tried to accomplish His purposes by using King Herod (Matthew 2:16). Ezekiel 29:3 describes Pharaoh as the great dragon. In Revelation 17:2; 18:3; 19:19-20 the harlot manipulates and controls the kings of the earth and the whole world, so both the harlot and the kings must represent global systems. We are no longer dealing with one literal, individual king, or one individual harlot, but rather, with the kings of the whole world. The kings will allow the harlot to entice them into an adulterous spiritual relationship where the church will control the state

(Revelation 17:2). The harlot will give the kings the wine of her fornication (false doctrine) so that they can't think straight!

THE HARLOT MOTHER/BEAST

The harlot is the dangerous figure in the story. Like Jezebel and Herodias, she pulls the strings and has a mind of her own. She sits on the waters—multitudes, nations, tongues, and people (Revelation 17: 15). She has daughters who are in her image (Revelation 13: 11-18), speak for her (Revelation 13:15), and do her bidding. In Revelation 17:5 she is explicitly called the mother of harlots, so she must have daughters! This harlot also hates God's faithful people, particularly the prophets (Revelation 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:2). Her character is just like Jezebel's. In fact, the book of Revelation calls her Jezebel (Revelation 2:20-23).

In Bible prophecy, a woman represents the church (Ephesians 5:25-27; Jeremiah 6:2; Revelation 19:7, 8; Revelation 12:1). Therefore, a pure woman is a pure church and an adulterous woman represents an apostate church. In Ezekiel 16, God compared apostate Israel with a harlot. There is no doubt that there is an apostate, harlot church in the world today: the Roman Catholic system. This system is doing its best to regain control of the world. However, she can only do so by enticing the political powers of the world to do her bidding by using the influence of the daughters that were born from her, the Protestant churches.

THE DAUGHTERS/IMAGE OF THE MOTHER

The helpers of the harlot in Revelation are identified as her daughters. They reflect the image of the mother. In fact, they speak for the mother! The Protestant denominations reflect, to a great degree the teachings of the Roman Catholic System. They teach that Sunday is the Sabbath and that the soul of man is immortal. The Protestant denominations were never able to totally break away from the teachings of the "Mother Church". They were spawned by the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century and teach many of Roman Catholicism's doctrines.

THE MISSION AND MESSAGE OF END-TIME ELIJAH

The final Elijah is a movement that will preach the full message of the previous two Elijahs to every nation, kindred, tongue and people (Revelation 14:6). Clearly, this could not be accomplished by a single individual but rather by a worldwide group of people.

The historical Elijah restored the daily sacrifice of the lamb that pointed forward to the sacrifice of the true Lamb (John 1:29). The end-time Elijah will proclaim the everlasting Gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue and people (Revelation 14:6). The apostle Paul defined the gospel message as the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15: 1-4).

The message of the final Elijah will call the church back to its roots. This final message is not primarily for the world but for the church! It will call God's professed Christian church to repent of sin and it will call all to keep the commandments of God (Revelation 12:17; 14:12). It is thus a message of victory over sin through the power of the Holy Spirit. It will also call the whole world to worship the true Creator God whose sign is Sabbath observance (Exodus 20:11; Revelation 14:7).

The message will announce that the hour of God's judgment has arrived (Revelation 14:7). It is not possible to speak about a judgment without speaking about the Law of God because the Law will be the standard used in the judgment (James 1:25). We are saved by grace through faith, but we shall be judged by our works because they reveal whether our faith is genuine.

As in the days of the historical Elijah, the message will polarize the world into only two groups and will prepare a people to meet Jesus when He comes on the clouds of heaven (Revelation 14:14-20). The message will call God's own people out of Babylon, it is a message primarily for God's people (Revelation 18:1-5)!

This message will denounce the religions of the world for committing spiritual fornication with the kings of the earth. They will denounce the adulterous union of church and state (Revelation 18:1-3). The final Elijah movement will be hated especially by the harlot (Revelation 17:6). All the powers of the world will come together in a final attempt to destroy the remnant of God. The results will be

the great tribulation where God's faithful children will have to flee to the desolate places of the earth (Matthew 24:16-21). But God's remnant will be victorious, and, like Elijah, will be translated to heaven without seeing death. Are you ready to accept God's Elijah message and to proclaim it with power to the world?



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #20 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT RELIGION AND POLITICS

The Mission, Message and Final Events of Jesus

As Jesus was about to begin His ministry, He was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38; Matthew 3:16). This empowered Him to preach the undiluted truth and it also enabled Him to perform great signs and wonders in the name of His Father (Luke 4:16-21). Satan, seeing that Jesus had come to contest His authority, whipped the world of the occult into a frenzy (Mark 1:21-24).

Multitudes followed Jesus because He proclaimed the truth with authority and performed great miracles of healing. In this, He was revealing the loving character of His Father to the world (Mark 3:8-10; Matthew 4:25; John 12:19; John 14:8-10). In His conflicts with the religious leaders, Jesus never quoted the rabbis; He always quoted the Word of God. In contrast, the scribes taught the traditions of men and therefore had no authority (Matthew 7:28-29 [pay particular attention to the parable which comes immediately before these verses]; Matthew 13:54; John 7:15, 46; Mark 11:27-28; Luke 2:41-50).

The Jewish leadership had developed a type of “apostolic succession” to defend and sustain their traditions. According to this concept, Moses supposedly received many oral traditions from God that he never committed to writing in

the Scriptures. According to the rabbis, these oral traditions were passed on from generation to generation in unbroken succession from Moses to the rabbis of Christ's day. This is what Jesus meant when He deplored that the rabbis sat in Moses' seat [*kathedra*] (Matthew 23:2). This erroneous concept of divine revelation led to the controversy over Corban in Mark 7 where certain technical terms were used by Jesus to describe the rabbinical view. The key words are "holding the tradition of the elders" (verse 3), "things which they have received and hold" (verse 4), "tradition which you have handed down" (verse 13).

Jesus openly rebuked these traditions that were not based on the Word of God. In fact, Jesus told them that they "laid aside the commandment of God," "rejected the commandment of God," "made of none effect the word of God," and practiced "vain worship" (verses 6-13). In Mark 7 Jesus showed how the law of Corban, based on tradition, annulled the force of the fifth commandment.

In John 18:28, we find another example of the absurdity of their traditions. The religious leaders would not go in to the Praetorium for fear of defiling themselves ceremonially—that would keep them from eating the Passover meal. However, at the same time, they were laying plans to defile their hands with blood by killing Jesus! Their tradition annulled the commandment of God!

The same could be said about the Sabbath. The traditions of the elders had burdened the Sabbath and disfigured it. The Sabbath of the rabbis was not the Sabbath which Jesus created. Yes, it was the **same day**, but it was kept in the **wrong way**. It was a false sabbath, a counterfeit sabbath, a sabbath of their own creation.

The greatest controversies of Jesus with the Pharisees was over the proper way to keep the Sabbath. In Mark 3:1-6, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand and to the Pharisees, this was a serious sin and yet at that very moment they were laying plans to kill Him! Thus, many traditions had come into the Jewish religion and Jesus rebuked each and every one of them by appealing to the authority of the written Word of God.

Because the multitudes followed Jesus, He began to have grave troubles with the religious establishment. The religious leaders were losing their flocks because of the teachings of Jesus:

“And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.” Mark 11:18

The priests (pastors), the scribes (theologians), and the elders (administrators), were filled with rage at the popularity of Jesus. They were losing their authority with the people. After Jesus resurrected Lazarus, the Pharisees revealed their true sentiments:

*“Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, “What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation... ^{12:2} The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, **the world has gone after Him!**” John 11:47, 48; 12:19*

The popularity of Jesus, because of what He taught, led the religious leaders to plot His death (Matthew 16:21; 26:3; John 11:53).

There were many religious groups or denominations in the days of Christ. There were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, the Zealots, and the Essenes. Although all of them were Jewish and each claimed to have the truth revealed by God, they had contradictory and divergent doctrines (notice, for example, the differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees in Acts 23:8). These religious sects despised each other. However, in a national emergency, they all came together to get rid of public enemy #1 (Matthew 26:57-67). We might say that they all banded together in a great ecumenical movement. The same day, Herod and Pilate became friends (Luke 23:12) and the Sadducees and Pharisees, who were theological enemies, laid aside their differences and joined forces to kill Jesus (Luke 23:6-8). Even the Herodians and the Pharisees came together (Mark 3:6). When the preaching of truth

causes the religious leaders lose their authority with their members, they are willing to use extreme measures.

The leaders could not answer the arguments of Jesus. They could not defeat Jesus with the power of persuasion based on the Word of God so they resorted to extreme measures (Matthew 22:29, 33-35, 46). The fact that Jesus was not educated in their schools and yet knew so much about Scripture, filled them with rage. Religious spies were sent by the leaders to constantly watch Jesus in order to find an excuse to nail Him (John 11:57; Luke 6:7; 4:1; 20:20).

The Jews were forbidden by Roman law to execute the death penalty, so they had to find a way to gain the support of the secular power to be successful in killing Jesus (John 18:31). In other words, the church appealed to the power of the state in order to accomplish their objectives (Matthew 27:1-2). In fact, Jesus was tried first in a religious court and when He was found worthy of death there, He was taken to the civil power to appeal for His execution (John 18:19-24, 28-31).

Practically all the accusations levelled against Jesus were based on supposed violations of the first table of the Law with which Caesar had nothing to do, or even wanted anything to do. Jesus was accused of blasphemy, of making Himself God and of breaking the Sabbath (see, John 19:7; Mark 2:7; John 10:33; John 9:16; 5:16, 18; 8:58-59). If Jesus had stolen, or killed, or bore false witness, the Roman government could have legitimately condemned Him for a violation of Roman civil law. But Jesus had broken no civil law of Rome. At first, all the accusations against Jesus were of a religious nature. When Pilate told the religious leaders that their accusations were of religious of nature and therefore they should judge Him by their ecclesiastical law, they openly prevaricated, accusing Jesus of making Himself a king and of tax evasion (Luke 23:2), which would have been crimes against the state.

Three times Pilate stated that the Roman state found no fault with Jesus (John 19:4, 6; 18:37-38). Only the church leaders found fault with Him. His accusers even employed false witnesses to condemn Him (Matthew 26:60). The trial of Jesus was a travesty in justice. It violated both Jewish and Roman law. A

question screams for an answer: Why would Pilate condemn a man to death whom he had declared innocent three times during His trial? The gospels give us the reason.

The fear of a tumult and of losing his political position led Pilate to give in to the plea of the religious leaders and the cry of the multitudes. The religious leaders threatened Pilate telling him that they would accuse him to the emperor and have him removed from office (John 19:12; Matthew 27:24-25). The voice of the leaders of the church and their members led Pilate to condemn Jesus. Jesus could not depend on the protection of the civil laws. His only hope was in God.

Satan exerted his influence upon the three-fold union of Pilate, Judas and Caiaphas (Luke 22:53; John 13:2; John 6:70; John 8:44). It is no coincidence that Jesus called Judas the “son of perdition” (John 17:12), the very name given to the final Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). The process of Jesus' condemnation is important. Judas, one of the inside circle, delivered Jesus into the hands of the religious power and the religious power delivered Jesus into the hands of the secular power to be killed (Luke 22:1-6; Matthew 26: 14-16).

The enemy of Jesus, par excellence, was the supreme pontiff, Caiaphas. He was the one who gave the death sentence against Jesus (John 11:47-53; 18:13-14) and it was he who said that getting rid of Jesus would keep the nation from falling apart and being destroyed by the Romans (John 11:48). Many of the religious leaders would have accepted Jesus because they knew that He was telling the truth. But they did not receive Him for fear of losing their religious stature and influence over the people (see John 12:42-43).

The religious leaders influenced a willingly blind people to cry out for the blood of Jesus (Matthew 27:20). Because the people had a blind respect for their leaders, they submitted to their teachings and will.

What led primarily to the hatred against Jesus was that He was unwilling to take over the political system of the world of that time. He refused to take the throne and govern politically. This was the same temptation Jesus had faced in the wilderness when Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of the world. It was the same temptation he suffered when the multitude, instigated by Judas, tried to

take Him by force to make Him a king (John 6:15). Jesus totally separated church and state (John 18:36-37; Matthew 26:51-53; Luke 9:54-56; 20:35). The Jewish leaders did not want the spiritual kingdom of the heart which was the necessary prerequisite for belonging to the kingdom of glory.

In reality, Jesus was King of His spiritual kingdom of grace but He could not yet take over the kingdom of glory. Jesus was anointed (Matthew 26:2), He had a triumphal procession (Luke 19:37-38), He was crowned (John 19:2, 3), wore a king's robe (John 19:2; Mark 15:17); held a scepter in his right hand (Matthew 27:29); was rendered homage as a king (Matthew 27:29), was introduced by Pilate as a king (Matthew 27:11), His royal throne was a cross (Matthew 27:31-37); He had a royal inscription above His throne/cross (John 19:19) and in John 18:37, He claimed to be King. But before the people could belong to His kingdom of glory, the kingdom of God had to be in their hearts (Luke 17:21). The principles of Christ's loving kingdom had to be implanted in the life. Jesus rejected the throne of worldly glory which in a few centuries the Antichrist would accept (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

This is the reason why the Jewish leadership and the multitudes chose Barabbas instead of Jesus. Barabbas personified their aspirations far better than Jesus. Barabbas wanted an earthly kingdom and caused an insurrection and sedition against the Roman government. If Jesus had done this, He would have been accepted as their messiah. When the Jews said, "We have no king but Caesar", they withdrew from the theocracy—God was no longer their king! They chose a murderer and an evildoer in place of the holy Son of God (John 18:29-30). This will happen again in the end time. The Jews were offered two possible kingdoms: 1) Barabbas who would bring salvation from the Romans (Luke 23:18-19), and 2) Jesus who would deliver them from the bondage of sin. They made a fatal choice.

In an ironic twist, the Jewish nation was destroyed by the very power they had used to kill Jesus—the Roman Empire (Luke 19:41-44; 21:20). What they thought to accomplish by killing Jesus, fell back upon them. The civil power they had used for their purposes became their destroyer! What they feared would

happen if they did not kill Jesus, happened because they killed Him! The very nation they used to destroy Jesus took away their nation and place.

Many sincere and honest priests and people left and joined the Christian church (Acts 6:7). These people came out and formed the nucleus of what would become a world-wide movement.

Reliving the Experience of Jesus

The greatest enemies of God's people throughout the course of history have not been outsiders, but insiders. Both Cain and Abel claimed to worship the true God and yet Cain murdered Abel because Abel obeyed God and worshiped Him in the manner that God had commanded. God sent the Old Testament prophets to the Jewish nation and those who professed to be His people killed them (2 Chronicles 36:15, 16; Matthew 21:33-43). The Father sent Jesus to His own and they killed Him (John 1:11). Judas, was an insider, who betrayed Jesus to His enemies. Jesus sent Stephen and other messengers to the Jewish nation after the death of Jesus and they stoned and killed them (Matthew 23:34; Acts 7).

Likewise, the apostate “Christian” Church in the Middle Ages, persecuted God's faithful people and slaughtered them by the millions. In fact, the process which the Inquisition followed during this period was very similar to the one that the Jewish Sanhedrin followed in the condemnation of Jesus.

In the Inquisition, the accused was first taken before a **religious court** and tried there. Witnesses were not allowed to defend the accused's cause. Torture was employed to force the accused to confess his “crimes”. The defendant's goods were confiscated and the sentence of death was pronounced. The accused was then delivered to the secular power to be destroyed. This is the identical process that the church of Christ's day followed in condemning Jesus to death.

Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that they would repeat the scenes of His life (see John 15:18-19; 16:1-2; 17:14-20; Luke 21:12-17; Mark 13:5-14). Revelation 12:1-5 describes Satan's attempt to kill Jesus and then, in 12:6, 14, 17 we have a description of his attempt to kill the remnant of God. The greatest

enemies of God's people in the last days will be others who profess to serve Jesus Christ. In persecuting the people of God, those who claim to serve God will feel that by persecuting the faithful, they are doing God a favor.

The United States of America is the greatest nation in the history of the world, not because it has more people, the greatest military, or the greatest economic prosperity. It is great because of the principles upon which it was founded. The First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees three rights to citizens:

"[1] Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, [2] nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof; [3] or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

The First Amendment guarantees religious and civil liberties. The drafters of the Constitution guaranteed these rights because they knew what happened when the church appealed to the state to crucify Jesus. They also knew what had happened in Europe with mechanisms such as the Inquisition and they were keenly aware of what had happened during the Colonial period. They knew what happens when the church and the state are joined together. They knew that when religious freedom is lost, the loss of civil rights follows in its train.

Today, we see a move on the part of many religious leaders of joining church and state. It can be seen in the desire to mandate prayer in public schools. It can be seen in the desire to have the government pay for religious education. It can be seen by the desire to teach the Bible as part of the public school curriculum. It can be seen in the desire to have the government give funds to private religious charitable organizations.

Religious leaders are saying, "Tear down the wall." But when this happens, the final scenes of the life of Jesus will be repeated with His faithful people. The beast with horns like a lamb will speak like a dragon!

Revelation 17 describes this moment. The harlot church (Roman Catholicism) will influence the kings of the earth to impose her agenda. She will be helped by

her daughters, apostate Protestantism. Under this triple union, the multitudes will do to God's final remnant what the Jewish nation did with Jesus. In Revelation 18:1-5, God gives a clarion call for God's people to get out of this system before human probation closes. Will you listen to the call of God and come out to join God's remnant people who keep the commandments of God? Your choice will determine your destiny!



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #21 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

Introduction and General Remarks

A disciplined study of Bible prophecy requires that the student be well versed in history because prophecy announces historical events in advance. The story we are going to study today is very sad, particularly because it deals with the end-time apostasy of those who claim to be God's people. What we will say is not a reflection on any particular person or leader. There are many genuine children of God among the leaders and the rank and file of all denominations, yet the Bible portrays that most of those who profess to be God's people, both among leaders and members, are in apostasy.

Even though our series of lessons centers mostly on the New Testament, particularly on the gospels and the book of Acts, it is necessary for us to go back to the Old Testament for some background information that will help us understand this present study.

The Apostasy and Desolation of Jerusalem

The history of Israel in the Old Testament was one of continual apostasy. The nation habitually embraced the teachings and practices of the surrounding pagan nations. For this reason, God referred to the nation as a “harlot”. This

word appears no less than 23 times in Ezekiel 16, besides many uses of the same name in chapter 23 and also in Jeremiah (cf. Ezekiel 16:30, 35; 23:11, 18, 29, 30).

These acts of idolatrous apostasy are referred to as “abominations” (cf. Ezekiel 16:2, 22, 51; 23:38-39; 2 Chronicles 36:14). Ezekiel 8 is the “abominations chapter” par excellence because God catalogued the abominations that Israel, His own professed people, were committing in Jerusalem. The chapter presents these abominations in an escalating order of gravity. The climax is in verse 16:

*“So He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house; and there, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their **faces toward the east** and they were **worshipping the sun** toward the east.”*

In the very next verse, God promised to desolate Jerusalem because of its abominations; thus, we have the expression “abomination of desolation”, meaning an abomination that leads to desolation.

Ezekiel 16 portrays Israel as a harlot who decked herself with jewelry of gold and silver to entice the pagan nations to fornicate with her. Because of her love affair with the pagan customs and practices of the surrounding nations, God promised that destruction would come to her from the four corners of the land. (Ezekiel 7:1-2). God promised Israel that they would drink the cup of His wrath because of the abominations that they practiced (Ezekiel 23:33-34) and they would drain the cup to its very dregs.

Ezekiel 1 describes God coming from the north to the Jerusalem temple to perform a work of investigative judgment with the end result of separating the faithful from the unfaithful in the city. The judgment did not involve the surrounding pagan nations. It was a judgment separation only of those who professed to be God's people. Ezekiel 9 describes this work of separation. The chapter describes how, before the desolation of the city, God placed a mark or sign on the foreheads of those who sighed and cried because of the abominations that were being committed in the city (Ezekiel 9:4). Yes, God had a faithful remnant in the city and He promised to protect these sealed ones in

the midst of the desolation to come. It is crucial to underline that those who were worshipping the sun (8:16, 17) are placed in contrast in the very next verses (Ezekiel 9:1-6) to those who have the mark on their foreheads.

To a great degree, the apostasy among the people was due to the evil influence of the religious leaders. However, the people were not free of guilt because they loved to have it so (Jeremiah 5:31).

When the work of separation was finished, the Shekinah glory of the Jerusalem Temple departed from the sanctuary and **lingered** on the Mount of Olives and then departed to heaven, leaving the temple (Ezekiel 11:22-23). Without the Shekinah in the temple, the city had no protection against the invading Babylonians who would bring desolation.

The word *desolation* is used repeatedly to describe what happened to Jerusalem when the presence of God abandoned it (cf. Daniel 9:2; Jeremiah 25:3, 4, 6, 9-11; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21). The desolation was terrible. Jeremiah wrote the funeral dirge book of Lamentations for the people to sing as they were being led captive to Babylon. The entire book describes the horrendous famine, disease, treason and crime that existed in Jerusalem as the armies of Babylon besieged it.

It is of critical significance to realize that Jeremiah blamed the desolation of the city on the desecration of the Sabbath:

*“And it shall be, if you heed Me carefully,” says the Lord, ‘to bring no burden through the gates of this city on the **Sabbath day**, but **hallow the Sabbath day**, to do no work in it,²⁵ then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, accompanied by the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever...²⁷ But if you will not heed Me to **hallow the Sabbath day**, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the **Sabbath day**, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.”* Jeremiah 17:24, 25, 27

The prophet Ezekiel, shortly after the ministry of Jeremiah, emphasized the extreme importance of the Sabbath as the sign between God and His people:

*“Moreover, I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be **a sign** between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them....²⁰ hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be **a sign** between Me and you, that you may know that **I am the Lord your God.**” Ezekiel 20:12, 20*

In between these two verses (verses 13-19), God described the apostasy of Israel because of their disregard for the Sabbath. In spite of God’s admonition to the people through Ezekiel, they continued trampling upon God’s holy Sabbath (Ezekiel 23:38). Finally, the Babylonian armies came to Jerusalem and destroyed the temple and the city just as Ezekiel had promised (Ezekiel 8:17; 9:5-7; 2 Chronicles 36:17-21).

This, however, did not mark the end of Israel’s history. At the end of Jeremiah’s 70-year prophecy, Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes gave decrees to rebuild and restore Jerusalem’s temple, city, walls and civil and religious order (Daniel 9:25; 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23). God gave Israel another opportunity to redeem her past failures.

Jerusalem in the Days of Christ

The prophecy of Daniel 9:25-27 foretold that after the rebuilding and restoration of Jerusalem the city would be destroyed again. Notably, the second destruction of the city is described with the words *abomination* and *desolation* (Matthew 24:15; Luke 21:20); words that we found in connection with the first destruction.

After the Babylonian captivity, the Israelites went back to their land and rebuilt the temple, the city and the walls and restored their civil and religious order. The glory of the second temple was not even a shadow of the glory of the temple that Solomon built. Yet strangely, God foretold that this second temple would be more glorious than the first (Haggai 2:1-9). The Jews to this day are still trying to explain how this prophecy was ever fulfilled. The Romans destroyed the second temple in the year 70 AD and even after Herod’s 46-year remodeling

project, it never came close to reaching the glory of the temple built by Solomon. Did Haggai's prophecy fail? Absolutely not!

The second temple was more glorious than the first because Jesus, in person, walked and taught in its courts. John 1:14 employs two technical terms to describe the coming of Jesus. Jesus "**tabernacled**" or dwelt with Israel in person and they beheld **His glory**. Both of these are sanctuary concepts. Sadly, however, Jesus came to His own and they did not receive Him. Once again Israel had fallen into open apostasy. Most of the guilt was at the door of the religious leaders of the nation—the priests, the scribes and the elders.

The greatest conflicts of Jesus with the religious leaders involved the Sabbath. The religious leaders had created a counterfeit Sabbath based on human tradition. They kept the right day, but in the wrong way. They strictly enforced **their** sabbath while they rejected the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27, 28). They enforced their own stringent sabbath laws but did not experience true Sabbath rest. For this reason, Jesus invited all to come to Him and He would give them rest (Matthew 11:28-30). Just as the religious leaders rejected the witness of Jeremiah and other messengers before the first destruction of Jerusalem, the leaders opposed Christ at every step of the way until there was no remedy.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem from the east, He announced the destruction of the city "because she did not know the hour of her visitation" (Luke 19:41-44). He then entered the temple and cast out the money changers. At this point, Jesus referred to the temple as "the temple of God" and "my house" (Matthew 21:12-13). For several days Jesus then proceeded to make a final call to the leaders to receive Him as the Messiah. However, His invitation fell on deaf ears (Matthew 21-23). Significantly, Jesus used many of the very words of 2 Chronicles 36:15-17 where we find a description of the repeated warnings that God sent to Israel before the captivity. As Jesus left the temple for the last time, He pronounced the chilling words, "*Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*" Matthew 23:38. The living Shekinah left the temple and it was no longer "His house" or "the temple of God". The desolation of the city and temple was to follow.

Upon leaving the temple for the last time, Jesus went and sat on the Mount of Olives where He lingered for a while with His disciples where He told them that Jerusalem would be desolated and the temple destroyed (Matthew 24:1-3). The Shekinah glory in person had left the temple for the last time and Jerusalem had no protection against her enemies. Some forty years later, the Romans came against the city and did what the Babylonians had done some 600 years before. Once again, apostasy led to the ruin of Jerusalem and there was decree to rebuild the city once more. The Hebrew theocracy had come to an end forever!

Let us turn now to the profound words of Jesus in Matthew 24:15. Before we go there, let's get a little historical context. The first fourteen verses of Matthew 24 describe in vivid detail what took place between the ascension of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem—a period of 39 years. Space will not allow us to detail all that happened within and without the city. There were wars and rumors of wars. False messiahs and christs arose. There were several significant earthquakes and when the Roman legions besieged Jerusalem, there was pestilence and famine in the city (Matthew 24:6, 7). Parents and children betrayed each other for food. Christians were betrayed by their own families to the Jewish authorities (Luke 21:16). The apostles preached the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit to the religious and civil authorities (Luke 21:12-14; Matthew 24:14).

The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus in his work, *Wars of the Jews*, documents the calamities that befell Jerusalem. It is no coincidence that Josephus tells us that the book of Lamentations was again “mourned” by the Jews as they were being slaughtered and led away captive to all nations. Rome was considered a new Babylon (1 Peter 5:13) because it did to Jerusalem what the ancient Babylonians had done in the past.

Now notice the cryptic words of Jesus in Matthew 24:15, 16:

“Therefore, when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place [Daniel 9:26, 27] (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

What did Jesus mean by the expression “abomination of desolation”? We don’t have to guess because the parallel passage in Luke 21:20 explains what He meant:

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.”

As we compare Matthew 24:15 with Luke 21:20 we see that the abomination precedes the desolation. In other words, the abomination led to desolation. Jesus was referring to the besieging of Jerusalem by the Roman legions. But, what was this abomination that was an omen of its desolation?

We find the answer to this question in the contents of the standards of the Roman legions. Josephus tells us that whenever the Roman armies surrounded a city, they placed their standards in the ground and rendered them worship:

*“Then came the ensigns encompassing the **eagle** which is at the head of the Roman legion, the king, and the strongest of all birds, which seems to them a **signal** of dominion, and an **omen** that they **shall conquer** all against whom they march; these sacred ensigns are followed by the trumpeters” (Wars of the Jews, book 3, chapter 6 and paragraph 2).*

The book, *Great Controversy* agrees with Josephus:

*“When the **idolatrous standards** of the Romans should be set up in the holy ground, which extended some furlongs **outside the city walls**, then the followers of Christ were to find **safety in flight**. When the **warning sign** should be seen, those who would escape must make no delay.” Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 26*

Pictures of Roman standards have been found in archeological digs and historical records. At the center of the standard is an eagle with outstretched wings. In its talons are arrows and surrounding the eagle, is a golden wreath, a symbol of the sun god Mithra, the official god of the Roman legions. In worshiping the standards, the legions were really worshiping the sun god. This was the abomination and sign of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem.

How could God's faithful people flee if the city was surrounded by the Roman armies? The answer is again provided by Josephus. For some humanly unexplained reason, when Cestius Gallus, general of the Roman legions, was at the point of taking the city, he mysteriously retreated. The apostate Jews who had rejected the words of Jesus, went after Cestius and his legions thinking that God was working in their favor. At this point, the faithful followers of Jesus left the city. They had seen the sign and fled.

In the year 70 AD, Titus returned to Jerusalem with the Roman legions and crucified more than a million Jews and leveled the city and temple. However, those who paid heed to the warning of Jesus, fled to the mountains and their lives were spared (cf. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, book 2, chapter 19 and paragraphs 2-7).

One final important point. The faithful who fled Jerusalem were Sabbath keepers (Matthew 24:20). Jesus had commanded His followers to “pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.” Thus we see the contrast between the Roman legions worshiping their sun standards and the Sabbath worshipers fleeing from the city. This is precisely the contrast we found in the Old Testament between those who worshiped the sun and those who observed the Holy Sabbath!

The Final Fulfillment of Matthew 24

On the Mount of Olives, the disciples had asked Jesus when the destruction of the Jerusalem temple would take place. But they also asked Him another question: “And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). The disciples believed that the destruction of the temple and the coming of the Messiah would coincide. However, Jesus explained that what happened leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem foreshadowed what would happen shortly before His second coming.

Let's take a few moments to examine the end time fulfillment of Matthew 24:15. We must remember that the final fulfillment of this prophecy will not be with literal Israel in the Middle East but with spiritual Israel on a worldwide scale.

The final fulfillment has nothing to do with the literal Jews in literal Israel in literal Jerusalem!

The book of Revelation picks up on what we studied from Ezekiel, describing a harlot covered with gold and silver and precious stones (Revelation 17:1, 4). She fornicates with the kings of the earth (Revelation 17:2). She is seated upon seven hills and has children who do her bidding because she is described as their mother (Revelation 17:5). In her hand is a cup filled with the wine of her abominations (Revelation 17:4) and because of these abominations she will be left desolate (Revelation 17:16). God will make her drink the cup of His wrath without mixture of mercy (Revelation 16:1).

One cannot miss that this terminology is strikingly similar to the description that we studied from the book of Ezekiel (Ezekiel chapters 7-11, 16, 23). This must mean that the harlot of Revelation 17 does not represent a pagan nation, but rather the apostate Christian church!

Before the harlot is destroyed and made desolate because of her abominations, God will seal His faithful children on the forehead to separate them from those who have the mark of the beast and will be destroyed (Revelation 7:1-3). This sealing reminds us of the sealing that took place when the religious leaders in Jerusalem were worshiping the sun just before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in the days of Ezekiel.

As in the time of Ezekiel, the final destruction will come from the four corners of the earth (Revelation 7:1), but before the destruction, God will send a message calling the world to worship the Creator (Revelation 14:7) and, of course, the sign of the Creator is the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11, 12, 20). God's end-time people will be Sabbath keepers! The question is, who is in contrast to the Sabbath keepers in spiritual Jerusalem?

In both destructions of Jerusalem, the apostates are identified as sun worshipers! Will Christians in the end-time be worshiping the literal sun? Obviously not because they know this would be idolatry. So, what does the abomination of desolation mean in the end time?

Just a little history first. It is well documented that there is a direct connection between ancient Rome, Papal Rome and the United States. Ancient Rome worshiped the literal sun god Mithra and Roman Catholicism adopted the day which honored the sun god, that is, Sunday. And Protestants have embraced Sunday as the day of worship from Roman Catholicism.

The founding fathers of the United States were fascinated by the government and insignia of ancient Rome. As we examine the Great Seal of the United States (both sides are found on the one-dollar bill), we immediately detect this fascination. All the inscriptions on the Great Seal are in Latin. The date of the Declaration of Independence is at the base of the pyramid in Roman numerals. The bald eagle with the sun burst above its head is there. The eagle has arrows in its talons. On the obverse side of the Seal is an unfinished pyramid with an eye above it and sun rays bursting forth from the eye. It can be proved historically that the United States adopted its insignia directly from ancient Rome. The architecture in downtown Washington, DC, is Roman. The streets are filled with monuments that honor national heroes and commemorate historical events.

For a time, in the early constitutional history of our country, the armies were called “legions”. In fact, many of the flags of our early “legions” had the eagle with sun bursts above its head or irradiating from its body.

The name of the upper chamber of Congress is called the Senate, and those who serve there are senators; both are Roman terms. Space will not allow me to provide all the documentation, but historians tell us that the connection between ancient Rome and the United States is undeniable. Notice the following quotation:

*“The neo-classical spirit of America at the end of the eighteenth century looked to the **ancient Roman Republic** for many symbols, including the name of the **Upper Chamber** of Congress (the Senate). In Rome the **eagle** began as a **republican symbol**; hence Americans chose their native bald eagle for the National Arms in 1782.” Whitney Smith, Flags through the Ages and Across the World, p. 314*

When Protestants broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, they were not able to discard Sunday observance that Roman Catholicism had adopted from the ancient Roman Republic. Thus, they pay homage to Rome, no matter how much they try to deny it! John O'Brien, a long tenured theology professor at the University of Notre Dame and the author of some forty books wrote:

*"But since Saturday, not Sunday, is specified in the Bible, isn't it curious that non-Catholics who profess to take their religion directly from the Bible and not from the Church, observe Sunday instead of Saturday? Yes, of course, it is inconsistent; but this **change** was made about fifteen centuries before Protestantism was born, and by that time the custom was universally observed. They have continued the custom, even though it rests upon the **authority of the Catholic Church** and not upon an explicit text in the Bible. That observance remains as a reminder of the **Mother Church** from which the non-Catholic sects broke away—like a boy running away from home but still carrying in his pocket a picture of his mother or a lock of her hair."* John O'Brien, *The Faith of Millions* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1974) p. 400, 401

The Protestant churches, as corporate entities, are the daughters of the harlot because they have obtained their day of worship (and doctrines such as the immortality of the soul and an eternally burning hell) from her. The sign or seal of God is the Sabbath (Ezekiel 20:12, 20; Exodus 31:17). This being the case, the mark of the beast must be an opposite day of worship, Sunday.

Someone might object that it is not the same to worship the sun as it is to worship on the day of the sun. At first sight, it might appear that it isn't the same. However, upon closer inspection, it is. I frequently ask people, "Who made the sun?" The answer is always, "God". Then I ask a second question: "Did God make the sun for worship?" The answer is quick and decided: "Of course not". I then ask, "What happens if you make the sun an **object** of worship?" The answer is immediate: "That would be idolatry". I then ask, "Why would that be idolatry?" The answer comes back: "Because the sun is not a sacred object. It is a secular object that God did not make for worship!"

Then I ask another series of questions: "Who made the first day of the week?" The answer comes back: "God did". My next question is, "Did he make the first day as a day of worship?" The answer is clear: "Of course not. It is one of the secular days on which we are supposed to work." Then I ask my third question: "And, what happens if we make the first day a **day** of worship?" There is usually a deep silence and then the answer comes, belatedly and softly: "Why, that would be idolatry." "Why?", I ask. "Simply because you have made a day of worship out of a day which God meant for secular purposes." Incidentally, Sunday cannot be holy because it is impossible for man to make anything holy. Only God can make days and things holy! The wrong way among the Jews and the wrong day among Christians are both based on human tradition rather than the Word of God.

The day is coming very soon when the Christian world, led by the United States, will impose, by force of law, Sunday as the day of worship. The law will be sealed with the Great Seal of the United States which contains the same elements of the Roman Standard:

*"The **Great Seal or State of Arms** is the **official emblem** of the United States. All **judicial, legislative and executive [the three branches of government]** proclamations bear this seal. It **certifies** and **authenticates** all **official acts** of the Federal government. It must appear on all its authoritative **laws and statutes**." Quaipe, Weig and Appleman, The History of the United States Flag, p. 115*

You might think that this is a preposterous idea! If you don't believe it now, you will believe it later when you see it with your own eyes. God is seeking a people today who will sigh and cry because of the abominations that are being practiced among those who profess to be Christians. Divorce, gay marriage, gay clergy, support for transgender lifestyles and a deafening silence about the crime of abortion are leavening the church and leading it into an irreversible apostasy. There must be a sighing and crying because of the abominations that are being committed in the church. In Revelation 18:1-5, this sighing and crying is described where God calls His faithful people out of the apostate religious

world described as Babylon. Will you accept the call of Jesus to come out? The decision is yours and your destiny depends on it!



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #22 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

The Immensity of God’s Forgiveness

The Bible is full of promises that describe God's magnanimous forgiveness. Several word pictures portray God's generous willingness to forgive. The psalmist wrote that God is willing to remove our sins as far as the east is from the west (Psalms 103:12). How far is the east from the west? The distance is infinite! According to Isaiah, when we repent, God will manifest a type of “divine amnesia” where He will forget our sins and remember them no more (Isaiah 43:25). In the same book of Isaiah, God promises to blot out our sins like a cloud of Fresno fog is burned away by the morning sun (Isaiah 44:22). The prophet Micah promised that God will take our sins and cast them into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19) and once He does that, there is no fishing allowed!

The laundry metaphor is also used. God promises to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). God also promises to take our sins and put them behind His back where He cannot see them (Isaiah 38:17). In an analogy from the world of commerce, God promises to forgive our debt which is so huge that we could never repay it (Matthew 18:22). An analogy from the court of law assures us that God will justify us or pronounce us, “not guilty” (Romans 4:3-8). Hebrews 7:25 assures us that God is willing to save us to the uttermost and Exodus 34:6-7 describes God as “merciful, and gracious, long-suffering, and

abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin....” What marvelous pictures of a generous and forgiving God!

In the Old Testament, God forgave all kinds of grievous sins. He forgave David for murder and adultery (Psalm 51; 1 Samuel 12:13). He forgave Abraham for lying. He forgave Moses for slaying the Egyptian. He forgave Israel for worshiping the golden calf. He even forgave Eve for aspiring to be equal to God and Adam for listening to his wife!

In the light of all these promises of God's forgiveness, it is surprising indeed to discover that there is a sin that God cannot forgive. Jesus spoke of this sin in Matthew 12:31-32:

*“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the **blasphemy against the Spirit** will **not be forgiven men**.³² Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever **speaks against the Holy Spirit**, it will **not be forgiven him**, either in this age or in the age to come.”*

The unpardonable sin is called the sin against the Holy Spirit. What sin could be so evil that God Himself would be unable to forgive it? Let's answer this solemn question with a deep spirit of prayer.

The Bible teaches that there are **two kinds** of sin. 1 John 5:16 explains that there is sin that leads to death and sin that does not. What did John mean? In the light of this study we will see that the sin which leads to eternal death is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

This text in 1 John 5:16 is in full harmony with the Old Testament. In ancient Israel there were two kinds of sin. One kind was due to human weakness; an oversight; it was unintentional (for example, Leviticus 4:27-28; Numbers 15:22-29). This kind of sin could be atoned for in the sanctuary by shedding the blood of an animal (cf. Hebrews 9:22).

However, there was a type of sin which could not be forgiven by the shedding of blood. It was referred to as sin with a “high hand” (Numbers 15:30 in

Hebrew). This type of sin was deliberate, premeditated, with no pangs of the conscience. So to speak, it was a sin “in God's face”. Numbers 15:30-31 describes this type of sin:

*“But the person who does anything **presumptuously**, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people. ³¹ Because he has **despised the word of the Lord**, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.”*

Verses 32-36 then provide a real life example of a high-handed sin:

*“Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. ³³ And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. ³⁴ They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him. ³⁵ Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘The man must **surely be put to death**; all the congregation shall **stone him with stones** outside the camp.’ ³⁶ So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.”*

God had given clear specifications about Sabbath observance in Exodus 20:8-11 and this man purposely defied the counsel of God. This type of sin is also described in Psalm 19:13 where David prayed that God would keep him from committing this horrendous kind of transgression:

*“Keep back Your servant also from **presumptuous sins**; let **them** not have **dominion** over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of **great transgression**.”*

We shall find in the course of our study that the unpardonable sin is a cherished and habitual sin from which we do not wish to repent. It is sin that we cling to until we lose our spiritual sensibility to the voice of the Holy Spirit. However, before we can understand fully the nature of this sin, we must first lay down and understand some basic principles:

Every person who is born into this world is born with freedom of choice (Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15). God has given us the ability to choose right or wrong. However, the problem is that, on our own, we are not able to know the difference between right and wrong and much less to choose the right and reject the wrong. The prophet Jeremiah wrote that our hearts are desperately wicked and even we ourselves don't know it (Jeremiah 17:9). This is why God has given every person in the world, along with the power of choice, a conscience to guide our choices. And, what is the conscience? The best definition I have ever found is found in the book *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 202:

*"Conscience is the voice of God, heard amid the conflict of human passions; when it is resisted, the Spirit of God is grieved. Men have the **power to quench** the Spirit of God; the **power of choosing** is left with them. They are allowed freedom of action. They may be **obedient** through the name and grace of our Redeemer, or they may be **disobedient**, and realize the consequences."*

Let's talk a little more about the work of the Holy Spirit. In order to understand the nature of the unpardonable sin, we must first understand who the Holy Spirit is, what His work consists of and how His work relates to that of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. He is not a mere essence or power, but rather a person who reasons, guides, reproves, thinks, helps, speaks, loves and can be grieved. It is difficult for us to conceive of the Holy Spirit as a person because of the **metaphors** that the Bible uses to describe His work, things like a **dove, rain, oil, fire and wind**. We almost come to think that the Holy Spirit is a **substance** that is **infused** or **poured into us** rather than a person outside of us.

The Holy Spirit has three main functions and they are all related to the Law. First and foremost, He convicts us of sin (John 16:8). Sin is the transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4), so the work of the Holy Spirit is very closely connected with the Law. The Holy Spirit wrote the Law on tables of stone (Exodus 31:18; compare Luke 11:20 with Matthew 12:28).

The Holy Spirit who wrote the Law on tables of stone also writes the Law on the tables of our hearts (Hebrews 8:7-13). The Holy Spirit does not only convict

us of our external evil acts. By means of God's spiritual law (cf. Romans 7:7-25), He shows us the inner depths of our beings—our motives, feelings, thoughts, and intentions (Hebrews 4:12, 13). He reveals to us who we really are, both inside and out! In other words, by using the spiritual law, the Holy Spirit shows us our wickedness, and He does not lie!

However, the Holy Spirit does more than to just convict us of our sin, inside and out. In our desperate need, we cry out, “Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” The answer is “I thank God—through Christ Jesus our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25). In other words, the Holy Spirit not only shows us our desperate situation but also points us to the righteousness of Jesus Christ in order to be able to stand in the judgment (John 16:8). That is to say, after Jesus left for heaven, there is no one who can lead us to Jesus but the Holy Spirit (see John 16:13-15). If we reject the voice of the Holy Spirit who shows us our sinfulness and our need of Christ, there is nothing more that God can do for us. (Hebrews 10:25-31). If we reject the Holy Spirit, we have no way of reaching Jesus because the Holy Spirit does Christ's work on earth.

However, the Holy Spirit performs a third work. He also leads us into ALL truth (John 16:13). This stands to reason, because He is called the “Spirit of Truth” (John 14:16-17). John 14:18 explains that Jesus comes to us through the Holy Spirit who is the representative of Christ (John 14:26). But, we ask, what is the Truth which the Holy Spirit leads us to? Jesus explained that the Word of God is Truth (John 17:17). So the Spirit leads us to the Word of God. This is why the apostle Paul tells us that the “sword of the Spirit is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). David tells us that the Law of God is the truth (Psalm 119:142).

Thus, in conclusion, we see that the Holy Spirit shows us our sin by means of the Law, leads us to Christ as the solution for sin, and guides us into all truth. To reject this work of the Holy Spirit would obviously mean that there is no way God can reach you.

Our Response to the Holy Spirit

We can choose to respond to the wooing voice of the Holy Spirit or we can choose to “resist” (Acts 7:51), “quench” (1 Thessalonians 5:19), or “grieve” Him (Ephesians 4:30). We can choose to harden our hearts when He convicts us of sin, leads us to Christ and reveals the truth of God’s Word to us (Hebrews 3:13; Ephesians 4:17-19). The Holy Spirit does not give up when we say no to Him the first time, the second or the third time. He is relentless and labors long with us. Yet every ray of light rejected, deafens our ears a little bit more until the Holy Spirit speaks and we can't hear His voice anymore. The conscience has been seared as by a hot iron (1 Timothy 4: 2) and the heart no longer responds.

You see, the unpardonable sin is not any one particular sin that we commit. It is the culmination of a process where we continually say “no” to the voice of the Holy Spirit who shows us our sins, leads us to Jesus and reveals the truth to us. The Holy Spirit is like an alarm clock. If you let an alarm clock continue sounding and don't get up, the time will come when you will sleep through it when it sounds! The Holy Spirit is like a transmitter and we are like a receiver. If we smash the receiver (our conscience) it will not matter how much the Holy Spirit transmits His message. It takes a transmitter and a receiver for communication to exist!

There are three kinds of people who are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. Let's take a look at them:

The first is the self-righteous sinner: This is the kind of sinner that Jesus referred to in Matthew 12:28, 31-32. Jesus had just performed powerful signs and wonders and He had taught the Word of God with authority. This left no doubt that He was the Messiah. Time and again God had showed the religious leaders that Jesus was the Son of God. But these self-righteous people had the audacity to attribute the work and teaching of Jesus to the prince of demons, Beelzebub.

The story of the Pharisee and the publican is another illustration of this kind of sinner (see Luke 18:9-14) as is also the story of the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22). How do you help someone who doesn't feel the need to be helped?

How do you cure one who will not admit that he is sick? How do you help one who is willfully blind to see? In the book of Revelation, the church of Laodicea was and is in danger of committing this sin. This church, living in the very end time, is so self-satisfied that she is blind, miserable, naked and poor and yet she thinks she is just the opposite! For this reason, Jesus threatened to spew Laodicea out of His mouth (cf. Revelation 3: 14-22). The Jewish church in Christ's day was of this type as well. They felt self-righteous and in need of nothing. Therefore, the Holy Spirit could do nothing with them. They considered themselves sinless, they rejected Christ and the truth of the Word of God by their traditions. It must be frustrating for the Holy Spirit to do all in His power to reach someone, and yet to fail because of a refusal to listen to His voice.

The second type of sinner who is in danger of committing the unpardonable sin is the unrighteous unbeliever. Pharaoh is an example of this kind of sinner. Some have been puzzled by the repeated statements in Exodus that "God hardened the heart of Pharaoh." If God hardened his heart, how can Pharaoh be responsible for his actions? First of all, it is necessary to realize that Exodus also says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (cf. Exodus 7: 13, 14, 22, 8:15, 19; 9:12, 34-35; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). Secondly, to use an example, the sun which shines on the clay hardens it but the same sun also melts ice. God's truth is like the sun; it shone on Pharaoh. Pharaoh could have chosen to allow the truth to melt his heart but instead he hardened it. The Spirit spoke but Pharaoh refused to hear his voice and make the right choice.

Other examples of unbelievers who committed the unpardonable sin are the Amorites (Genesis 15:16), the antediluvian civilization (Genesis 6:3, 5, 11-13; 2 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 11:7), Felix (Acts 24:25); Agrippa (Acts 26:28), Herod and Pilate (Luke 23:8, 9; Matthew 27:3-4, 19-20, 24; John 18), and Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:8-11).

The third group that are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin are unrighteous, worldly Christians. You might say, "How can you talk of unrighteous Christians? Is this not an oxymoron?" The answer is that there is a

certain category of Christians who are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. Who are they?

Paul described this type of Christian in 2 Timothy 3:1-5:

*“But know this, that in the last days, perilous times will come: ² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having **a form of godliness** but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”*

They are people who claim to believe in Jesus who violate the law with impunity under the pretext that Jesus did it all. They claim that because we are not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:14) and we are not required to keep the Law. They claim that victory over sin is impossible in this life. They boast that Christ kept the Law for us so we don't have to keep it ourselves. Jesus described these “counterfeit Christians”:

*“Not everyone who **says to Me**, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied **in Your name**, cast out demons **in Your name**, and done many wonders **in Your name**?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:21-23)*

As we have seen, the Holy Spirit convicts us that we are transgressors of the Law. When we see our sinfulness in the light of the Law, we feel a need for Christ as the Holy Spirit draws us to Him. However, if the Law was nailed to the cross, as some believe, how can the Holy Spirit show us our sin? Why would we even feel a need for Christ? In fact, why would we even need grace if there is no Law?

A young Christian man once told me, “I don't have to keep the Law because I am not under law but under grace.” I asked him, “Do you repent?” He answered, “Of course I do.” I then asked him, “And what do you repent of?” “That's easy,” he answered, “I repent of sin.” And then I asked him the final question: “And what

is the definition of the sin you repent of?" He looked at me, knowing that he had worked himself into a corner. I then read 1 John 3:4, "Sin is the transgression of the law" and said to him: "How can you repent of sin if there is no Law? How can you feel a need for Christ if the Law does not point out that you are a sinner? Actually, to get rid of the Law means to get rid of grace.

Christians frequently use certain texts of the apostle Paul to excuse sin. Three of these are Romans 6:14; 3:28; 5:20. But if Christians read the verses that immediately follow, they would see clearly that Paul was not giving people the license to disobey God's Law. (See Romans 6:15; 3:31; 6:1).

There are many examples of this type of sinner in the Bible. There is King Saul who received the Holy Spirit at the beginning of his reign (1 Samuel 16:6, 9, 10; 15:22, 23; 16:14), Judas Iscariot who claimed to be loyal to Jesus but became identified with covetousness (Luke 22:3), Achan (Joshua 7:12-14), Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-11), the man in the wilderness who trampled on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36), Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-10), and ancient Israel before the Babylonian captivity (2 Chronicles 36:15-16). Paul also mentions two individuals who committed this sin (1 Timothy 1:19-20).

All three of these kinds of sinners have a common denominator: They really do not see how serious sin is. They therefore feel no need to come to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing. They also refuse to embrace the truth as it is revealed by the Holy Spirit. Those who commit the unpardonable sin, do so in the face of great light. In each of the cases above, those who committed the unpardonable sin had an abundance of knowledge imparted by the Holy Spirit.

Obeying Immediately

It is a serious matter to love darkness rather than light (John 3:19-20). The Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105). To reject the Word is to reject the light. When a person spends too long in the dark, the optic nerve is damaged and blindness ensues. Then the person dwells in darkness the rest of his life. To choose to live in spiritual darkness will do the

same thing spiritually (Matthew 6:22-23). We must choose to become children of the light (John 12:35, 36.)

At the end of human history, the whole earth will be enlightened with the Word of God (Revelation 18:1). On the other hand, Satan will be working to keep people in darkness. In fact, 2 Thessalonians 2 wrote about the great delusions in store for the world. Why will the wicked be lost? Verses 10-13 explain that people did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved and for this reason, they will be deceived by Satan's lie:

“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, ¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹ And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, ¹² that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

Did you know that it is actually possible to repeat a lie so many times that you gradually come to believe that it is the truth? This is what is happening to the world today. Folks, there are limits to God's forbearance. Revelation 22:11 speaks of the moment when the whole world will have taken sides and probation will then close. Everyone will have made their decision. What side will you be on?

What must we do then? We must learn to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. This is not some mystical, esoteric, meditative experience. The Holy Spirit works through the Word. He uses His sword! The Word is His sword. Study the Word. Pray for the Holy Spirit to show you your sins. Obey God's truth the moment it is revealed to you. Do not become sluggish. The book of Hebrews tells us that the first step toward the unpardonable sin is to not grow spiritually (Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:1-8).g

The story of *Gulliver's Travels* has a great lesson for us. When Gulliver ended up on the island of the pygmies and they began tying his arms and legs with thread, he was not too concerned. After all, who can't break strands of thread?

However, eventually he was bound with so much thread that he could not escape.

Proverbs 5:22 teaches us the same lesson about the wicked man:

“His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin.”

We might say, “This sin will not count this time,” or, “I will delay following this truth until a later time.” The passing of time will not make it easier to overcome sin or to obey the truth. If anything, the passing of time will make it increasingly difficult.

We could compare the process of the unpardonable sin with the hardening of the arteries. The arteries do not get clogged up all at once. It is a long, slow process but the ultimate result is a heart attack and physical death. In the same way, every time we reject the voice of the Holy Spirit; every time we hang on to our cherished sins; every time we neglect to come to Jesus; every time that we refuse to obey the truth; our spiritual arteries are getting clogged up. The process is long and slow, but ultimately it will end in a spiritual heart attack and everlasting death.

Is it not urgent for us to give our sins to Jesus? Is it not of critical importance to obey the truth as it is found in God's Word? The book of Hebrews admonishes us: “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’” Hebrews 3:7-8. And Jesus tells us, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* Revelation 3:20. Will you listen to the voice of Jesus and let Him in? I pray so!



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #23 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT PROPHETS AND PSYCHICS

Introduction

A few years ago I decided to preach a series titled “*What Jesus Said*”. The objective was to present the full message of the Bible from the perspective of the New Testament, particularly from the four Gospels and the book of Acts. It was actually quite easy to find abundant information on all the doctrines of the Bible in the New Testament, especially in the gospels and the book of Acts.

However, as I prayed and meditated on how best to present from the Gospels and the book of Acts the manifestation of the gift of prophecy in the end-time church, I kept coming to a dead end. As I researched, I did find much valuable information about prophets, both false and true, in the Gospels and Acts. However, I was particularly interested in presenting the subject matter from the perspective of the end-time gift as it would exist in the remnant church.

I struggled with this for several weeks and then one day as the deadline for the meetings was drawing ever closer, I was sitting in my office, praying and reflecting upon this, when suddenly, like a bolt of lightning, a thought came across my mind. It was almost like I heard a voice saying, “*Study the life, message and mission of John the Baptist.*” So I went to Strong’s Concordance and looked up every reference to John the Baptist. As I studied, I discovered a striking parallel

between the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist and the prophet that God raised up to guide the end-time remnant church.

Part #1: The Mission and Message of John the Baptist

Great Advent Revival

John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, arose after an extended period of prophetic silence in the history of Israel. In fact, for over 400 years between Malachi and the birth of John, there was no living prophetic voice in Israel. During the period between the Testaments, Israel lost sight of much of the truth of God. A revival and reformation was desperately needed.

It was the spring and summer of the year 27 AD and momentous events were taking place in and around Jerusalem. A great religious revival was transpiring among God's people. They believed that significant events were about to occur. There was messianic fever. The final week of the seventy-week prophecy was about to begin and there was great expectancy among the people. Multitudes flocked to John the Baptist in the wilderness, confessing their sins and being baptized by him. This is how Matthew described it:

"Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him⁶ and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins" Matthew 3:5, 6

The primary reason for the excitement was that the events of the final week of the seventy-week prophecy of Daniel 9 were about to begin (Daniel 9:24-27). Another reason for the messianic fever was that the Old Testament had ended with the promise that God would send Elijah before the great and terrible Day of the Lord. John the Baptist seemed to fit the description of the promised Elijah. He lived in the desert like Elijah, he ate what Elijah ate, he was clothed like Elijah and he called the people to repentance like Elijah did. Immediately before beginning His ministry in Galilee, Jesus alluded to the prophecy of the seventy weeks when He announced:

*“The **time is fulfilled**, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:15*

Jesus spoke these words immediately after the Holy Spirit anointed Him at His baptism (Acts 10:38) and the prophecy of the seventy weeks had already predicted that the Messiah would be anointed at the beginning of the last week (Daniel 9:25).

Not the Prophet

John the Baptist was a **humble and modest man**. He did not seek to attract attention to himself. He knew that God had called him to give testimony to the Messiah. He said, regarding the Messiah:

“It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.” John 1:27

When the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask John if he was the promised Christ, or Elijah, or **the prophet**, he firmly responded, *“I am not”* (John 1:19-21).

Messenger of the Lord

If John did not claim to be the prophet, what was his title? Bible prophecy had already announced that the precursor of the coming of Messiah would be **the Lord’s messenger** (Malachi 3:1). The mission and title of the precursor had already been predicted over four hundred years **before he was born**. Jesus said about John:

*“This is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send **My messenger** before Your face, who will **prepare** your way before you.’” Luke 7:27*

More than a Prophet

Jesus announced that John the Baptist was not a mere prophet but **more** than a prophet and that there had been no greater prophet:

*“But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and **more than a prophet**.” Luke 7:26*

*“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has **not risen one greater** than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Matthew 11:11*

John was **more than a prophet** because he was the **connecting link** between the two Testaments and was called to prepare the way for the first coming of the Messiah. No other prophet could make this claim.

No Miracles

The Jews were impressed with signs and wonders and they were always asking for signs to prove whether a messenger was from God or not (Matthew 12:38, 39; 16:4; John 2:18; 4:48; 6:30; 12:18). John performed **no miracle** or sign and yet his message was true:

*“Then many came to Him and said, ‘John performed **no sign**, but all the things that **John spoke** about this Man were true.’ ⁴² And many believed in Him there.” John 10:41, 42*

It was the truthfulness of **John’s words** that authenticated him as the Lord’s messenger, not the miracles that he performed.

The Testimony of Jesus

John the Baptist had the **testimony of Jesus**. The words *testimony* and *witness* are synonymous. In fact, the NIV and other versions use the word *testimony* in place of *witness* in the following verses. Jesus said about John:

*“If I bear **witness** of Myself, My **witness** is not true. ³² There is another who bears **witness** of Me, and I know that the **witness** which He **witnesses** of Me is true. ³³ You have sent to John, and he has borne **witness** to the truth.” John 5:31-33*

Not the Light

When John was asked if he was the promised light; he decidedly answered that he was not. He answered that he came to bear testimony to the light:

*“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all through him might believe. ⁸**He was not that Light**, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. ⁹That was the true Light that gives light to every man coming into the world.” John 1:6-9*

A Lesser Light

John was called to bear witness to **the** Light, and yet he was also a light; a **lesser light**. Jesus referred to John as bright and **shining lamp** (*lúchnos*: a lamp or candle; John 5:35). Clearly, John the Baptist was a **lesser light** who was called to lead men and women to the **Greater Light**—Jesus Christ. In John 5:36 Jesus referred to Himself as the “Greater Light”:

*“He [**John the Baptist**] was the burning and shining lamp [*lúchnos*], and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. ³⁶ But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.” John 5:35, 36*

The Scriptures a Lesser Light

Jesus also taught that the Old Testament Scriptures were a lesser light that gave witness to Him. He told a group of Jews:

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.” John 5:39

Thus, there were **two sources** that gave witness to Jesus, the **written** Scriptures of the Old Testament and **John the Baptist**. One witness was **canonical** (the Old Testament) and the other was not (John the Baptist).

No book can fully reveal the person of Jesus Christ in all His glory. The Bible is merely a **pale reflection** of Jesus, the person. The greater light is the sun and the lesser light is the moon (Genesis 1:16). The light of the moon has the purpose of reflecting the light of the sun to the earth in the darkness of the night. Likewise, the Old Testament Scriptures and John the Baptist were lesser lights meant to point to the Greater Light!

Why Two Lesser Lights?

At this point, a question screams to be answered: Why did Israel need a non-canonical lesser light such as John the Baptist if they had the other written lesser light of the Old Testament Scriptures? The answer is quite simple: In the period between the two testaments, God's people had fallen into **gross darkness** because they had **neglected and misinterpreted** the written Scriptures:

"Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.

*²For behold, the **darkness shall cover the earth**, and **deep darkness** the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you."* Isaiah 60:1, 2

*"The people who **sat in darkness** have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and **shadow of death** Light has dawned."* Matthew 4:16

All sorts of traditions, false teachings and practices came in during this period and therefore the people **needed a lesser light** to help the people see the Greater Light in the written Scriptures. For this reason, God raised up John to help the people discern the Greater Light.

If I enter a dark room where I have never been before and I need to find the light switch, it would help if I had the "lesser light" of **a flashlight** to lead me to the light switch to turn on the "greater light".

No New Light

The role of John was not to bring new light but rather to turn the attention of the people to the light already given in the Scriptures so that they could discern the Messiah in them. He was to awaken interest in the Old Testament prophecies

concerning the Messiah, to amplify and explain them and to correct misconceptions of the people. The role of John was not to **supplement** the Old Testament Scriptures, but rather to **complement** them.

You see, those who claimed to be God's people and boasted about having the Old Testament Scriptures were violating their every principle. They claimed to be waiting for the Messiah. They professed to love God. They boasted of having a close relationship with Him, and yet they ended up crucifying Him because they misunderstood the written Scriptures of the Old Testament and rejected the clarifying light given by the lesser light, John the Baptist!

Because they rejected the lesser light (John) and misunderstood the written Scriptures, they ended up rejecting the Greater Light (Jesus)! The people boasted, "we have Moses," and yet they did not understand or practice his teachings:

*"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which **testify of Me**.⁴⁰ But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life....⁴⁵ Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust.⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he **wrote about Me**.⁴⁷ But if you do not **believe his writings**, how will you **believe My words**?" John 5:39, 40, 45-47*

The role of John was to attract the attention of the people back to the written Scriptures already given so that they could see Jesus. John did not bring new light; he sought to give the people an understanding of the light already given. If **the Jews** had understood and obeyed the writings of Moses and the prophets, there would have been no need to raise up John the Baptist!

John drew the attention of the people to the Old Testament prophecies that pointed to the Messiah. He introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29). This was no new, revolutionary idea. The people knew all about the Old Testament sanctuary service and the Lamb taken to the slaughter in Isaiah 53. But didn't John institute baptism? The answer is no. Baptism was well known in the days of John as a symbol of cleansing. The Jews knew that water was used for cleansing in the sanctuary service. They also knew that leprosy was a symbol of sin and that Naaman had submerged himself in the Jordan River seven times and had

come out clean! The apostle Paul even referred later to the baptism of Israel in the **Red Sea** (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

John exalted the Old Testament and made it come alive and yet he did not add anything of substance to it. He merely explained how it was being fulfilled in the Messiah and rebuked, reproved and corrected those who had gone astray from it.

A Pain in the Neck

John was a fly in the ointment; a pain in the neck; a speck in the eye. He was no pushover. He was not politically correct. He told it like it was! He rebuked sin fearlessly and played no favorites and, of course, won numerous enemies. John rebuked Herod to his face for committing adultery with his brother's wife and lost his head as a result. John was totally unafraid of speaking the truth:

*“As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A **reed shaken by the wind**?⁸ But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in **soft garments**? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.’” Matthew 11:7, 8*

Restorer and Preparer

John was called to **prepare a people** for the first coming of Jesus (Luke 1:17; Matthew 3:1-3; Malachi 3:1). By repentance, revival and reformation (bearing fruit), the people were to wait expectantly for the arrival of the bridegroom, Jesus Christ. John was the connecting link or liaison between Israel (the bride) and Christ (the Groom) and he was called to prepare the way for the wedding (John 3:28-30).

Jesus affirmed that John was Elijah, so we must understand the role of Elijah in the Old Testament. Elijah was not an innovator. He was the restorer. He did not introduce **any new truths**. He simply called Israel to repent and return to the religion of the fathers. This is why he built the altar of the Lord and invoked the God of the covenant founders of the Old Testament—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Malachi 4 tells us that the end-time Elijah will also be a great restorer. Matthew 17:11, 12 and Luke 1:16, 17 tell us that the New Testament Elijah—John the Baptist—came to **restore** all things and to **prepare** the way for the coming Messiah:

*“And he will **turn** many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.¹⁷ He **[John the Baptist]** will also go before Him **[Jesus]** in the spirit and power of Elijah, **'to turn** the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and **the disobedient to the wisdom of the just**, to make **ready** a people **prepared** for the Lord.” Luke 1:16-17*

*“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,² and saying, **'Repent** for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’³ For this is He who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: **“Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.”**’” Matthew 3:1-3*

*“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will **restore all things**.’” Matthew 17:11*

In New Testament times, the friend of the bridegroom was to make preparations for the wedding so that all was ready when the bridegroom came (Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19, 20; John 3:29; Matthew 22:1-14). There was no glory for the friend of the bridegroom. All the glory belonged to the groom who married the bride. So to speak, the friend of the bridegroom decreased so that the groom might increase.

The Old Testament contained prophecies about the Bridegroom, Jesus, coming to marry his bride, Israel. The matchmaker (John the Baptist) had come to make all the arrangements for the wedding, but the bride rejected the Groom! By rejecting the preparatory work of the matchmaker, the Jews rejected the Bridegroom as well. The very people He came to serve mistreated John the Baptist.

Despised and Rejected

The enemies of John accused him of being **demon possessed**:

*“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘**He has a demon.**’”
Matthew 11:18*

Jesus rebuked the chief priests and the elders for **mistreating John**:

*“For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and **you did not believe him**; but tax collectors and harlots **believed him**; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and **believe him**.” Matthew 21:32*

The **scholars** and **ministers** of the day rejected John. The people rejoiced in John’s message, but the leadership despised him:

*“And when all **the people** heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. ³⁰ But the **Pharisees** and **lawyers** rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.” Luke 7:29, 30*

Because the religious leaders knew not John, they knew not Jesus when He came (John 1:10-11 and 17:12 use the identical expression “know him not”). And these leaders were the very people who claimed to understand and teach the Old Testament Scriptures! By rejecting the lesser light, they misinterpreted the other lesser light and therefore, they rejected the Greater Light:

*“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will **restore** all things. ¹² But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they **did not know him** but did to him **whatever they wished**. **Likewise** the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.’ ¹³ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of **John the Baptist**.” Matthew 17:11-13*

True prophets have never been loved by the people to whom they are sent. Before the Babylonian captivity, God told Israel:

*“And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because **He had compassion** on His people and on His dwelling place. ¹⁶ But they **mocked the messengers** of God, **despised His words**, and **scoffed at His prophets**, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was **no remedy**.” 2 Chronicles 36:15, 16*

And Jesus rebuked Jerusalem for the way they treated the prophets:

*“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who **kills the prophets** and **stones [like Stephen]** those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Matthew 23:37*

Jeremiah was thrown into the cistern, **Elijah** was hunted like a wild beast, **Isaiah** was sawn asunder in a hollow log, **John** the Baptist was beheaded, **Jesus** was crucified, **Stephen** was stoned, and the list goes on.

Prophets are not Omniscient

Prophets are not omniscient or infallible. They were always weak human beings in need of God’s grace. With the passing of time, the prophets **grew in their understanding** of truth. At first they might **not have fully understood** the message that God was attempting to impart. John the Baptist did not fully comprehend the kind of kingdom that the Messiah would establish. He believed that there would be only **one coming** of the Messiah. At the beginning of his ministry, John predicted the Messiah would purge the faithful and burn the wicked with unquenchable fire:

*“His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He **[the coming Messiah]** will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with **unquenchable fire**.” Matthew 3:12 (See also verses 7 and 10)*

Ellen White made some incisive remarks about John’s limited understanding of the Messiah’s coming when he began to preach in the wilderness:

*“John **did not fully understand** the nature of the Messiah's kingdom. He looked for Israel to be delivered from her national foes; but the coming of a King in righteousness, and the establishment of Israel as a holy nation, was the great object of his hope.” The Desire of Ages, p. 103*

*“During the weeks that followed **[the baptism of Jesus]**, John with new interest studied the prophecies and the teaching of the sacrificial service. **He did not distinguish clearly** the two phases of Christ's work—as a suffering sacrifice and a conquering king—but he saw that His coming had a deeper significance than priests or people had discerned.” The Desire of Ages, p. 136*

When Jesus did not appear to measure up to his expectations, John sent a message to Jesus with two of his disciples asking Him if He was the expected Messiah or they were to expect another (Matthew 11:1-3). Was John a false prophet because he did not fully understand the work of the Messiah? Was his work as a prophet any less trustworthy because his knowledge and understanding were limited due to his own misconceptions? John grew in his understanding and when his disciples brought back the report from the lips of Jesus, John finally understood, but it took him time to clearly grasp the truth. One should be willing to evaluate the message of a prophet in the light of his entire career and not the limited understanding at the beginning of his career.

Part #2: The Life, Message and Mission of Ellen G. White

In the 1830's and 1840's there was a great revival in the eastern United States. At the time, the established churches had fallen into a rigid and arid formalism that sapped their vitality. In the midst of this deplorable condition of the churches, God raised up a movement to prepare the way for the Lord's second coming.

All over New England and elsewhere, preachers arose proclaiming the need to prepare for the soon coming of Jesus. However, the message was bitterly opposed by the religious leaders of the various denominations. Church members were expelled for attending Millerite revival meetings and William Miller himself became the object of scorn even to the point of danger to his life.

These churches claimed to have the truth. They claimed that their doctrines and practices were based on the Scriptures. However, they had not progressed beyond the Protestant Reformation. When the revival movement reached its climax, printing presses ran day and night proclaiming the soon second coming of Jesus. However, they were bitterly disappointed. In the aftermath of the disappointment, God raised up a prophet to lead out in a restoration of the Bible truths that had been lost by the church during the Dark Ages. The name of that prophet was Ellen G. White.

No Claim to be a Prophet

Like John the Baptist, Ellen White preferred not to be called a prophet although she truly was. In her own words:

"During the discourse [at Battle Creek], I said that I did not claim to be a prophetess. Some were surprised at this statement, and as much is being said in regard to it, I will make an explanation. Others have called me a prophetess, but I have never assumed that title. I have not felt that it was my duty thus to designate myself. Those who boldly assume that they are prophets in this our day are often a reproach to the cause of Christ." 1SM 35, 36

"When I was last in Battle Creek, I said before a large congregation that I did not claim to be a prophetess. Twice I referred to this matter, intending each time to make the statement, "I do not claim to be a prophetess." If I spoke otherwise than this, let all now understand that what I had in mind to say was that I do not claim the title of prophet or prophetess." 1SM 35

"Early in my youth I was asked several times: Are you a prophet? I have ever responded [that] I am the Lord's messenger. I know that many have called me a prophet, but I have made no claim to this title. My Savior declared me to be His messenger. "Your work," He instructed me, "is to bear My word." 1SM 32

The Lord's Messenger

What, then, did Ellen White prefer to be called? The answer is that she repeatedly referred to herself as the Lord's messenger:

"Early in my youth I was asked several times: Are you a prophet? I have ever responded; I am the Lord's messenger. I know that many have called me a prophet, but I have made no claim to this title. My Savior declared me to be His messenger." 1 SM 32

"I have had no claims to make, only that I am instructed that I am the Lord's messenger; that He called me in my youth to be His messenger, to receive His word, and to give a clear and decided message in the name of the Lord Jesus." 1SM 32

*"To claim to be a prophetess is something that I have never done. If others call me by that name, I have no controversy with them. But my work has covered **so many lines** that I cannot call myself other than a **messenger**, sent to bear a message from the Lord to His people, and to take up work in any line that He points out." 1SM 34*

No Miracle Worker

Some people rejected Ellen White's work because she was not a **miracle worker**:

*"Some declare their unbelief in the work that the Lord has given me to do because, as they say, "Mrs. E. G. White **works no miracles**." But those who look for **miracles** as a **sign** of divine guidance are in grave danger of deception." 2SM 53, 54*

More than a Conventional Prophet

Like John the Baptist, Ellen White's work was **far greater** than that of a conventional prophet. She was more in the **line of Moses** who had a long trajectory in leading God's people out of Egyptian bondage to the borders of the Promised Land. God chose her to **restore the truth** in all the dimensions of life. She herself repeatedly stated:

*"My work includes **much more** than this name [**prophetess**] signifies. I regard myself as a messenger, entrusted by the Lord with messages for His people.... My commission embraces the **work of a prophet**, but it does not end there. It embraces **much more** than the minds of those who have been sowing the seeds of unbelief can comprehend." 1SM 36*

*"Why have I not **claimed** to be a prophet? Because in these days many who boldly claim that they are prophets are a reproach to the cause of Christ; and because my work includes **much more** than the word 'prophet' signifies." 1SM 32*

*"To claim to be a prophetess is something that I have never done. If others call me by that name, I have no controversy with them. But my work has **covered so many lines** that I cannot call myself other than a messenger, sent to bear a message from the Lord to His people, and to take up work in any line that He points out." 1SM 34*

Ellen White wrote on a broad range of subjects. Our church institutions and our personal lives in every dimension would be far better if we followed her counsel in the following books and compilations:

- Principles on diet (*Counsels on Diet and Foods*)
- Principles on true Education (*Education, Fundamentals of Christian Education*)
- Principles on the publishing ministry (*Counsels to Writers and Editors*)
- Principles on administration of the work (*Testimonies to Ministers*)
- Ministerial principles (*Gospel Workers*)
- Principles of evangelistic outreach (*Evangelism*)
- Principles of theology (*The Conflict Series*)
- Principles on marriage and home life (*The Adventist Home*)
- Principles of psychology (*Mind, Character and Personality*)
- Principles for a devotional life (*The Desire of Ages, Steps to Christ*)
- Principles for training children (*Child Guidance*)
- Principles on finance (*Counsels on Stewardship*)
- Principles on health (*The Ministry of Healing, Counsels on Health*)
- Principles for operating medical institutions (*Medical Ministry*)

The Testimony of Jesus

Like John the Baptist, Ellen White had the **testimony of Jesus**:

*“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have **the testimony of Jesus Christ**.” Revelation 12:17*

*“And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For **the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy**.” Revelation 19:10*

*“Then he said to me, “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your **brethren the prophets**, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.” Revelation 22:9*

*“This prophecy [Revelation 12:17] points out clearly that the **remnant church** will acknowledge God in His law and will have **the prophetic gift**. Obedience to the law of God and the **spirit of prophecy** has always distinguished the true people of God, and the test is usually given on present manifestations.” Loma Linda Messages, p. 33*

A Lesser Light

Ellen White was a lesser light chosen by God to lead men and women to the greater light, **Jesus Christ**:

*“Little heed is given to the Bible and the Lord has given a **lesser light** to lead men and women to the **greater light**.” 3SM 30*

What did Ellen White mean when she referred to “the greater light” and the “lesser light”? Was “the greater light” the Bible and “the lesser light” her writings, as has been traditionally believed? Let’s allow Ellen White to explain herself elsewhere in her writings:

*“The prophet John was the connecting link between the two dispensations. As God’s representative he stood forth to show the relation of the law and the prophets to the Christian dispensation. He was the **lesser light**, which was to be **followed by a greater**. The Holy Spirit illuminated the mind of John that he might shed light upon his people; but no other light ever has shone or ever will shine so clearly upon fallen man as that which **emanated from the teaching and example of Jesus**. Christ and His mission had been but **dim ly understood** as typified in the **shadowy sacrifices [one lesser light]**. **Even John [the other lesser light]** had not fully comprehended the future, immortal life through the Savior.” The Desire of Ages, p. 220*

*“The religion of the Jews, in consequence of their departure from God, consisted mostly in ceremony. John was the **lesser light**, which was to be followed by a*

greater light. He was to shake the confidence of the people in their traditions, and call their sins to remembrance, and lead them to repentance; that they might be prepared to appreciate **the work of Christ**.” *Review and Herald*, volume 41, number 17, April 8, 1873

“It was not his **[John’s]** privilege to be with Christ and witness the manifestation of divine power attending the **greater light**.” *Conflict and Courage*, p. 279

“With the first advent of Christ there was ushered in an era of **greater light and glory [than the lesser light of the Old Testament]**; but it would indeed be sinful ingratitude to despise and ridicule **the lesser light** because a **fuller and more glorious light** had dawned. Those who despise the blessings and glory of the **Jewish age [the lesser light]** are not prepared to be benefited by the **preaching of the gospel [the greater light]**. The brightness of the Father’s glory, and the excellence and perfection of His sacred law, are only understood through the atonement made upon Calvary by His Dear Son; but even the atonement loses its significance when the law of God is rejected.” *This Day with God*, p. 246

Traditionally it has been taught that **the Bible is the greater light** and the writings of Ellen White are the lesser light. Some have taken the word *lesser* to mean “**inferior**”, “less inspired” and “of lesser authority”. That is, they believe that Ellen White was less inspired than the biblical prophets and that therefore she had less authority.

But those who believe this miss the point. As we have shown, **both** the Bible and Ellen White **are lesser lights** that lead to Jesus Christ, the Greater Light. Ellen White’s inspiration and authority are equal to that of the biblical prophets, but she was called for a **different function**. She was not called to bring forth **new truth**, but rather to amplify the truths already revealed and to correct those who go astray from the truth to bring them back to the previously revealed truth.

Why Two Lesser Lights?

As in the times of John, today two sources give witness to Jesus, one **canonical** (the Bible) and the other **non-canonical** (the writings of Ellen G. White). As with John, the purpose of the writings of Ellen White is to focus attention **on the**

written Scriptures that had been misinterpreted and buried in the Dark Ages. If God's people had studied the Word with a sincere desire to know God's will and to obey it, it would not have been necessary for God to call Ellen White.

Christians today who claim to follow the Bible, keep Sunday, eat pork, believe that immortal souls leave the body at death, that the wicked will burn in hell forever, that we should baptize infants by sprinkling, and so on. God called Ellen White to restore that which had been torn down during the period of papal dominion. He called her to lead out in completing the Protestant Reformation.

Ellen White herself clarified the purpose of her writings in Testimonies for the Church, volume 5, pp. 663-66:

"Brother J would confuse the mind by seeking to make it appear that the light God has given through the Testimonies is an addition to the word of God, but in this he presents the matter in a false light. God has seen fit in this manner to bring the minds of His people to His word, to give them a clearer understanding of it. The word of God is sufficient to enlighten the most beclouded mind and may be understood by those who have any desire to understand it. But notwithstanding all this, some who profess to make the word of God their study are found living in direct opposition to its plainest teachings. Then, to leave men and women without excuse, God gives plain and pointed testimonies, bringing them back to the word that they have neglected to follow. The word of God abounds in general principles for the formation of correct habits of living, and the testimonies, general and personal, have been calculated to call their attention more especially to these principles.

"If you had made God's word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the Testimonies. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourselves with God's inspired Book that He has sought to reach you by simple, direct testimonies, calling your attention to the words of inspiration which you had neglected to obey, and urging you to fashion your lives in accordance with its pure and elevated teachings.

*“The Lord designs to warn you, to reprove, to counsel, through the testimonies given, and to impress your minds with the importance of the **truth of His word**. The written testimonies are **not to give new light**, but to impress vividly upon the heart the **truths of inspiration already revealed**. Man's duty to God and to his fellow man has been distinctly specified **in God's word**, yet but few of you are obedient to the light given. **Additional truth is not brought out**; but God has through the Testimonies **simplified** the great truths already given and in His own chosen way brought them before the people to **awaken and impress** the mind with them, that all may be left **without excuse**.”*

In other places she repeats the same purpose of her writings:

*“Above all other books, the **Word of God** must be our study, the great textbook, the basis of all education.” Testimonies for the Church, volume 6, p. 131*

*“The Testimonies are **not to belittle** the Word of God, but to exalt it and **attract minds to it**, that the beautiful simplicity of truth may impress all.” Testimonies for the Church, volume 5, p. 665*

God called Ellen White to be a **restorer** of the truths of Scripture that had been lost during the period of papal dominion. John the Baptist did not bring forth any new truths not contained in the Old Testament; neither did the historical Elijah. Both called God's professed people to come **back** to the true worship of Jehovah and to **restore** the teachings from which they had gone astray. Like the historical Elijah, John the Baptist called the people to repentance. He did not bring any new truths but sought to **restore, clarify and amplify the truth**. The same is true of the mission of Ellen White.

But Aren't the Written Scriptures Sufficient?

Even some Seventh-day Adventist members wonder why we need Ellen White's writings if we have the Bible. For the same reason that the **Jews needed John** even though they had the writings of the Old Testament! The Jews did not understand or obey the Scriptures, so God in His mercy gave them **a helping hand** by **simplifying** and **amplifying** the truths already given and correcting their misconceptions. Ellen White is not a source of new light, but rather one who

amplifies and simplifies the old light. And her writings **correct** those who err from Bible truth, bringing them **back to the Word**.

I was once listening to a call-in religious radio talk show in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A pastor was answering questions from the listening audience. As I was listening, a person called and asked a two-part question: *“Is it a sin to smoke and will God send me to hell for smoking?”* I was captivated by the question and curious to see how the pastor would answer. To the first question the pastor answered: *“I can assure you that it is not a sin to smoke because the Bible does not say, ‘Thou shalt not smoke.’”* And then the pastor answered the second question: *“With regards to your second question I can assure you that you will not go to hell but rather you will make it to heaven quicker!”*

My question was: Had the pastor forgotten that the Bible says, *“Thou shalt not kill”*? Had he not read the Scripture that says that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and God will destroy those who defile the temple?

An Example of Ellen White’s Mission

Around the same time that God called Ellen White, another person arose claiming to have the prophetic gift. He purportedly found and translated some **gold plates** in **Palmyra, New York**, written in an ancient **Egyptian dialect**. The result was *The Book of Mormon*. The Latter Day Saints refer to this book as *“another Testament of Jesus Christ.”* It is considered a **supplement** or **addition** to the Word of God (along with *The Pearl of Great Price* and *Doctrine and Covenants*). The Mormons, **without apology**, affirm that these books contain truths that are **not found in the Bible**. One wonders why there is **no manuscript trail** for *The Book of Mormon* and why Joseph Smith translated the plates into **King James English** rather than the English of his day!

When the Latter-day Saints pay a visit to a home, their first task is to convince the prospective convert that Joseph Smith was a true prophet and that *The Book of Mormon* must be studied as a **supplement** to the Bible. As the studies continue, the Bible and the *Book of Mormon* are used together.

Ellen White and the Bible

With Seventh-day Adventists the **process is reversed**. The catechumen is taught the truth from the **Bible alone** and once all the doctrines have been clearly presented from the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy is presented, **not as a supplement**, but rather as a **complement** to the Bible. This is not left till last because the Spirit of Prophecy is of **lesser inspiration**, **authority** or **importance** than the written Scriptures, but rather because the **purpose** of the writings of Ellen White is to complement—not supplement—Scripture.

Ellen White admonished us never to place the *Testimonies* before or ahead of the Bible:

*“The testimonies of Sister White should not be carried **to the front**. **God's Word** is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to **take the place of the Word** . . . Let all prove their positions **from the Scriptures** and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed **Word of God**.” Letter 12, 1890.*

*“The more we look at the promises of the **Word of God**, the brighter they grow. The more we practice them, the deeper will be our understanding of them. Our position and faith is **in the Bible**. And never do we want any soul to bring in the Testimonies **ahead of the Bible**.” Manuscript 7, 1894 *Evangelism*, p. 256*

And yet she also warned that if a person loses confidence in the Testimonies they will also lose confidence in the Scriptures:

*“If you lose confidence in the Testimonies you will **drift away from Bible truth**.” *Counsels to the Church*, p. 94*

*“Besides the instruction in His Word, the Lord has given **special testimonies** to His people, **not as a new revelation**, but that He may set before us the plain lessons **of His Word**, that errors may be corrected, that the right way may be pointed out, that every soul may be **without excuse**.” Letter 63, 1893*

*“The Bible must be your counselor. Study it and the testimonies God has given; for they **never contradict His Word**.” Letter 106, 1907*

Ellen White magnifies, explains, amplifies, corrects, simplifies and highlights the great truths of Scripture but does not add any new truth. Elder A. G. Daniells compared the writings of Ellen White to a microscope or telescope. Microscopes and telescopes do not create reality; they merely magnify it and help us see it more clearly!

Despised and Rejected

In the course of time Ellen White has been accused of mesmerism, demon possession and epileptic seizures. Sad to say, sometimes the leaders and scholars of the church are Ellen White's greatest critics.

Is it just possible that many persons in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today who say, "I don't need Ellen G. White because I have the Bible" are really violating every principle of God's Word? The fact is that many within the church despise Ellen G. White and her writings as much as was John the Baptist by the Jews. In some churches when Ellen White is quoted from the pulpit, some members cringe. However, they don't seem to mind at all when the writings of Max Lucado, Rick Warren or Richard Foster are quoted.

Former pastors and scholars of the church write books such as *The White Lie* and *Ellen G. White: Prophetess of Health* to undermine confidence in the prophetic gift. Internet sites lambast Ellen White with a vitriolic hatred, all under the pretense that because we have the Bible, we don't need Ellen White! Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Ellen White foresaw all of this. She assured us that the very last deception of Satan would be to make of non-effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. If this is Satan's very last deception, then we must be close to the end because we can see this hatred being exhibited now!

"The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony." Letter 12, 1890

I learned something long ago and it is this: I never form an opinion of someone based on what his **enemies** say because the enemies tend to distort the truth. On the other hand, I don't form an opinion of a person on the basis of what his **friends** say either, because they tend to embellish the truth.

For example, some non-Adventist scholars have stated that Seventh-day Adventists believe that Satan is their savior because of Ellen White's interpretation of the scapegoat ceremony. But any impartial and fair-minded observer will see that Azazel bears sins that have already been forgiven in the sanctuary. Others claim that Ellen White taught that keeping the Sabbath saves us; clearly a false statement! If you want to know the truth about Ellen White, go directly to the source and read her writings for yourself—get the information first hand!

Preparer and Restorer

Why did God call Ellen White to be a prophet? The answer is, to **prepare a people** for the second coming as John prepared a people for the first. As in the days of Christ, there will be a **small remnant** that will take the message to heart. Ellen White described a group of Adventists who had no shelter in the time of trouble and the reason why:

*"I saw the state of some who stood on present truth, but **disregarded the visions**—the way God had chosen to teach in some cases, those who **erred from Bible truth**. I saw that in **striking against the visions** they did not strike against the worm—the feeble instrument that God spake through—but against the Holy Ghost. I saw it was a small thing to speak against the instrument, but it was dangerous to slight the words of God. I saw if they were in error and God chose to show them their errors **through visions**, and they disregarded the teachings of God **through visions**, they would be left to take their own way, and run in the way of error, and **think they were right**, until they would find it out too late. Then in the time of trouble I heard them cry to God in agony, 'Why didst Thou not show us our wrong, that we might have got right and been ready for this time?' Then an angel pointed to them and said, 'My Father taught, but you would not be taught. He spoke **through visions**, but you disregarded His voice, and He gave you up to your own ways, to be filled*

with your own doings.” Broadside, “To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God”, Jan. 31, 1849 1SM 40

“There will be a hatred kindled against the testimonies which is satanic. The workings of Satan will be to unsettle the faith of the churches in them, for this reason: Satan cannot have so clear a track to bring in his deceptions and bind up souls in his delusions if the warnings and reproofs and counsels of the Spirit of God are heeded.” 1SM 48

“Those who have most to say against the testimonies are generally those who have not read them, just as those who boast of their disbelief of the Bible are those who have little knowledge of its teachings. They know that it condemns them, and their rejection of it gives them a feeling of security in their sinful course.” 1SM 45, 46

Not Omniscient or Infallible

Ellen White was not perfect, nor was she omniscient or infallible. She was humble, always wanting Jesus to shine:

“I wish that self should be hidden in Jesus. I wish self to be crucified. I do not claim infallibility, or even perfection of Christian character. I am not free from mistakes and errors in my life. Had I followed my Savior more closely, I should not have to mourn so much my unlikeness to His dear image.” Daughters of God, p. 272

“In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible. His word is true, and in Him is no variableness, or shadow of turning.” Letter 10, 1895.

Ellen White grew in her understanding of truth with the passing of time. For a short time after 1844 she believed that the door of mercy had closed for the world. However, with the passing of time, God showed her that it had closed only for those who had rejected the 1844 message. Does this make Ellen White less than a trustworthy prophet? Not any more than John the Baptist!

Her enemies, who hold this against her, must also be critical of John the Baptist who, for a while, believed in only one coming of the Messiah until God showed him otherwise!

We can also discern Ellen White's growth in understanding of present truth in the development of the *Conflict Series*. The progression from *Spiritual Gifts* to *The Spirit of Prophecy*, to the *Conflict Series* shows how, with each series, she grew exponentially in her understanding of the message for this time.



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

LESSON #24 - WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH

The Original Family

God created man at the beginning in His image and likeness. Adam and Eve were members of the heavenly family:

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”
Genesis 1:26

Adam, at the beginning, was the Son of God. He was a member of the heavenly family:

“[Cainan was] the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.”
Luke 3:38

There was no evil inclination in Adam’s nature. All his tendencies, inclinations and actions were good.

“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.” *Genesis 1:31*

The Family of the Lost

After sin, Seth was born into the family of the sinful Adam. He was in Adam's image and likeness, not God's. He was now a member of the fallen Adam's family.

"This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. ² He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. ³ And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth." Genesis 5:1-3

Because we are born into the family of the fallen, we must be born again.

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'... ⁵ Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'" John 3:3, 5

In this world, there are only two families: one of God and the other of the devil. The sinful nature of the members of Satan's family expresses itself in acts of sin. Little children who have not reached the age of accountability pout and scream when they don't get their own way.

*"In this the **children of God** and the **children of the devil** are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother." 1 John 3:10*

We are by nature children of wrath and sons of disobedience.

*"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the **sons of disobedience**, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were **by nature children of wrath**, just as the others. Ephesians 2:1-3*

All human beings are born into this world with a sinful nature with sinful tendencies and inclinations. In the course of time, the sinful nature leads us to commit sinful acts, thoughts and words.

*“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”
Psalm 51:5*

Those in are in the flesh cannot please God. For this reason, a new birth is indispensable:

*“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”
Romans 8:7*

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.” Romans 7:18, 19

There is not a single person in the world who is inherently righteous because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God:

“As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; ¹¹There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. ¹² They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10-12, 23

The Wages if We Remain in Adam’s Family

In Adam, all die, and if we remain in his family, we will die also. If we do not change families, we are doomed.

“For the wages of sin is death....” Romans 6:23

“Therefore, just as through one man, sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Romans 5:12

In Adam all die. If we remain in his family, we will die. We must change families.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” 1 Corinthians 15:22

Our sinful nature produces the works of the flesh and we cannot inherit the **kingdom** of God.

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21

The Change of Families: The Adoption Ceremony

The book of Romans describes two families: The family of the lost in Adam and the family of the saved in Christ:

“Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.” Romans 5:18-19

In baptism, we are incorporated into Christ. In the baptismal ceremony we change families and become brothers and sisters of Jesus and therefore sons and daughters of God. Both Matthew 28:19 and Galatians 3:26 use the preposition *eis* which in Greek means “into”. In baptism we are included in Christ’s family name!

*“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into **His** death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried **with Him** through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also** should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been **united together** in the likeness of His death, **certainly we also** shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.” Romans 6:3-5*

We must be born again of the water and the Spirit into a new family, the family of the second Adam:

*“Jesus answered and said to him: ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’” John 3:5, 6*

By baptism of water and the Spirit Jesus was referring to the two-fold blessing of baptism:

*“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the **Holy Spirit**.’” Acts 2:38*

Brothers and Sisters of the Second Adam and Children of God

Jesus is the solitary Seed of Abraham, but when we are baptized into Christ, we become the Seed's seed:

“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.... ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Galatians 3:16, 25-29

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.... ⁴⁵ And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45

Galatians 4:4-7:

“Pero cuando vino el cumplimiento del tiempo, Dios envió a su Hijo, nacido de mujer y nacido bajo la ley, ⁵ para que redimiese a los que estaban bajo la ley, a fin de que recibiésemos la adopción de hijos. ⁶ Y por cuanto sois hijos, Dios envió a

vuestros corazones el Espíritu de su Hijo, el cual clama: ¡Abba, Padre! ⁷ Así que ya no eres esclavo, sino hijo; y si hijo, también heredero de Dios por medio de Cristo”.

“Mas a todos los que le recibieron, a los que creen en su nombre, les dio potestad de ser hechos hijos de Dios; ¹³ los cuales no son engendrados de sangre, ni de voluntad de carne, ni de voluntad de varón, sino de Dios”. John 1:12, 13

Jesus is the Son of God and when we receive Him, we become his brothers and sisters. Then, through Him we have access to the Father as children. Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren:

*“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing **many sons** to glory, to make the captain of their salvation **perfect through sufferings**. ¹¹ For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are **all of one**, for which reason He is **not ashamed to call them brethren**, ¹² saying: ‘I will declare Your name to **My brethren**; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.’” Hebrews 2:10-12*

Because Jesus is the Son, He will inherit all things and because we are his brethren, we will inherit with Him:

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” Romans 8:16, 17

Because we are sons, we can cry out “Abba, Father” just like Jesus did:

“And He said, ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.’” Mark 14:36

“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” Galatians 4:6, 7

Because we are born again, we are a new creation:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

Jesus is the first born among brethren:

*“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the **image of His Son**.” Romans 8:29*

As the siblings continually behold their elder brother, they are changed from glory to glory into His image:

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 3:18

The Mode of Baptism

Baptism is a burial. In fact, the word *baptism* means “to submerge”

*“Therefore, we were **buried** with Him through **baptism** into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:4*

Jesus went in and came out of the water:

“It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Mark 1:9-11

John the Baptist baptized where there was much water:

“Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.” John 3:23

Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch by immersion:

“... both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.” Acts 8:38

Jesus gave us an example of the correct mode of baptism. His baptism was an announcement of his death, burial and resurrection, and through baptism we

are reckoned dead with him, buried with Him and resurrected with Him. We enter into His experience.

“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” Matthew 3:16, 17

Explain why baptism by **immersion** the only option.

Proper Age and Preparation for Baptism

We must become disciples and be taught before baptism:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.” Matthew 28:19, 20

Repentance is necessary before baptism:

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 2:38

Confession is required before baptism:

“Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him ⁶ and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.” Matthew 3:5, 6

Believing is necessary:

“And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Mark 16:15-16

Baptism is Not Optional

When Saul of Tarsus delayed his decision, Ananias told him that baptism was the only way for his sins to be forgiven:

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Acts 22:16

Baptism is not optional. A person cannot see or enter the kingdom of God without being baptized of the water and the Spirit:

“Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” John 3:5-7

Joining God’s Family

Through baptism, we join the experience of Christ. However, baptism also has a corporate meaning. We not only join Christ, but also His body. There are those who say that they want to be baptized into Christ, but they do not want to belong to any church. That is not possible.

“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” Colossians 1:18

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many.” 1 Corinthians 12:13, 14

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:46-47

The Ordinance of Humility

Three times Jesus said that the church should participate in the foot washing:

*“So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you?’ ¹³ You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, **you also ought to** wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For **I have given you an example**, that **you should do** as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, **blessed are you if you do them.**” John 13:12-17*

The Ordinance of Humility is a miniature reminder of our baptism. It gives us the opportunity to make things right with God and our fellow human beings so we can go with a clear conscience to partake the emblems of Christ's sacrifice. The ordinance should be one of somber confession of sin and self-abasement. However, when we go to the table of the Lord it should not be sadness and affliction, but rather of joy as denoted by the Greek word *eucharistéo*, “to give thanks”.

The Communion Service

There are four basic views of Communion that grew out of the Protestant Reformation. The greatest conflicts in the Reformation was over the meaning of communion. The word *communion* means “to have common union” but that did not happen.

The Roman Catholic View: Transubstantiation

In John 6, Jesus encouraged the crowd to eat His flesh and blood and in the Communion Service He said, “this is my body”, “this is my blood”. Roman Catholics take this literally. They believe that when the priest pronounces the words of consecration, the bread is no longer bread and the wine is no longer wine. The appearance and taste remain the same but the substance is

transformed into the real body and blood of Jesus. Supposedly he has the power to create his Creator:

*“Thus the priest may, in a certain manner, be called **the creator of his Creator**, since by saying the words of consecration, he creates, as it were, Jesus in the sacrament, by giving him a sacramental existence, and produces him as a victim to be offered to the eternal Father. As in creating the world it was sufficient for God to have said, Let it be made, and it was created—He spoke, and they were made—so it is sufficient for the priest to say, ‘Hoc est corpus meum,’ and behold the bread is **no longer bread**, but the body of Jesus Christ. ‘The power of the priest,’ says St. Bernardine of Sienna, ‘is the power of the **divine person**; for the transubstantiation of the bread requires **as much power as the creation of the world**.” St. Alphonsus de Liguori, *Dignity and Duties of the Priest or Selva*, pp. 33-34.*

Catholics also believe in the ubiquity of Christ in the emblems. That is to say, Jesus is complete in every host. For Catholics, the effectiveness of the bread and wine is not in the faith of the believers but rather in the words of the priest! Like when a baby is baptized, the stain of original sin is removed, not by the faith of the baby, but by the words of the priest who transforms regular water into “magic” water.

The problem with the Roman Catholic view is that they fail to realize that the literal body and blood of Jesus does not profit anything because we assimilate Jesus spiritually through the Word (John 6:63). Deuteronomy 8:3 clearly states that the manna represented the Word of God. It is through the Word that we are nourished, not by drinking literal blood and eating the literal body of Jesus.

The Lutheran View: Consubstantiation

Martin Luther came up with a variation of the Catholic view. He taught that the bread remains bread and wine is still wine, but Jesus is somehow physically present along with the bread and wine. Thus, the real literal body and blood of Jesus nourish the Christian.

Ulrich Zwingli: The Symbolic view

Zwingli believed that Communion has a merely commemorative function. In other words, it reminds us of the death of Christ.

The View of Calvin and the Seventh-day Adventist Church:

For Seventh-day Adventists, the Communion service is not merely commemorative, but a profound spiritual experience. Jesus and the angels are present at the service to impart a spiritual blessing to those who come in faith discerning the body and blood of Christ.

Let's examine the key passages that center on the communion service:

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' ²⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. ²⁹ But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'" ³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Matthew 26:26-30

"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'" ²⁵ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'" ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. ²⁷ Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰ For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are

chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.
1 Corinthians 11:23-32



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

ADDENDUM TO LESSON #3 - THE RISK OF ETERNAL LOSS

A Note of Clarification

On Friday evening, January 2, 2015, I preached a sermon at the Generation of Youth for Christ convention titled; “The Risk of Eternal Loss”. At the conclusion of the sermon a division president and his wife encouraged me to write out the sermon and publish it. Later, other leaders of various denominational entities joined in the plea. So, I have decided to follow up on their request.

Before I begin, I need to make a note of clarification. After the sermon, Trinitarians accused me of being anti-Trinitarian because I spoke on the relationship between the Father and the Son but failed to mention the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, some anti-Trinitarians proudly claimed that I was on their side of the issue for the same reason.

There is a reason why I only mentioned the relationship between the Father and the Son and said nothing about the Holy Spirit. I believe that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead as the Bible and Ellen White make clear. The subject of my sermon that evening, however, was not on the third person of the Godhead. By way of comparison, Ellen White wrote extensively about the relationship between the Father and the Son in the first chapter of *Patriarchs and Prophets* and never mentions the Holy Spirit; not even once! Does this mean

that she did not believe in the Holy Spirit? Of course not! It simply means that her topic in that chapter was the relationship between the Father and the Son, not the person of the Holy Spirit.

So let's begin our study of the heavenly relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Some have been critical of my view that Jesus is God the Son. They claim that we should refer to Jesus as the Son of God rather than God the Son. True, the Bible does not refer to Jesus as God the Son. However, the Bible does make crystal clear that Jesus is God (John 1:1-3). Therefore, it is not inappropriate to refer to Jesus as God the Son because He is the Son and He is also God.

Ten Characteristics

Before the creation of the angels, the beings of the unfallen worlds, and man, the Father and the Son had a very special, unique relationship. Let's examine ten characteristics of that relationship.

Point #1: In eternity past, before anything was created, Jesus already existed side by side with His Father as a distinct Person, with His own individuality.

God the Father and God the Son are two separate individuals; two distinct personalities, each with their own self-identity. Both the Bible and the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy make this crystal clear. In His intercessory prayer of John 17, Jesus spoke these words to His Father:

"And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

It is obvious that the Son could not be with the Father if He were the same person as the Father (see also John 1:1-3). Two distinct persons—two separate individuals—are clearly in focus here. In verse 22 of this same prayer, our Lord Jesus described the glory of the Father that He gave to His twelve disciples:

*“And the glory which You gave Me, I have given them, that **they may be one** just as We are one.”*

In what sense did Jesus desire His disciples to be one? Did He want them to become one person? The apostles, obviously, were twelve individuals yet Jesus prayed that they might be one. If in fact twelve individuals can be one without losing their own individuality, then two can be one in the same sense. Jesus wasn't speaking numerically here, but of relational and functional unity. Just as the twelve disciples were each distinct individuals, yet in their Lord's vision united in spirit and purpose, so the Father and the Son are two distinct individuals, united in character and purpose.

Ellen White explained how Jesus wished His disciples to become one:

*“The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the **personality** of either. They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but **not in person**. It is thus that **God and Christ are one**”* *Ministry of Healing*, p. 422

Thus it should be clear, from the testimony of the inspired writings, that the Father and the Son are **two distinct individuals**.

Point #2: Although the Father and the Son are two individuals, each with their own distinct personality, the Bible describes them as one.

As pointed out before, the Father and the Son are not one in terms of individuality, but rather in terms of **unity** of character, power and purpose. We think of Jesus' statement in John chapter 10, verse 30: *“I and My Father are **one**.”* Jesus did not mean that He and His Father were the same person but rather that both of them were in unity—on the same page, so to speak.

Ellen White confirms this point in the following statement:

*“From eternity there was a **complete unity** between the Father and the Son. They were two, but **little short of being identical**—two in **individuality**, yet one in spirit and heart and character.”* *The Youth's Instructor*, December 16, 1897

Point #3: It is clear from the inspired writings that the Father and the Son are both equally God in the fullest sense of the word.

The Father and the Son are both one hundred percent divine. Jesus is not a lesser or inferior God than the Father. The Father and the Son are both **equally** God in the highest sense of the word. This is a vitally important point on which the Bible is too clear to be misunderstood. In John chapter 1, and verse 1, we find the following words:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God.**”*

The Word, described in this verse, is Jesus. This is made clear in verse 14, where we are told that, *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”* Before the beginning of all beginnings, Jesus, the Word, was with God and **was God**. He was not **a** god like the Jehovah’s Witnesses believe, but God in every sense of the word. Ellen White confirms this point in the following statement:

*“God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God. To Christ has been given an exalted position; He has been made **equal** with the Father. All the counsels of God are opened to His Son.” Testimonies for the Church, volume 8, p. 268*

Elsewhere, Ellen White states:

*“This Savior was the brightness of His Father’s glory, and the express image of His Person. He possessed **divine** majesty, perfection, and excellence. **He was equal** with God. It pleased the Father that in Him should **all fullness** dwell.” God’s Amazing Grace, p. 160*

Here is another statement where the equality of the Father and Son is stressed:

*“Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, **only one equal with God** could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law, and bring him again into harmony with Heaven.” God’s Amazing Grace, p. 42*

And then we have this amazing statement:

*“Christ was God **essentially**, and in the **highest sense**. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore. The Lord Jesus Christ, the **divine Son** of God, existed from eternity, a **distinct person, yet one** with the Father.” The Faith I Live By, p. 46*

*“Christ was the Son of God. He had been **one with Him** before the angels were called into existence. He had ever stood at the **right hand** of the Father”. Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 38*

It is significant to note in this last statement that even before the creation of the angels, the Father sat in the center of the throne, while the Son sat at His **right hand**. That is, while Jesus was equal with the Father and ruled together with Him, the Father was the supreme Ruler. Ellen White thus refers to the Father as “**the King of the universe**” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 39). It is clear, then, that although the Father and the Son are equal in divinity, status, dignity, power, character and purpose, the Son was functionally subject to His Father, even before the creation of the angels (more on this later).

Point #4: There was and is a special intimacy between the Father and the Son.

The Bible tells us that the Son is in **the bosom** of the Father. This fact is underlined in John chapter 1, verse 18: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is **in the bosom** of the Father, He has declared Him.” In the Bible, the bosom is a word that describes closeness and intimacy.

Ellen White confirms this point as well:

*“He [the Father] permitted Him [Jesus] to leave the **bosom of His love**, the adoration of the angels, to suffer shame, insult, humiliation, hatred, and death.” The Review and Herald, February 28, 1888*

The inspired testimony is clear. Jesus was in the bosom of His Father long before He came to this earth as a man.

Point #5: Jesus is the express image of the Father's Person.

Never does the Bible tell us that the Father is the image of the Son's person. The Son, rather, is always the image of His Father.

Consider the following statement from the pen of Ellen White where she affirms that the authority of Christ was next to that of the Father:

"The Son of God was next in authority to the great Lawgiver . . . He was in the express image of His Father, not in features alone, but in perfection of character." *Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 2, p. 9

"In Him is gathered all the glory of the Father, the fullness of the Godhead. He is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. The glory of the attributes of God is expressed in His character." *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 115

"He who had been in the presence of the Father from the beginning, He who was the express image of the invisible God, was alone able to reveal the character of the Deity to mankind." *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 422

So even though the Father and the Son are equal, the Father's authority is supreme. In the familial relationship, a son is equal to his father and yet is subject to his father's authority. In like manner, although Jesus is equal with His Father, He is subject to His Father's authority. Jesus was the express image of His Father; little short of being identical!

What, in fact, does the designation "express image" mean? Several New Testament passages explain how ordinary human beings were created in the image of God, and how they must be re-created in that same image (e.g. 2 Corinthians 3:18). The word for "image" in these verses is *eikon*, from which we get our English word *icon*. But a different word is used to describe Christ as the image of His Father. Hebrews, chapter 1, verse 3 describes Jesus as the express image of His Father. The word for "image" here is *xaracter* from which we get our English word *character*. What this means is that Jesus is the mirror image of the Father's character.

In short, both Scripture and the writings of Ellen White are clear that God the Son is the express image of God the Father.

Point #6: Jesus is the Father's second self.

We have all heard the expression, "like father, like son". This popular saying is a fit description of the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son in the Godhead. When Philip asked Jesus, "*Show us the Father*", Jesus replied, "*Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father*" John 14:8, 9.

Jesus is the Father's second Self, so—according to Jesus—the one who sees Him has in fact seen a reflection of the Father. It is as if the Son has His Father's DNA!

Let's consider again a statement from Ellen White that we reviewed earlier:

*"From eternity there was a **complete unity** between the Father and the Son. They were two, but **little short of being identical**—two in individuality, yet **one** in spirit and heart and character." The Youth's Instructor, December 16, 1897*

So closely does the Son reflect the Father's self, that when the Father thinks, the Son makes His thoughts audible:

*"What **speech is to thought**, so is Christ to the invisible Father. He is the manifestation of the Father, and is called the Word of God." That I May Know Him, p. 38*

Point #7: As the Son of God, Jesus is of the same substance as the Father.

In human terms, we might say that the Son has the same DNA as His Father. Philippians 2, verse 6, speaks of how Christ, before His incarnation, was "in the form of God." The Greek word that is translated "form" in this verse, by the way, isn't referring to simple external characteristics, but rather to substance—or essence; the very stuff of which an individual is composed. Ellen White, in harmony with this passage from Philippians, expresses it this way:

*“I and the Father are one.” The words of Christ were full of deep meaning, as He put forth the claim that He and the Father were of **one substance**, possessing the **same attributes**.” Signs of the Times, November 27, 1893*

Elsewhere the Lord’s servant writes:

*“Christ was God **essentially**, and in the **highest sense**” The Review and Herald, April 5, 1906*

Ellen White did not mean that Christ was essentially God, but rather that He was God essentially. What is meant here is that Christ was God **in His essence**—to the very **core** of His being. He possesses the same divine traits, powers, and wisdom as the Father.

Point #8: Jesus is the reflection of the Father’s glory. That is to say, it is the glory of the Father that shines on the face of Jesus.

Let’s notice once again Hebrews chapter 1, verse 3, where we read that Jesus is the brightness of the Father’s glory. Never do we read in Scripture or the Spirit of Prophecy that the Father is the brightness of the Son’s glory. Rather, it is always the Son who is the reflection of the Father’s glory. John chapter 1, verse 14, adds the same thought:

*“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the **glory as of the only begotten of the Father**, full of grace and truth.”*

The glory of Jesus, therefore, is the glory of the Father. In 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 6, we find the same thought expressed in a different way:

*“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the **glory of God** in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

Ellen White’s perspective of Christ is in perfect harmony with what the New Testament teaches:

*“He (Christ) was the brightness of the **Father’s glory**, the express image of His Person.” Medical Ministry, p. 19*

Elsewhere she writes:

*"In Him (Christ) is gathered all the **glory of the Father**, the fullness of the Godhead. He is the **brightness of the Father's glory**, and the express image of His Person." Christ's Object Lessons, p. 115*

*"This Savior was the brightness of **His Father's glory**, and the express image of His Person. He possessed divine majesty, perfection, and excellence. He was **equal with God**." Testimonies for the Church, volume 2, p. 200*

Point #9: Even though the Father and the Son are on a level of equality as Persons, the Son is subject to the Father's authority functionally because the Father is His Head.

Someone might ask "How is it possible to be equal with someone else, and at the same time be subject to that person's authority?" The Bible explains how this is so, in 1Corinthians chapter 11, verse 3:

*"But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the **head of Christ is God**."*

So, according to the Bible, the Father is the Head of Christ and as such, Christ is subject, or submissive, to His Father's will—in eternity past, in the present, and in eternity future. Needless to say, both the Father and the Son have authority and dominion, but while the Father possesses *absolute* authority, the Son possesses *delegated* authority. Never do we read that the Son has ever held independent authority. Rather, He has always been subject to His Father's authority and His Father's will. Before the creation of angels, the beings of other worlds and humans, Jesus was already subject to His Father's will. When Lucifer began spreading rumors, insinuating that Jesus was one just like himself, Ellen White explains that the Father assembled the heavenly host to explain the true position of His Son:

*"The **great Creator** assembled the heavenly host, that **He might**, in the presence of all the angels, **confer special honor** upon His Son. The Son was seated on the throne with His Father, and the heavenly throng of holy angels was gathered*

around them. The **Father then made known** that it was **ordained by Himself** that Christ, His Son, should be equal with Himself, so that wherever was the presence of His Son, it was His own presence. The word of the Son was to be obeyed as readily as the word of the Father. His Son **He had invested with authority** to command the heavenly host. Especially was His Son to work in union with Himself in the anticipated creation of the earth and every living thing that should exist upon the earth. His Son would carry out **His will and His purposes** but would do **nothing of Himself alone**. The **Father's will** would be fulfilled in Him." *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 13-14

Did you notice how many times Ellen White refers to God as "Father" and to Jesus as "Son"? It is obvious that Jesus was already the Son in heaven before the incarnation. Here is a second Ellen White statement with added details:

"The **King of the universe summoned** the heavenly hosts before Him, that in their presence **He might set forth** the true position of **His Son**, and show the relation He sustained to all created beings. The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both.... Before the assembled inhabitants of heaven **the King declared** that none but Christ, the **only begotten of God**, could fully enter into His purposes, and to Him it was committed to execute the mighty counsels of **His [the Father's] will**. The Son of God had wrought the **Father's will** in the creation of **all the hosts of heaven**; and to Him, as well as to God, their homage and allegiance was due. Christ was still to exercise divine power, in the creation of the earth and its inhabitants. But in all this He would not seek power or exaltation for Himself contrary to **God's plan**, but would exalt the **Father's glory** and execute **His purposes** of beneficence and love". *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 36

These Ellen White statements, affirming the Son's submission to the Father from eternity past, merely echo such Bible verses as 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15-17, and Hebrews 1:2 where we are informed that the Father created all things through the instrumentality of the Son.

1 Corinthians 8:6, in language too clear to be misunderstood, affirms: "...yet for us there is one God, the Father, **of whom** are all things, and we for Him; and one

Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom** are all things, and through whom we live.” And in Revelation 4:11 we are clearly told that all things exist by the will of the One who was sitting on the throne—the Father.

Even after His earthly sojourn, Christ remained subject to His Father. This is clear from Jesus’ statement to His disciples just before His ascension to heaven, when He declared, “All authority **has been given to Me** in heaven and on earth.” Matthew 28:18. Without question, it is the Father who gave His Son this authority. We see this same fact declared yet again in Philippians chapter 2, verses 9-11:

*“Therefore **God also has highly exalted Him** and **given Him the name** which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, **to the glory of God the Father.**”*

The text is clear. It is the Father who exalts Christ and gives Him the name that is above every name, and it is all to the glory of God the Father. We never read about the Son giving authority to the Father. Even after His resurrection and ascension, Christ is still subject to His Father’s authority. This will continue to be true even after sin is eradicated from the universe. Consider the following verse:

*“Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the **Son Himself will also be subject** unto Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”*
1 Corinthians 15:28

When James and John asked Jesus if, in the future kingdom of glory, they could sit, one on His right hand and the other on His left, Jesus replied that “to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared **by My Father.**” Matthew 20:23. Notice, Jesus didn’t say He Himself would decide who would sit on His right and left in the future kingdom. Rather, it will be the Father who will make that decision.

Many resent and resist the idea of subjection, because they assume that to be subject to someone is equivalent to being inferior. People think that if they take

orders from another, or carry out another's will, they are less important. But Jesus taught just the opposite: the servant is the greatest. God's way of thinking and ours are diametrically opposed. In God's order, the one who descends is the one who is highest. The problem exists with our way of thinking—we assume that subjection is a bad thing. But if subjection is a bad thing, how is it that it existed even before sin invaded God's universe, as the Son subjected Himself to His Father's will? How can it be bad when the Son will be subject to His Father's will in eternity future?

Point #10: It has been, and always will be, a delight for the Son to subject Himself to His Father's will and purposes because He knows that His Father loves Him.

The Son does not subject Himself to His Father's will as a slave. He willingly and joyously does His Father's will because He is certain that the Father loves Him. It isn't difficult to subject oneself to the plans and desires of another if you are certain that person loves you fully. Often, Jesus spoke of doing His Father's will because of His confidence in His Father's love. Jesus expressed it this way: *"The Father **loves the Son**, and has given all things into His hand."* John 3:35. And again: *"For **the Father loves the Son**, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel."* John 5:20.

The Creation

Now let's turn our attention to the creation of Adam and Eve.

God worked the better part of six days to create this earth, and everything He made was perfect and beautiful. On the sixth day, God formed man from the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, thus making Adam a living being (Genesis 2:7). Adam then named the animals, noticing all the while that each had a counterpart—a mate—like itself. No doubt he felt lonely having no such companion for himself. Genesis chapter 2, verse 20, observes at this point, *"But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him."*

God then gave Adam the first general anesthesia in history. Scripture tells us how Adam fell into a deep sleep, enabling God to perform the first surgery—and to leave no scar. From one of Adam’s ribs, God created a woman, and brought her to the man—His special gift to Adam (Genesis 2:22).

We can only imagine Adam’s response when he woke up from that general anesthesia, opened his eyes, and saw this breathtakingly beautiful woman standing before him. “WOW!” he must have exclaimed. “Here is one just like me!” And then we read how God officiated the first wedding of human history—the marriage of Adam and Eve.

A Miniature Reflection

Now let us turn to Genesis chapter 1, and discover some very interesting details. A careful study of Genesis 1:26, 27 helps us understand that God intended the relationship of the first man and woman of the human race—Adam and Eve—to be a small scale reflection of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Godhead. God wanted to reveal in miniature—just as He would later do with the plan of salvation by means of the Hebrew sanctuary service—the relationship He sustained with His Son.

In Genesis 1:26, God the Father took the initiative and spoke to His Son: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” We have already noticed that the Scriptures teach that the Father accomplished the work of Creation through His Son (1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2), thus it is clear that in Genesis 1:26 the Father is working in concert with His Son. The Father is basically saying to His Son; “Let’s make man to reflect the relationship that exists between us!”

With one lone exception, the word “*man*” in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 is accompanied by the definite article and refers solely to the masculine gender. The lone exception is found in Genesis 1:26 where the word “*man*” is generic, and refers to both to male and female. So God is saying to His Son, “Let Us (Father and Son) make man (man and woman) in Our image, according to Our likeness.” Clearly, the relationship between the Father and the Son was to be

reflected and explained in the relationship between Adam and Eve. That's why the Father said to the Son, "Let Us (Father and Son) make man (Adam and Eve) in our image." Thus, the relationship and roles of men and women in the human race were to reflect the relationship and roles that exist between God the Father and God the Son in the Godhead.

Dominion

God said, regarding Adam and Eve, "*Let them have dominion.*" Genesis 1:26. Just like the Father and the Son had dominion, so Adam and Eve were to exercise the same. But we must keep in mind, as we noted before, that the Father in the Godhead—the One sitting on the center of the throne—had *absolute* dominion. The Son who was sitting at the right hand, had *delegated* dominion, but the Father was His Head. Likewise, Adam and Eve both had dominion, but as with the Godhead, one of them was to be the head in the relationship and that one was Adam (1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:12-13).

Adam and Eve's Relationship

Let's pursue the relationship between Adam and Eve to see if it reflects the relationship between the Father and Son in the Godhead. The creation story is clear that Adam and Eve were **two distinct persons** just as the Father and the Son are two distinct persons. As is true with the Father and the Son, Adam and Eve were **distinct** one from the other, each with their own individuality.

Yet the creation story also makes it clear that although Adam and Eve were two, they were also in another sense, **one**—one flesh, as Genesis 2:24 states. Jesus even went so far as to say that they were **no longer two**, but one (Matthew 19:4-6). They were two persons, yet in the sense of **unity**, one—just like God the Father and His Son.

As God the Father and God the Son are both fully and equally God, so Adam and Eve were fully and **equally human**. Both Adam and Eve are referred to by the generic word "*man*" in Genesis 1:26 as both the Father and the Son are called God in John 1:1, 2. Eve was not some **lesser order** of humanity; she was one

hundred percent “man”—in the **generic sense** of the word. Consider the following Ellen White statement:

*“Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand at his side **as an equal**, to be loved and protected by him.” Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 46*

*“When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in **all things** she should be **his equal**.” Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 484*

Eve was not only equal with Adam, but she was taken from a place close to **Adam’s bosom**. God did not take a bone from Adam’s head or foot but rather from near his heart. A **special intimacy** existed between them. We read in Deuteronomy 13:6, interestingly, how one’s wife is to be “the wife of your bosom.” Here we see a striking parallel with the Godhead, as the Son was “in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18).

Like Jesus is the Father’s second self, so Eve was created to be Adam’s **second self**. Notice how Ellen White describes this:

*“A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his **second self** showing the close union and the **affectionate attachment** that should exist in this relation” Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 46*

Adam could therefore legitimately say, “One who has seen Eve has seen me.”

Further, Eve was of the **same substance** as Adam. She had his DNA—only his, in fact, because Eve had no mother. As Eve had only the DNA of Adam, so Jesus has only the “DNA” of His Father—the same essence and substance.

Notice Genesis 2, verse 23:

“And Adam said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man’.

I have previously shown from Scripture that Jesus is the glory of the Father. In a similar way, the apostle Paul states that man was created to be **the glory of God**, and the woman was created to be the **glory of man**:

*“For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is **the glory of man**.” 1 Corinthians 11:7*

Some women might respond to this verse with the rejoinder, “I don’t like that. I don’t want to be the glory of the man; I want my own glory.” But Jesus didn’t say that. He was perfectly happy reflecting the glory of His Father. When God created Adam first, and then Eve, Eve was to be the glory of Adam because she was taken from him. This is why Paul comes short of stating that Eve was created in the image of God. Eve was clearly the image and glory of God but she derived that glory and image through Adam.

The Bible is equally clear that even though Adam and Eve were equal, Adam was still the **head of Eve** and Eve was to be **subject** to his loving authority. Consider the following text:

*“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the **head of woman is man**, and the head of Christ is God.” 1 Corinthians 11:3*

Let’s ask ourselves, “Is it a bad thing that God is the Head of Christ? Is it a bad thing that Christ is the Head of the man?” Most would likely answer “no” to the above questions. Yet many of these same persons would say it is a very negative thing for the man to be the head of the woman! This is incongruous with the attitude of Christ in the Godhead. In the heavenly economy, the Son happily considers the Father His Head. And most, if not all, Christian men have no problem considering that Christ is their Head. Why then should a godly Christian woman have trouble considering the man as her head?

Sadly, in our radically egalitarian world, too many have problems with authority and hierarchy of any kind. Contemporary culture—or much of it—insists that roles of all kinds be identical and interchangeable; thus we find deep resistance to the idea of women submitting in any way to the authority of men—spiritually or otherwise. But clearly, whether we like it or not, that’s

what the Bible teaches. The apostle Paul instructs wives to be subject to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18) and he even goes further in stating that what applies in the home applies as well in the church (1 Timothy 2:12, 13; 3:1-7 Titus 1:5-9; 1 Corinthians 11:3).

How many wives would find it hard to submit to their husbands if their husbands loved them in the way the apostle commands: *“just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it”* (Ephesians 5:25)? This is precisely the way it is in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. The Son has no trouble submitting to His Father, for He knows His Father loves Him supremely and entirely.

Another important point to consider is that in 1 Corinthians 11, verse 3, God the Father is the only One mentioned who is not subject to a head. Christ has a Head, man has a Head, and woman has a head. But the Father has no head, and the woman is head of no one. That is where the order of authority ends. The Father is the Head of Jesus, Jesus is the Head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman. The woman, however, is head of no one, and the Father has no head. This is the order of authority that God has established.

Eve’s Sin

Now we turn to the story and significance of Eve’s sin. When we consider the inspired evidence, it becomes clear that Eve, in fact, committed two grave mistakes before she partook of the fruit from the forbidden tree (Genesis 2:17).

First, she wandered from her husband’s side and acted **independently** of him, deciding to do her own thing. Second, unhappy with the position that God had assigned her, she desired to ascend to a more exalted sphere, in fact, she wished to ascend to the very height of God, as the serpent suggested (Genesis 3:5). In the end, it came down to selfishness. Notice the following Ellen White statements:

*“The angels had cautioned Eve to beware of **separating herself** from her husband while occupied in their daily labor in the garden; with him she would be in less danger from temptation than if she were alone. But absorbed in her*

pleasing task, she unconsciously **wandered from his side.**” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 53-54

“Eve, unconsciously at first, **separated from her husband** in her employment. When she became aware of the fact, she felt that there might be danger, but again she **thought herself secure**, even if she did not remain close by the side of her husband. She had wisdom and strength to know if evil came, and to meet it.” *The Story of Redemption*, p. 32

In other words, Eve’s first mistake was to assume she could act **independently** of her head, that her judgment was sufficiently strong in Adam’s absence, and that she would be safe anyway.

The second mistake Eve made, as we noted above, was in assuming she could ascend to a **higher sphere** than the one God had assigned her. The following inspired statement is quite pointed in this respect:

“Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband’s side in her Eden home; but like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a **higher sphere** than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to **rise above** her original position, she fell far below it. All who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties in accordance with God’s plan will reach a similar result. In their efforts to **reach positions** for which He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they might be a blessing. In their desire for a **higher sphere**, many have sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 59

So Eve made two big mistakes before eating the fruit. First, acting **independently** of her husband, thinking she would be safe in his absence; and second, wanting to **ascend to a higher sphere** from where she was.

Adam’s Sin and Dilemma

What, then, was Adam’s great mistake? Like Eve, to be sure, his principal sin was eating from the forbidden tree. But there’s something else involved here.

Just as the Father's most precious possession was His Son, so Eve was the most precious thing Adam had. When Eve transgressed, Adam faced a great dilemma: Would he be willing to give up the most precious gift that God had given him; the one who was **one with him**? Would he be willing to give up the one who was his very own substance; his glory? Would he be willing to tear from his bosom the one who was his intimate partner? Would he risk losing her and being separated from her forever?

Obviously, in his decision, Adam was thinking only of his own selfish self-interest. Ellen White describes it this way:

*"There was a terrible struggle in his mind. He mourned that he had permitted Eve to wander from his side. But now the deed was done; **he must be separated** from her whose society had been his joy. How could he have it thus? Adam had enjoyed the companionship of God and of holy angels. He had looked upon the glory of the Creator. He understood the high destiny opened to the human race should they remain faithful to God. Yet all these blessings were lost sight of in **the fear of losing** that one gift which in his eyes outvalued every other. Love, gratitude, loyalty to the Creator—all was overborne by love to Eve. She was part of himself, and he could not endure **the thought of separation**." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 56*

God the Father's Dilemma

At this point, it would be instructive to review the relationship between the Father and the Son. As we have seen, Adam and Eve's relationship was a miniature reflection of the divine relationship. Like Adam and Eve, both the Father and the Son were distinct Persons and yet one in substance and character. As Eve was in the bosom of Adam, so Jesus was in the bosom of His Father. And the Son was the Father's second self as Eve was Adam's. The Son was the Father's express image and glory as was Eve Adam's.

So now, in the wake of humanity's sin, God the Father faced a dilemma on a much larger scale than Adam. The Father had to make a decision similar to the one Adam had to make in Eden. Would the Father be willing to give up His most

prized possession in heaven, His most intimate Partner, the One who was His second self, His glory, His image and very substance? Would He be willing to give up His own Son, at the risk of eternal loss or would He keep Him to Himself?

It was a great struggle for the Father, we can be sure. What is strikingly clear is the contrast between the decision of God the Father, to give up what was most precious to Him, and the decision of Adam to not give up the one most precious in his life. Ellen White vividly explains the Father's struggle in the following statement:

*"Before the Father He [Christ] pleaded in the sinner's behalf. While the host of heaven awaited the result with an intensity of interest that words cannot express, long continued was that mysterious communing—'the counsel of peace'—for the fallen sons of men. The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth, for Christ is a lamb 'foreordained before the foundation of the world'; yet **it was a struggle, even with the King of the universe**, to yield up His Son to die for the guilty race." Signs of the Times, November 4, 1908*

Ellen White adds further commentary on this scene in the following statement:

*"God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, **at the risk of failure and eternal loss**." The Desire of Ages, p. 49*

God the Father, in other words, risked the **loss of His Son** forever—the loss of the One who was co-substantial with Him, His express image, His second self, the One who shared His glory and was close to His bosom. The above passage from Ellen White continues as follows:

*"The heart of the human father yearns over his son. He looks into the face of his little child, and trembles at the thought of life's peril. He longs to shield his dear one from Satan's power, to hold him back from temptation and conflict. To meet a **bitterer conflict** and a **more fearful risk**, God gave His only begotten Son that the path of life might be made sure for our little ones. "Herein is love." Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth!" The Desire of Ages, p. 49*

In another statement, Ellen White observes:

*“For our redemption, **heaven itself was imperiled.**” Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 196*

The Father’s choice was the opposite of Adam’s. The Father was willing to risk the security of heaven itself in order to save us! Adam, by contrast, was unwilling to take a much smaller risk. He was unwilling to relinquish His most prized possession, at the risk of losing her forever.

Romans chapter 8, verse 32 describes the Father’s self-sacrificing love: *“He who **did not spare His own Son**, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”*

The following Ellen White statement describes the love of the heavenly Father:

*“The eternal Father, the unchangeable One, gave His only begotten Son, **tore from His bosom**, He who was made in the express image of His Person, and sent Him down to earth to reveal **how greatly He loved mankind.**” The Review and Herald, July 9, 1895*

The Father, in other words, loved humanity as much as He loved His own Son.

Let us again review a passage we noted above, continuing where we left off:

“Before the Father He [Christ] pleaded in the sinner’s behalf. While the host of heaven awaited the result with an intensity of interest that words cannot express, long continued was that mysterious communing—‘the counsel of peace’—for the fallen sons of men. The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth, for Christ is a lamb ‘foreordained before the foundation of the world’; yet it was a struggle, even with the King of the universe, to yield up His Son to die for the guilty race.”

This is where we left off. Now let’s finish the statement:

But *“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ O, the mystery of redemption! The love of God for a world that did not love Him! Who can know the depths of that love which “passeth knowledge”? Through endless ages, immortal*

minds, seeking to comprehend the mystery of that incomprehensible love, will wonder and adore.” Signs of the Times, November 4, 1908

We can see, from our study of the inspired writings, that Adam’s experience was a reflection of that of God the Father. Sadly, Adam made a different choice. He refused to give up the co-substantial one. God the Father, by contrast, chose to give up His Only Begotten Son.

The Son’s Dilemma

Now we turn to another question: What was the Son’s dilemma in all of this? The answer is that it was the counterpart of Eve’s dilemma, only on a much larger stage. Christ was equal to God, but instead of endeavoring to rise higher than the position God had assigned, He chose to step lower. The Son’s attitude and response were the opposite of Eve’s. While Eve wished to **ascend** and become God, Christ chose to **descend** even lower than the heavenly position His Father had given Him—He took the form of a servant, laying aside His crown, His scepter and His royal robe, He came down to the level of those He wished to save.

Philippians chapter 2, verses 5-8, tells us:

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of **no reputation**, taking the form of a **servant**, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled Himself**, and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*

Eve wanted to ascend. Christ, by contrast, chose to descend. He yielded up the scepter, stepped down from His eternal throne, that He might bring light to be benighted and life to the perishing. Jesus knew, as well as His Father, that His choice to come down involved an infinite risk:

“Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Savior could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father’s acceptance of the sacrifice.

*He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their **separation was to be eternal**". Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 753*

But there is more. Remember how Eve chose to act independently of Adam? And how she felt that she could do just fine on her own?

In contrast to Eve, Jesus **never separated** or acted independently from His Head. Throughout His earthly sojourn, Jesus chose to walk hand in hand with His Father. As He had done in eternal ages, He chose to subject His own will to His Father's will. Luke 22:42; John 5:30.

A Striking Illustration

In Genesis 22:2 we find a dramatic story that God gave us to illustrate the agonizing sacrifice that was made by both the Father and His Son. God comes to Abraham and commands, "Take your son, your **only** (the word *only*, in Hebrew, meaning "unique" or "one-of-a-kind") son Isaac, whom you **love**, and go sacrifice him on a mountain I will show you."

Think of the struggle it was for Abraham to give up his son, the son of the promise! This was a miniature reflection of the struggle God the Father went through when He faced the decision to give up **THE** Son of the Promise. Abraham struggled in agony, but in the end decided to do as God commanded.

Taking Isaac, some servants, the wood, the knife, and the means to light a fire, Abraham set out for Mount Moriah. Like God the Father, he chose to give up his own precious, beloved son.

Arriving at the mountaintop, it was Isaac's turn to make a decision. Would he place himself fully in his father's will, and willingly give up His life upon the sacrificial altar? The father struggled to give up his son, and the son submitted to his father's authority.

Lessons

Considering this illustration and the redemption narrative we have reviewed, we are constrained to ask: How much does God love us? The answer: Infinitely!

The writings of the Spirit of Prophecy tell us that if even one soul had needed salvation, the Father and the Son would have endured the same agony, and would, in the end, have agreed to the sacrifice. Inspiration tells us:

*"The value of a soul, who can estimate? Would you know its worth, go to Gethsemane and there watch with Christ through those hours of anguish, when He sweat as it were great drops of blood. Look upon the Savior uplifted on the cross. Hear the despairing cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Look upon the wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet. Remember that **Christ risked all**. For our redemption, **heaven itself was imperiled**. At the foot of the cross, remembering that **for one sinner** Christ would have laid down His life, you may estimate the **value of a soul**." Christ's Object Lessons, p. 196*

Inspiration tells us:

*"If but **one soul** would have accepted the gospel of His grace, Christ would, to save **that one**, have chosen His life of toil and humiliation and His death of shame." The Ministry of Healing, p. 135*

*"The loss of **even one soul** is a calamity **infinitely** outweighing the gains and treasures of a world." Great Controversy, p. 21*

So, what is the value of a single soul? Here is the answer:

*"The wealth of earth dwindles into insignificance when compared with the worth of **a single soul** for whom our Lord and Master died. He who weigheth the hills in scales and the mountains in a balance, regards a human soul as of **infinite value**." God's Amazing Grace, p. 173*

You will notice that the value of a single soul is **infinite**. Why is this? Simply because each one is unique and irreplaceable! When there is only one of a kind, it is priceless. Once a soul is lost, it is lost forever!

How, may we ask, do we purchase something that is of infinite value or priceless? The answer is: Only by paying an **infinite price** can you purchase something that is of infinite value. Thus Ellen White explains:

*“Jesus, the world’s Redeemer, gave His precious life to save fallen humanity. Every son and daughter of Adam is His purchased possession. He paid the **infinite price**, the ransom money in His own precious life, to redeem man. Therefore, he identifies His interest with suffering humanity.” The Home Missionary, Dec. 1, 1894*

*“The soul is of **infinite value**. Its worth can be estimated only by the **price paid** to ransom it. Calvary! Calvary! Calvary! will explain the true value of the soul.” Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 187*

But the gospel story not only tells us how much the Father and the Son love us. It also tells us how much we should love others. If the value of even one soul is infinite, should we not work arduously to win as many as possible? We are instructed:

*“**One soul** is of more value to heaven than a whole world of property, houses, lands, money. For the conversion of one soul we should tax our resources to the utmost.” Testimonies for the Church, volume 6, pp. 21-22*

*“**One soul** saved in the kingdom of God is of more value than **all earthly riches**. We are answerable to God for the souls with whom we are brought in contact, and the closer our connections with our fellow men, the greater our responsibility. We are one great brotherhood, and the welfare of our fellow men should be our great interest. We have not one moment to lose. If we have been careless in this matter, it is high time we were now in earnest to redeem the time, lest the blood of souls be found on our garments. As children of God, none of us are excused from taking part in the great work of Christ in the salvation of our fellow men.” Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 209*

I would like to share a final lesson that we can learn from this study.

In the ongoing discussion on women’s ordination, some have led us to believe that if we don’t believe that men and women can fulfill identical roles in both the home and in the church, then we must believe that women are inferior to men. In light of what we’ve studied, however, it should be clear how false this assumption is. God has called men to be the elders and pastors of the church.

They are to be husbands of one wife, heads of their households. But too many today believe that the husband and the wife in the home, and men and women in the church, have interchangeable roles. But the Bible is clear that men are to occupy the position of leader in the home and elder/pastor of the church. This does not mean that women are inferior to men, any more than a different role on the part of Christ makes Him inferior to His Father. Beings can have different functions and yet be equal.

This isn't rocket science. It is easy to understand. And yet today, there are those who are resisting the place that God has assigned them, and they wish to change God's order. That's what started the original rebellion in the first place, both in heaven and on earth.

God's way is always best. In eternity future, all of us—like the Father and the Son—will have different functions. Some will have higher functions—higher responsibilities—than others. Ellen White speaks of higher and lower ranks of angels. It was this order against which Lucifer rebelled. If this is our attitude here on earth, we will hardly be fit for a heaven seeking security against another rebellion. In Jesus' kingdom, one with the highest position descends to the lowest, so he can serve others. May that be the spirit of us all!



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

ADDENDUM TO LESSON #8 – THE MEASURE OF FORGIVENESS

Matthew 18:21-35

Verse 21

“Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

“The rabbis limited the exercise of forgiveness to three offenses. Peter, carrying out, as he supposed, the teaching of Christ, thought to extend it to seven, the number signifying perfection.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 243

Verse 22

“Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

“But Christ taught that we are never to become weary of forgiving. Not ‘Until seven times,’ He said, ‘but, until seventy times seven.’ Christ Object Lessons, p. 243

“And we are not only to forgive seven times, but seventy times seven. Just as often as God forgives us, we are to forgive one another.” Ellen G. White, The Review and Herald, April 8, 1902.

The spirit of **unconverted man** is different:

Genesis 4:23-24

*“Then Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me.”²⁴ If Cain shall be **avenged sevenfold**, then Lamech **seventy-sevenfold**.”*

Verse 23

*“Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king [**Jesus**] who wanted to **settle accounts** [**the judgment**] with his **servants** [**those who claim to serve Him**].*

*“**Christ** is represented by the king, who, moved with **compassion**, forgave the debt of his servant.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 244*

Verse 24

*“And when he had begun to **settle accounts** [**the judgment**], one was **brought to him** who owed him ten thousand talents.”*

The servant was **not a slave**. He was rather an **employee**. The expression “**settle accounts**” is a **financial expression** (see Luke 16:2). This seems to indicate that the servant was an **administrator** of the king’s monetary assets. Most scholars believe he must have been responsible for the revenue in **one of the provinces** (like a **state treasurer**) belonging to the king’s realm. The **enormous debt** he owed his lord indicates that he was one of the **high officials** in the king’s government.

The Greek terms used seem to indicate that this man was already under **suspicion of embezzlement**. The **passive tense** of the verb indicates that he did **not come of his own** accord but rather was brought by the **king’s guards**.

The application **to us**:

*“Man was under the **condemnation of the broken law**. He could **not save himself**, and for this reason Christ came to this world, clothed His divinity with humanity, and gave His life, the just for the unjust.” COL, p. 244*

Verse 25

*“But as he was **not able** to pay, his **master** commanded that he be **sold**, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that **payment be made**.”*

The debt was **enormous** and utterly **unpayable**. Ten thousand talents are equivalent to **470,448 pounds of silver** and ten thousand talents of silver are equal to **100 million denarii**. The enormity of this amount can only be understood when we realize that a **denarius was the daily wage** for a common worker in the Roman Empire.

Joachim Jeremias has pointed out that the enormity of this debt can only be understood:

*“If we realize that both **muria [thousand]** and **talanta [talent]** are the **highest magnitudes** in use. 10,000 is the **highest number** used in reckoning, and the talent is the **largest currency** unit in the whole of the Near East.” Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, p. 210*

We, like the king's servant, have broken God's Holy Law. We have **forfeited our right to freedom**. We deserve to be in **perpetual bondage**. The enormity of our debt to God is **impossible to pay**.

Verse 26

*“The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have **patience** with me, and **I will pay** you all.’”*

The servant **deserved the sentence** which was pronounced against him. He did **not argue** about his guilt or innocence.

Actually, he did not realize that his debt was so great that, no matter **how good his intentions** were he could **never pay** it. Scholars have calculated that if this was a **high government official** it would have taken him at least **15,000 years** to pay the debt and of course no one lives that long!

*“When the debtor pleaded with his lord for mercy, he had no true sense of the **greatness of his debt**. He did not realize his **helplessness**. He hoped to **deliver himself**. “Have patience with me,” he said, “and **I will pay** thee all.” So there are many who hope by their **own works** to **merit** God's favor. They do not realize their helplessness. They do not accept the **grace of God as a free gift**, but are trying to build themselves up in self-righteousness.” *Christ Object Lessons*, pp. 245, 246*

Verse 27

*“Then the master of that servant was moved with **compassion**, released him, and **forgave** him the debt.”*

What an **illustration of grace**! The undeserving servant was relieved of his debt simply because **he cried out** to the king and the **king had compassion** upon him.

The king did not make the servant **work off his debt**. This would have been **impossible**. The debt was completely forgiven simply because the man, in his **dire need, cried out** to the king for mercy! He was not forgiven because of his **goodness** but rather because of the **goodness of the king**.

God **forgives because He loves** and love is **giving without expecting anything in return**.

The Breadth of God's Forgiveness

Micah 7:19

*“He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will **cast all our sins** into the depths of the sea.”*

Isaiah 38:17

*"But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins **behind Your back**."*

Psalms 103:12

*"As far as the **east is from the west**, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."*

Isaiah 44:22

*"I have **blotted out**, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like **a cloud**, your sins."*

Isaiah 43:25

*"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will **not remember** your sins."*

1 John 1:9

*"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to **forgive us** our sins and to **cleanse us** from all unrighteousness."*

Verse 28

*"But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a **hundred denarii**; and he laid **hands on him** and took him **by the throat**, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'"*

The word *denarii* used here is a reference to a denarius which was the **daily wage** a common laborer was paid. Though the amount of one hundred *denarii* was a **considerable sum** (100 days of labor) it could be paid in the course of time with a **little effort**. In contrast to **10,000 talents** (one hundred million denarii), one hundred denarii were "peanuts".

Verse 29

"So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'"

The servant not only pleaded with the king. He also worshiped him as is indicated by the Greek word *proskunéo* in Matthew 18:26. But the fellow servant did not worship the servant. This would indicate that the king in this parable represents Christ who receives our penitential worship.

Verse 35 (the fellow servant represents our brothers)

"So My Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Verse 30

"And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt."

Verses 31-33

"So when his fellow servants [the recording angels] saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. ³² Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³ Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'"

"Their own hearts are not broken and humbled on account of sin, and they are exacting and unforgiving toward others. Their own sins against God, compared with their brother's sins against them, are as ten thousand talents to one hundred pence—nearly one million to one; yet they dare to be unforgiving." Christ Object Lessons, pp. 245, 246

Verse 34

*“And his master was **angry**, and delivered him to the **torturers** until he should pay all that was due to him.”*

Verse 35

*“So My Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, **from his heart [vital expression]**, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”*

“He who refuses to forgive is thereby casting away his own hope of pardon.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 247

*“He who **loves God** because his own sins have been forgiven will manifest a **forgiving spirit** toward others.” Manuscript Releases, vol. 15, p. 197*

Ephesians 4:32

*“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving** one another, **even as God** in Christ **forgave you**.”*

Matthew 6:14-15

*“For **if** you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father **will also** forgive you. ¹⁵ But **if** you do not forgive men their trespasses, **neither** will your Father forgive your trespasses. “*

*“He who is unmerciful toward others shows that he himself is **not a partaker of God's pardoning grace**. In God's forgiveness **the heart** of the erring one is drawn close to the great heart of Infinite Love. The tide of **divine compassion flows into the sinner's soul**, and **from him** to the souls of others. The tenderness and mercy that Christ has revealed in His own precious life will be seen in those who become **sharers of His grace**.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 251*

*“We are not forgiven **because** we forgive, but **as** we forgive. The ground of all forgiveness is found in the **unmerited love of God**, but by our attitude toward*

others we show whether we have made **that love our own.**" *Christ Object Lessons*, p. 251

Luke 17:3, 4: This is impossible for the selfish, unrenewed heart:

*"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he **repents**, forgive him. ⁴ And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, **saying, 'I repent'**, you shall **forgive him.**"*

We say; I will forgive you, but **don't you dare do it again.**"

How do we know that he has **truly repented** if he comes back **seven times in one day**? We are not to ask if a request for **forgiveness is sincere** but we are to forgive and leave the consequences with God. This is **not for us to judge**. This is the reason **why our records will be examined** to reveal if we **truly repented**.

We are to forgive **as many times as God forgives**. How many times has God forgiven you today?

Two benefits to forgiveness:

- As forgiveness flows through us we can experience the **feelings of God** when He forgives because **His forgiveness is flowing through us**.
- It will do wonders for your **physical health**. The bitterness of lack of forgiveness makes you physically, **psychologically** and **spiritually** ill. Nothing kills more than **holding grudges**. Forgiveness is **cathartic**, it cleanses **resentment, bitterness, unhappiness**, and a spirit of getting even, all of which actually hurt us because they **dry up the life forces** and make us miserable.

With a **church member, friend, family member or pastor**, perhaps it was betrayal, lying, cheating **on a spouse**. We say; "What he or she did is **unforgivable**. I can't forgive him or her". You are right, **we can't forgive** because forgiveness is **a gift that comes from God** and **flows through us**.

If we have not grasped the immensity of the forgiveness of God, we will not be willing to forgive, for it is the sense of the **immensity of His forgiveness of us**

that leads us to forgive others. Forgiveness flows from Him through us to others. When we understand the measure of His forgiveness, then we will see that what we have to forgive is nothing in comparison. What did He forgive? Sin and a sentence of eternal death!

John 7:37-39

“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

It is a sense of His love in forgiving us our **huge debt** that flows through us and leads us to forgive others their **petty offenses**.

- Jesus **healed Simon** of his leprosy and Simon wished to show his gratefulness.
- Jesus **rebuked the demons** that controlled Mary Magdalene’s heart and mind.
- The love of Jesus in pardoning her led Mary in turn **to love Jesus back**. On the other hand, Simon, who had been healed by Jesus of leprosy felt **little gratitude** toward Jesus because he considered himself righteous and did not feel that Jesus had done that much for him.
- Simon felt he **owed little** (though he really owed more because of his self-righteousness) and therefore **loved little**. She felt she **owed much** (because of her sinful past) and therefore **loved much**.

Jesus had forgiven this woman a great debt and Simon was unwilling to forgive her.

Luke 7:36-47

*“Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to eat. ³⁷ And behold, a woman in the city **who was a sinner**, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the **Pharisee’s house**,*

brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, ³⁸ and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying: 'This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner [he felt that here debt was much larger than his because she was a sinner and he was righteous].'⁴⁰ And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' So he said, 'Teacher, say it.'⁴¹ 'There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?' ⁴³ Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have rightly judged.'⁴⁴ Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? [in Simon's mind she was the one who owed the most] I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. ⁴⁵ You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. ⁴⁷ Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.'"

She was forgiven much and His forgiving love flowed into her heart and as a result that love flowed back to Him.



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

ADDENDUM TO LESSON #17 – A MATTER OF HONESTY – PURE AND SIMPLE

Introduction

In 1885, while Ellen White was in Europe, a certain brother suggested that she should talk more about the love of Jesus and less about duty. This was Ellen White’s response:

“Brother E suggests that it would please the people if I speak less about duty and more in regard to the love of Jesus. But I wish to speak as the Spirit of the Lord shall impress me. The Lord knows best what this people needs.”
Manuscript 26, 1885

Stewardship Principles at the Very Beginning

Stewardship involves far more than money. It includes every dimension of life, including time, health, finances, and talents. Here, I am going to focus on the faithful stewardship of money.

Karen Whala, the stewardship department director, asked me to preach this specific sermon that I preached here some 20 years ago. Let’s begin with some basic stewardship principles that God established at the beginning:

1. God created Adam and Eve and blessed them.

2. He gave them permission to enjoy the fruit of every tree in the Garden.
3. However, God reserved a tree for Himself to test Adam and Eve's honesty.
4. Adam and Eve partook from the tree that God had reserved for Himself.
5. The result was the curse.

God has a similar test for His people today.

A Similar Test Today

Malachi 3:8-10

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' 'In tithes and offerings.⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation.¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, "Says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

Two points I want to underline in these verses:

- To rob God results in the curse.
- Honesty and integrity results in God's blessing.

What is the Tithe?

The tithe is 10% of our increase. Not our net after paying for all of our personal expenses, but rather 10% of our gross. Although all our income belongs to God, the tithe belongs to Him in a special sense. In similar fashion, all days are God's but the Sabbath is His in a special sense.

Leviticus 27:30

"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord."

In the agricultural society of the Old Testament, people did not tithe with currency but rather with livestock and agricultural products:

Leviticus 27:32

“And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord.”

“A Matter of Honesty Pure and Simple”

To use the tithe for personal expenses is theft or embezzlement. Malachi underlines that by withholding the tithe, the people were not robbing the priest or the temple, but the Lord! When we neglect to tithe today, we are not robbing the preacher or the church, but God!

A partial tithe is just as bad or worse than no tithe. Some people try to placate their consciences and appease God by dropping a buck or two in the offering plate, as if to say, *“I am not going to steal it all, just some of it!”*. But God does not accept anything less than absolute and complete honesty.

Thus, returning the tithe is a test of honesty. If God cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden for partaking of what was not theirs, what makes us think that God would allow us back into the Garden while we are committing the same sin as they did? If God cannot trust us with what He has given us here, will He be able to trust us in heaven?

Equitable and Fair

Some say the rich should return more than the poor. However, the tithing system is fair and equitable. It weighs upon all in a proportionately equal way.

God is no heavenly IRS agent ready to take away our money. In the first place, it is not our money. God owns 100% of it but gives us 90% for our own use and reserves only 10% for Himself. I would call that a great deal! The

government takes our taxes because it needs them finance its operations. God does not need our tithe for His government to function. He has limitless resources at His disposal.

What Should be our Motive for Returning it?

Technically, we do not give the tithe, but rather return it or give it back to God. It comes into our personal account and goes right out!

Returning the tithe is not an act of love or of generosity, but a test of our honesty, pure and simple!

#1: I have heard people say:

"I don't know how I will make ends meet but from this point on I am going to make a sacrifice, I am going to pay my tithe."

But we cannot sacrifice what is not ours in the first place!

#2: I have heard others say:

"I will tithe because God promises to bless me if I do."

Once again, the wrong motivation!

#3: Still others say, *"I don't want to incur God's curse so I will tithe."*

We do not tithe to gain God's blessing or to escape His curse. We tithe because it belongs to Him. Returning the tithe is a matter of honesty, pure and simple! And when we tithe the blessing comes as a natural result. We do not tithe for God to bless us, rather we tithe and He blesses us.

Where Should we Return it?

Malachi 3 tells us to take it to the storehouse. But where is the storehouse?

Where was the Storehouse in the Old Testament?

According to Deuteronomy 12:11-14, even before the children of Israel

entered the **promised land**, God spoke of a **central place** where the people were to **bring** the tithes:

*"... there will be **the place** where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide [**the temple in Jerusalem**]. **There you shall bring** all that I command you: your burnt **offerings**, your sacrifices, **your tithes**, the heave **offerings** of your hand, and all your choice **offerings** which you vow to the Lord."*

Once they were established in the **land of Canaan** they were to take the tithe to a central location. We discover that the central location was the **Jerusalem Temple**.

1 Chronicles 26:20: The **storehouse** was in the **temple** and the temple was the house of God:

*"Of the Levites, Ahijah was over the **treasuries** of the **house of God** and over the **treasuries** of the dedicated things."*

Malachi 3:10

God said, *"that there may be meat in **mine house**."*

God's house was the temple in Jerusalem:

Isaiah 56:7 God's promise that He would bring even the **stranger** to his holy mountain and:

*"make them joyful in **my house** of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon **mine altar**; for **mine house** shall be called an **house of prayer** for all people."*

Upon concluding His **triumphal entry** into Jerusalem Jesus threw out the money changers and referred to the temple as "my house".

Matthew 21:12-13

*"Then Jesus went into the **temple of** God and drove out all those who bought and*

sold **in the temple**, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ And He said to them, "It is written, '**My house** shall be called **a house** of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

Mark 12:41-44

Jesus referred to the **treasury in the temple**:

*"Now Jesus sat opposite **the treasury** and saw how the people put money **into the treasury**. And many who were rich put in much. ⁴² Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. ⁴³ So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have **given to the treasury**; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her **whole livelihood**."*

Persons were not at liberty to decide **where to return the tithe**. It was to be brought to the **Lord's house**—the temple.

Ellen White is also very clear about the meaning of the storehouse:

*"Will any venture longer **to rob God** in tithes and offerings? In the coming holidays, let our gifts be not to one another, but to the **house of God**, 'that there may,' He says, 'be meat in **mine house**.' In place of spending our time and means in getting up something to surprise and gratify our friends, shall we not turn all our offerings into **God's treasury**?" *The Review and Herald*, December 8, 1896*

Where is the Storehouse Today?

According to **1 Timothy 3:15**, the house or temple of God today is **the church**. So this must mean that the tithe is to be deposited in the **treasury** of the local **church**.

1 Timothy 3:14-15

"These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; ¹⁵ but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the

house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

What Is The Tithe To Be Used For?

Numbers 18:20: No inheritance for the Levites:

"Then the Lord said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel."

Numbers 18:24: Because they had no inheritance, their job was to serve the spiritual needs of the congregation full time:

"For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to the Lord, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore, I have said to them, 'Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.'"

Numbers 18:21: The tithe was for the service of the Levites in the Temple who served the spiritual needs of the congregation:

"Behold, I have given [the church members do not pay the preacher, God does] the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting."

Numbers 18:26: The Levites were to give a good example by tithing their tithe:

"Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: 'When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the Lord, a tenth of the tithe.'"

The tithe was to be used strictly for the remuneration of the Levitical priesthood who served the spiritual needs of the congregation of Israel.

Numbers 18:21 makes this undeniably clear.

*“Behold, **I have given** the **children of Levi** **all** the tithes in Israel as an inheritance **in return** for the work which they perform, the **work of the tabernacle** of meeting.”*

Has God’s Plan Changed?

But, has God’s plan **changed** in the New Testament? Let’s go to the **1 Corinthians chapter 9** for an answer.

1 Corinthians 9:1-3: The **members** of Corinth were the **fruit** of Paul’s labors and **the proof** that **he had been called** to the gospel ministry.

1 Corinthians 9:4-6: Paul argues that a **minister** of the gospel has the **right to be remunerated**.

1 Corinthians 9:7-9: Paul uses **four arguments** to prove that a minister of the gospel **should be remunerated** for his work:

- A **soldier** does not go to war at his own expense (9:7)
- One who **plants** a vineyard has a right to eat from it (9:7)
- One who tends the **flock** has a right to drink the milk from the flock (9:7)
- Paul then quotes **Deuteronomy 25:4** to show that **even oxen** who were threshing had the right to eat **from the floor** they were threshing upon (9:8, 9). Paul then explains that this prescription was **not given for the benefit of oxen** but **for ministers** (9:9, 10).

1 Corinthians 9:11-12: Paul then argues that ministers who serve in people’s **spiritual matters** should be supported by these same people’s **material things**.

1 Corinthians 9:13-14

“Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? ¹⁴ Even so [in the same way] the Lord has [suggested? Recommended?] commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”

In the Old Testament, priests who served in the temple and at the altar were supported from the tithe. Paul clearly teaches that God has commanded this today. In Malachi 3 God said “let there be food in mine house.” The question is: Food for whom? The answer is, for the ministers!

1 Corinthians 9:15-18: Even though the Lord commanded the ministers to be paid from the tithe, the apostle Paul chose to be a self-supporting minister because he was always being criticized by his enemies that he was in the work for financial gain.

Ellen White and Purpose of the Tithe

Ellen White concurs with Scripture:

“The tithe is the Lord’s, and those who meddle with it will be punished with the loss of their heavenly treasure unless they repent. Let the work no longer be hedged up because the tithe has been diverted into various channels other than the one to which the Lord has said it should go. Provision is to be made for these other lines of work. They are to be sustained, but not from the tithe. God has not changed; the tithe is still to be used for the support of the ministry.” Counsels on Stewardship, p. 102

“This fund [the tithe] should not in any case be devoted to any other use; it is to be devoted solely to support the ministry of the gospel.” The Review and Herald, May 9, 1893

“One reasons that the tithe may be appropriated for school purposes; still another would reason that canvassers and colporteurs should be supported from the tithe, but a great mistake is made when the tithe is withdrawn from the

*object for which it is to be used—the **support of the ministers.**” Echoes from the Field, June 21, 1905*

The church does not pay the preacher, God does.

Excuses People Offer for Not Tithing

I have heard people in the church offer **other excuses** for not returning the tithe. And I must stress that they are excuses, **not reasons**. Let’s examine some of them.

Excuse #1

“I can’t make ends meet if I tithe, I **can’t afford it**. I give **what I can**.” The fact is, **we cannot afford not to tithe**. Would it be right to go to a store and **shoplift** if you were in need? Of course not! Then why is it alright to steal from God when we are in need? Would it not be best to **get out of debt and stay out of debt** and learn to be **thrifty** in our lifestyle? After all, most of us have **more than we need** even though we may have **less than we want**.

Excuse #2

“I give my **time and talents** to the Lord and **this is my tithe**.” God does not run a **restaurant** where you can pay your bill by **washing the dishes**! God expects our time, talents, strength and tithe!

Excuse #3

“God **doesn’t really care** how much I give because he **looks at my heart**, at the **inside**, not the outside. Besides, I am **under grace** and God loves me no matter what.” It is true that God loves you, but many people whom God loves **will be lost**! You see, God will not forgive any **cherished sin**, especially covetousness. There will be **no thieves in heaven**.

Excuse #4

“I pay the preacher’s salary and if he doesn’t preach what I think he should, **I**

will withhold my tithe or take it elsewhere.” The misconception here is the idea that you pay the preacher’s salary. The fact is, you do not pay the preachers salary, God does. It is His money and He pays the preacher.

Numbers 18:26

“Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, ‘When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you [the priests] from them [the congregation] for your inheritance, then you shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithe’.”

Furthermore, those who say this are thinking that returning the tithe is an investment. In a consumer oriented society, we tend to think we pay for services rendered. *This is the American way!* But the tithe has nothing to do with getting a return on your money. It is a matter of honesty, pure and simple!

Excuse #5

“The preacher is being legalistic when he says that I must return tithe. It is simply enough to love Jesus!” It amazing how many duties we fail to fulfill in the name of love! You can tithe without loving Jesus but you cannot love Jesus and not tithe!

Jesus dealt with this problem in Matthew 23:23

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin [legalism], and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”

Why did God Choose this Method to Remunerate the Ministry?

It goes without saying that God does not need my money because it is all His anyway.

Psalm 24:1

*“The **earth** is the Lord’s and the **fullness** thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”*

God has chosen this way to **finance His work** for the same reason He has chosen us to **preach the gospel** when He could do it much more efficiently and quickly. The tithing system was developed for our **personal good**. It **tests our faithfulness** to God, develops **habits of honesty and integrity** and **starves covetousness to death!**

How Important is This Issue of Tithing?

Wherever I have ministered, I have found that the people who are most faithful in tithing are also the **most prosperous** materially and spiritually. The issue of **honesty is of the utmost importance** in the sight of God—a matter of life and death. God will **not take thieves to heaven!**

What makes us think that God will open wide the gates of the New Jerusalem to **let thieves in**, when he cast Adam and Eve out **for the same sin**? I know this is **strong language** but it is true! Malachi tells us that **repentance** will lead us to return a faithful tithe: *“Return unto me and I will return unto you.”*

The Bible reveals that God **means just what He says** and He cannot be trifled with. God told the priests not to touch the ark. **Uzzah** did and he dropped dead. God told **Saul** not to offer the sacrifice until Samuel returned to Gilgal, but Saul disobeyed and he lost the throne and eventually his salvation. **Ananias and Saphira** vowed a certain amount to God and only gave part of it and they dropped dead. **Nadab and Abihu** offered common fire instead of holy fire and they were consumed. **Belshazzar** used holy vessels to serve wine and he was slain that very night. **Achan** stole God’s tithe of the Promised Land and he was stoned to death.

I don’t want to **scare you into returning the tithe**, but I do want us to understand **how seriously** God considers this matter. If God **winks at our embezzling** the tithe today, then He must **apologize** to all these people for

what happened to them! It is difficult for me to understand how a change from the Old to the New Testament can make stealing and embezzling acceptable today.

Secrets to a Faithful Returning of the Tithe

- It all begins in our mind. We must first reach a firm conviction, thorough Bible study and prayer, that God owns the tithe.
- We must make a firm decision that we will tithe. This involves a firm decision of the will.
- We must act on our decision, like the Nike advertisement, “Just do it!”
- We must renew our decision every pay period. Our will must be trained to habitually choose that which is right on a continuing basis.

May the Lord the Lord help us be faithful in this matter.

In Closing, Let's Again Read

Malachi 3:8-11

“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ ‘In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. ¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, ‘Says the Lord of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.””

Just a couple of Ellen White statements before I close:

“All that is withheld of that which God claims, the tenth of the increase, is recorded in the books of heaven against the withholders, as robbery. Such defraud their Creator; and when this sin of neglect is brought before them, it is not enough for them to change their course and begin to work from that time

upon the right principle. This will not correct the figures made in the heavenly record for **embezzling** the property committed to them in trust to be returned to the Lender. Repentance for unfaithful dealing with God, and for **base ingratitude**, is required.” *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 394

“In that day when every man shall be judged according to the deeds done in the body, **every excuse that selfishness may now make** for withholding the tithe, the gifts and offerings, from the Lord will melt away as the dew before the sun. If it were not forever too late, how glad would many be to **go back** and rebuild their characters! But it will be **too late** then to change the record of those who, **weekly, monthly, and yearly**, have robbed God. Their destiny will be fixed, unalterably fixed. . .” *Messages To Young People*, pp. 307, 308

Offerings

The tithe **envelope**:

#1: Tithe (last year \$840,000) None of the tithe stays in the local church.

#2: Conference Advance—progress (camp-meeting, evangelism, education, Camp Wawona). All last year was \$4,100

#3: World Missions (\$14,000 in 2020; 6,600 in 2021)

#4: Church Budget (\$293,000 in 2021 about the same as 2020)

- ✓ Community Service’s needs **\$1,600 a month** (\$4,000 last year), over **100 Bible studies**, and people to **follow up** the Bible studies and to **work at the center**.
- ✓ Worthy Student **\$8,000** needed a year
- ✓ Fresno Adventist Academy (FAA) subsidy **\$125,000.00**
- ✓ Need a full time **secretary**



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

ADDENDUM TO LESSON #18 – UNFAITHFUL MAMMON

We will study a parable that is somewhat difficult to interpret, the unfaithful steward. We find this parable in Luke 16:1-9.

The Purpose of the Parable

“Christ's coming was at a time of intense worldliness. Men were subordinating the eternal to the temporal, the claims of the future to the affairs of the present. They were mistaking phantoms for realities, and realities for phantoms. They did not by faith behold the unseen world. Satan presented before them the things of this life as all-attractive and all-absorbing, and they gave heed to his temptations.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 366

2 Corinthians 4:17, 18

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal.”

HERE AND NOW

*Temporal/a moment
Present
Phantoms
Seen
This life
Light affliction*

SWEET BY AND BY

*Eternal
Future
Realities
Unseen
Future life
Eternal weight of glory*

Both the apostle **Paul and Ellen White** are comparing those who focus on the **here and now** versus those who invest for the **sweet by and by**.

The Parable

Luke 16:1-13

*"He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain **rich man** who had a **steward**, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting **his** goods. ² So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an **account** of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' ³ "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot **dig**; I am ashamed to **beg**. ⁴ I have resolved what to do, that when I am **put out of the stewardship**, they may **receive me** into their houses.' ⁵ "So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to **the first**, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷ Then he said **to another**, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' ⁸ So the **master commended** the unjust steward because he had dealt **shrewdly**." [not because he was dishonest]*

Jesus applies the lessons from the parable:

"For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

“⁹ And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon [like the steward did after he saw the light], that when you fail, they [who are they?] may receive you into an everlasting home.¹⁰ He who is faithful in what is least [in this life] is faithful also in much [in the next life]; and he who is unjust in what is least [in this life] is unjust also in much [in the next life].¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon [the Lord’s resources in this life], who will commit to your trust the true riches [the Lord’s resources of the future life]?¹² And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s [what God has given us in this life], who will give you what is your own [what God will give us in the next life]?”¹³ “No servant can serve two masters [God and yourself]; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Jesus uses a worldly, secular story to teach spiritual other worldly lessons.

Selfish Purposes

Luke 16:1, 2: Up to this point, the steward has used the master’s goods for his own selfish purposes:

“He also said to His disciples: ‘There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. Therefore, he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’”

EGW Note

“To the unfaithful steward his lord’s goods had been entrusted for benevolent purposes; but he had used them for himself.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 369

A Difficult Predicament

Luke 16:3: He is now in a difficult situation because he discerns that the reckoning day is coming and his misuse of the master’s goods will leave him destitute:

"Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg."

Ellen G. White Note

"With the prospect of discharge before him, the steward saw three paths open to his choice. He must labor, beg, or starve." Christ Object Lessons, p. 367

"The servant in the parable had made no provision for the future. The goods entrusted to him for the benefit of others he had used for himself; but he had thought only of the present. When the stewardship should be taken from him, he would have nothing to call his own." Christ Object Lessons, p. 369

Preparation of a Shrewd Plan

Luke 16:4: So he prepares a plan to secure his temporal future:

"I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they [his master's clients] may receive me into their houses."

Luke 16:5-7: Shrewd in planning for his temporal future but by dishonest means:

"So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷ Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty."

Ellen G. White Note

"Christ did not commend the unjust steward, but He made use of a well-known occurrence to illustrate the lesson He desired to teach." Christ Object Lessons, p. 367

*“But his master's goods were **still in his hands**, and he determined to use them so as to secure himself against **future want**. To accomplish this he must work on a **new plan**. Instead of gathering for himself, he must impart to others.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 369, 370*

The dishonest steward was **worldly shrewd**. He decided to give his lord's clients a discount on the merchandise that they had already purchased, but had not yet paid for.

*“This unfaithful servant made others sharers with him in his dishonesty. He defrauded his master to advantage them, and by accepting this advantage, they placed themselves **under obligation** to receive him as a friend into **their homes**.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 367*

The Master Commends the Steward

Luke 16:8a:

*“So the **master** [lord, KJV] **commended** the unjust steward because he had dealt **shrewdly**.”*

EGW Note:

*“The **worldly man** praised the **sharpness** of the man who had defrauded him [not his dishonesty but his shrewdness]. However, the rich man's commendation was **not the commendation of God**.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 367*

Sons of this World and Sons of Light

Luke 16:8b: Now comes the **application** of the parable. A **comparison** of the worldly, secular man planning for his **future temporal** needs, with the sons of light—believers—and their **eternal needs**:

*“For the sons of **this world** are shrewder in their generation [in the secular affairs in the present world] than the **sons of light**.”*

This verse teaches the central lesson of the parable. In the next verse, Jesus will apply the parable to the **sons of the light**.

Here the **contrast** is between the children of this world who are shrewd in making provision for the **future temporal needs** and the sons of the light who lay no plans for their **future eternal needs**.

Luke 16:9

*“And **I say to you** [Jesus is speaking to the sons of light], **make friends** for yourselves by **unrighteous mammon** that when you fail, **they** [who is ‘they’?] may **receive you** [the sons of light] into an **everlasting home** [heaven].”*

The Meaning of Unrighteous Mammon (Verses 8, 9)

Luke 16:8-9: New Century Version

*“So, the master praised the dishonest manager for being smart. Yes, worldly people are smarter with their own kind than **spiritual people** are. ⁹ “I tell you, make friends for yourselves using **worldly riches** [**unrighteous mammon**] so that when those riches are gone, you will be welcomed in those homes that **continue forever**.”*

Luke 16:8-9: NIV

*“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the **people of this world** are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the **people of the light**. ⁹ I tell you, use **worldly wealth** to gain **friends** for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be **welcomed into eternal dwellings**.”*

Luke 16:8, 9, Good News

*“As a result the master of this dishonest manager praised him for doing such a shrewd thing; because the **people of this world** are much more shrewd in handling their affairs than the people who **belong to the light**.” ⁹ And Jesus went*

on to say, “And so I tell you: make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home.”

Luke 16:8, 9, New Living

“The rich man had to admire the dishonest rascal for being so shrewd. And it is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light.⁹ Here's the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.”

Addressed to Five Different Groups

#1: To the publicans

“There had been among the publicans [tax collectors] just such a case as that represented in the parable, and in Christ's description they recognized their own practices. Their attention was arrested, and from the picture of their own dishonest practices, many of them learned a lesson of spiritual truth. COL, p. 368

“Christ was seeking by every means to win them to higher aims and nobler principles [investing for eternity]. This purpose He had in mind in the story of the unfaithful steward.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 368

#2: To the disciples

“The parable was, however, spoken directly to the disciples.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 368

Note: They were to use the master's goods for the blessing of others and not for their own advancement.

#3: To the Pharisees

“The Pharisees, filled with self-importance and self-righteousness, were misapplying the goods lent them by God to use for His glory.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 369.4

*“And the Savior was speaking also **to the Pharisees**. He did not relinquish the hope that they would perceive the force of His words. Many had been deeply convicted, and as they should hear the truth under the dictation of the Holy Spirit, **not a few would become believers in Christ**.” *Christ Object Lessons*, p. 369*

*“The scene known to have taken place among the publicans He holds up before the **Pharisees** both as representing **their course of action** and as showing the only way in which they can **redeem their errors**.” *Christ Object Lessons*, p. 369*

#4: To Israel

*“**So with Israel**. God had chosen the seed of Abraham. With a high arm, He had delivered them from bondage in Egypt. He had made them the **depositaries of sacred truth** for the **blessing of the world**. He had entrusted to them the **living oracles** that they might **communicate the light** to others. But His stewards had used these gifts to **enrich and exalt themselves**.” *Christ Object Lessons*, p. 369*

*“Thus he might **secure friends**, who, when he should be cast out, would **receive him**. So with the **Pharisees**. The stewardship was soon to be taken from them, and they were called upon to **provide for the future**. Only by seeking the **good of others** could they **benefit themselves**. Only by **imparting** God's gifts in the **present life** could they **provide for eternity**.” *Christ Object Lessons*, p. 369*

#5: Lessons for Everyone

*“The lesson of this parable is **for all**. Everyone will be **held responsible** for the grace given him through Christ. Life is too solemn to be absorbed in temporal or earthly matters. The Lord desires that we shall **communicate to others** that which the eternal and unseen communicates to us.” *Christ Object Lessons*, p. 373*

*“The Lord has endowed them with **capabilities, and power, and influence**; He has entrusted them with **money**, that they may be **co-workers** with Him in the great redemption. All His gifts are to be **used in blessing** humanity, in **relieving the suffering** and the needy. We are to feed the **hungry**, to clothe the **naked**, to*

care for the widow and the fatherless, to minister to the distressed and downtrodden.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 370

“Alas, how many are appropriating to themselves the gifts of God! How many are adding house to house and land to land. How many are spending their money for pleasure, for the gratification of appetite, for extravagant houses, furniture, and dress. Their fellow beings are left to misery and crime, to disease and death. Multitudes are perishing without one pitying look, one word or deed of sympathy.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 371

“They are embezzling His entrusted goods.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 371

“Everyone will be required to render up his entrusted gifts. In the day of final judgment men's hoarded wealth will be worthless to them. They have nothing they can call their own.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 372

“Those who spend their lives in laying up worldly treasure show less wisdom, less thought and care for their eternal well-being, than did the unjust steward for his earthly support. Less wise than the children of this world in their generation are these professed children of the light. Christ Object Lessons, p. 372

Who will Welcome the Sons of Light?

Verse 9

“God and Christ and angels are all ministering to the afflicted, the suffering, and the sinful. Give yourself to God for this work, use His gifts for this purpose, and you enter into partnership with heavenly beings. Your heart will throb in sympathy with theirs. You will be assimilated to them in character. To you these dwellers in the eternal tabernacles will not be strangers. When earthly things [unrighteous mammon] shall have passed away, the watchers at heaven's gates will bid you welcome.” Christ Object Lessons, p. 373

Albert Barnes

“This may be done by using our riches as we ‘should do;’ that is, by not suffering them to entangle us in cares and perplexities dangerous to the soul, engrossing

the time, and stealing away the affections; by employing them in works of mercy and benevolence, aiding the poor, contributing to the advance of the gospel, bestowing them where they will do good, and in such a manner that God will 'approve' the deed, and will bless us for it."

"To those who have squandered His goods, Christ still gives opportunity to secure lasting riches [we will face the judgment but it has not taken place yet]. He says, 'Give, and it shall be given unto you.' 'Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.' Luke 6:38; 12:33. 'Charge them that are rich in this world, . . . that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.' 1 Timothy 6:17-19." Christ Object Lessons, pp. 374, 375

If

- A worldly person who has squandered his master's goods
- Starts thinking about the future and
- Begins benefitting others, albeit with dishonest methods
- So that his friends will welcome him to their temporal homes,

How much more

- Should the children of the light who have squandered God's goods
- Start thinking about the future and
- Use the Master's resources to benefit others
- So that the heavenly beings will welcome them to the heavenly home.

Comparison by Contrast

If an unjust judge, who does not fear God or regard man answers the pleas of a widow (the secular realm), how much more will God answer the pleas of His people because He loves them (the spiritual realm).

If an unfaithful steward, after wasting his master's goods, comes to himself and invests in the future by thinking of others, through dishonest means (the secular realm), how much more should God's people who have wasted God's goods consider their ways and by honest means invest in the future kingdom (the spiritual realm).

Verses 10-13

Luke 16:10-13

*"He who is faithful in what is least **[the riches in this life]** is faithful also in much **[the riches in the world to come]**; and he who is unjust in what is least **[in this life]** is unjust also in much **[in the life to come]**. ¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous **mammon** **[the worldly wealth in this life]**, who will commit to your trust the **true riches** **[the riches of wealth in heaven]**? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in what is **another man's**, who will give you what is **your own**? ¹³ "No servant can serve **two masters** **[love the Lord and hoard worldly riches]**; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve **God** and **mammon** **[claim to serve God and yet hoard riches in this life that don't belong to you]**."*

A Final Example

Hebrews 11:24-26

*"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the **passing pleasures** of sin, ²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ **greater riches** than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked **to the reward**."*

Where would Moses be today if he had chosen to remain in Egypt?

Where is he today?

“Houses and lands will be of no use to the saints in the time of trouble, for they will then have to flee before infuriated mobs, and at that time their possessions cannot be disposed of to advance the cause of present truth. I was shown that it is the will of God that the saints should cut loose from every encumbrance before the time of trouble comes, and make a covenant with God through sacrifice.” Ellen G. White, Early Writings, pp. 56, 57



“What Jesus Said to New Testament Christians”

by Pastor Stephen Bohr

BAPTISM IN THE NAME

Introduction

My experience in Manhattan, New York:

- At the end of the service one night, someone **gave me a DVD** and said: ‘Pastor, please watch this and tell me what you think’.
- The speaker was Christian Silva, the son of a retired Seventh-day Adventist pastor in Argentina.
- The title of his presentation was: “**The Apostate Baptism**”.
- His presentation appeared **logical**, with evidence that **appeared to be persuasive documentation** so I decided to research the matter.
- **His argument**: The words attributed to Jesus in the baptismal formula, “*baptizing them in the name of the **Father**, the **Son** and the **Holy Spirit**”* are not part of the original text of Matthew 28:19. Rather, they were added by the Catholic Church during the period of the Trinitarian controversies at the **Council of Nicaea** in the year 325 AD to sustain the **pagan doctrine** of the trinity.
- He **correctly argued** that Matthew 28:19 is the only place where the name of the three persons of the Godhead are invoked. All the baptisms in the book of Acts the baptisms in the book of Acts were performed in the name of Jesus, not the name of all three.

The Problem

Matthew 28:18-20

*“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”*

As mentioned before, **Matthew 28:18-20** is the **only text** in the Bible that contains the command to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All other texts in the New Testament instruct us to baptize in the **name of Jesus**.

Baptisms in the Book of Acts

Acts 2:38: Baptisms on the **Day of Pentecost**:

*“Then Peter said to them: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the **name of Jesus Christ** for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

Acts 8:14-17: The baptism of a group of **Samaritans**:

*“Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, ¹⁵ who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the **name of the Lord Jesus**. ¹⁷ Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”*

Acts 10:43-48: The baptism of the Roman centurion, **Cornelius**:

*“To Him all the prophets witness that **through His name** whoever **believes in Him** will receive remission of sins. And he commanded them to be baptized in **the name of the Lord**.*

Acts 19:4, 5: A baptism at **Ephesus**:

*"Then Paul said: "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." ⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the **name of the Lord Jesus**."*

Acts 22:16: The baptism of **Saul of Tarsus**:

*"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the **name of the Lord**."*

Acts 4:12: Salvation only in the name of Jesus:

*"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is **no other name under heaven** given among men by which we must be saved."*

No Name in the Formula

Although the baptismal formula instructs us to invoke the name of the three persons of the **Godhead**, it but does not tell us **what that name is**.

- The word '**name**' in Matthew 28:19 is **singular**. Thus, baptism is in a **single name**, not three. That is to say, the three persons in the Godhead share one **common name**.
- What is the name? The baptismal formula does **not provide the name**. It simply tells us to invoke the name. '**Father**' is not a proper name, '**Son**' is not a proper name and '**Holy Spirit**' is not a proper name either. These are **functional titles**, not proper names.

Ellen White and the Authenticity of the Formula

Ellen White repeatedly vouches for the authenticity of the baptismal formula. Here are a few of examples:

"He gave His commission to the disciples: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations," "baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Matthew 28:19, 20, R. V. The Desire of Ages, p. 819

"Just before He left them, **Christ gave His disciples the promise**, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." While **these words were upon His lips**, He ascended, a cloud of angels received Him, and escorted Him to the City of God." Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pp. 65, 66

"Christ desires every minister, everyone who lives by faith in Him, to realize that upon him there rests a sacred responsibility. To all who have enlisted in God's service is given the gospel commission to carry to nations a knowledge of the truth for this time. To inspire us with confidence, **God has preserved for us a record of the giving of this commission**. After His resurrection, **Jesus spoke unto His disciples**, saying, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Bible Training School, July 1, 1903

Ellen White's seeming Ambiguity

In the following quotation, Ellen White explained that Jesus commanded His disciples to carry forward His work in **His name** but baptism should be in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

"The disciples were to carry their work forward in **Christ's name**. Their every word and act was to fasten attention on **His name**, as possessing that vital power by which sinners may be saved. Their faith was to center **in Him** who is the source

of mercy and power. In **His name** they were to present their petitions to the Father, and they would receive answer. They were to **baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christ's name** was to be their watchword, their badge of distinction, their bond of union, the authority for their course of action, and the source of their success. Nothing was to be recognized in His kingdom that did not bear **His name** and superscription." Acts of the Apostles, p. 28

Ellen White obviously **saw no contradiction** between **baptizing** in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and carrying **forward the work** of the gospel in the name of Jesus.

Solving the Seeming Discrepancy

So, how do we solve this **apparent discrepancy** between baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and baptism in the name of Jesus? According to Scripture, Jesus did not come in His **own name** but rather in the name of His Father:

Isaiah 44:6 is a very interesting verse in that it describes **two persons**, who both bear the **same name**, Yahweh.

Isaiah 44:6

"Thus says the **LORD [Yahweh]**, the King of Israel **and** his Redeemer, the **LORD [Yahweh]** of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God.'"

Yahweh led Israel in the **pillar** of cloud and the pillar of fire:

Exodus 13:21

"And the **LORD [Yahweh]** went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night."

The **Angel of God** led Israel across the wilderness but the Angel was the Lord:

Exodus 14:19, 24

*"And the **Angel of God**, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. ²⁴ Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that **the Lord looked down** upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians."*

The name of Yahweh was in the Angel:

Exodus 23:20-22

*"Behold, I send an **Angel** before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. ²¹ Beware of Him and **obey His voice**; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for **My name is in Him**. ²² But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then **I will be** an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries."*

Jesus Came in His Father's Name

Jesus did the Father's will and came, not in His **own name**, but in the name of the Father:

John 5:30

*"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but **the will of the Father** who sent Me."*

John 12:49, 50

*"For I have not spoken on **My own authority**; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, **what I should say and what I should speak**. ⁵⁰ And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the **Father has told Me**, so I speak."*

John 14:7-10

*"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." ⁸ Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "**Have I been with you** so long, and*

*yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has **seen Me has seen the Father**; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

Jesus said that the Father was with them even though He was not personally there. In this same sense, we are to understand the statement of Jesus 'I will come to you' when He referred to the coming of the Holy Spirit. The presence of Jesus through the Spirit is the same as the presence of the Father through Jesus.

John 14:10, 11

*"Do you not believe that I am **in the Father**, and the Father **in Me**? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on **My own authority**; but the Father who dwells **in Me does the works**."*

John 5:43: Jesus came in **His Father's name**:

*"I have come in **My Father's name**, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his **own name**, him you will receive."*

John 10:25: Jesus came in **His Father's name**:

*"Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in **My Father's name**, they bear witness of Me."*

John 17:6

*"I have manifested **Your name** to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me and they have kept Your word."*

Psalms 22:22

*"I will **declare Your name** to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You."*

Hebrews 2:11, 12

*"For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to **call them brethren**,¹² saying: "I will declare **Your name** to **My brethren**; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You."*

Matthew 21:9: (Cf. Psalm 118:26)

"Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: 'Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord [Yahweh]!' Hosanna in the highest!"

Acts 2:21: (Cf. Joel 2:32)

"And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord [Yahweh] shall be saved.'

Philippians 2:5-11

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Therefore God [the Father] also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus [this is the name] every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

"Jehovah is the name given to Christ. "Behold, God is my salvation," writes the prophet Isaiah; "I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day ye shall say, Praise the Lord, call upon His name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His name is exalted." Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, volume 7A, p. 439

Holy Spirit Comes in Christ's Name

As Jesus did not come in His own name but in the name of the Father, so the Holy Spirit did not come in His own name but rather in the name of Jesus:

John 14:26

*"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send **in My name**, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."*

John 16:13-15

*"However, when He, the **Spirit of truth**, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on **His own authority**, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴ He will **glorify Me**, for He will take of **what is Mine** and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All things that the **Father has are Mine**. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you."*

What the Father has belongs to Jesus and what the Spirit has belongs to Jesus.

John 15:26

*"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will **testify of Me**."*

What is the name?

Matthew 1:21, 24, 25: The angel instructed Mary to give the name 'Jesus':

*"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name **Jesus**, for He will **save** His people from their sins." ²⁴ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did **as the angel of the Lord commanded him** and took to him his wife, ²⁵ and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he **called His name Jesus**."*

Jehoshua: The name 'Jesus' is a compound word that means, "Jehovah saves". This is the **name, which is above all names** that the Father gave Jesus. **Philippians 2:9-11** states explicitly that the Father gave Jesus this name.

The meaning of Baptism

Mark 1:9-11: The gospels tell us that all **three** members of the Godhead were present at the baptism of Jesus. Why, then, would it be unusual to invoke the name of all three as the baptismal formula states?

*"It came to pass in those days that **Jesus** came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the **Spirit** descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then*

a voice came from heaven: 'You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"

"In the submission of Christ to the ordinance of baptism, he shows the sinner one of the important steps in true conversion. Christ had no sins to wash away, but in consenting to become a substitute for man, the sins of guilty man were imputed to him. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." While God accepts Christ as the sinner's substitute, he gives the sinner a chance, with Christ's divine power to help him, to stand the test that Adam failed to endure.

Christ came to John, repenting on the sinner's account, believing in behalf of the sinner [objective aspect of salvation], that through the plan he had devised, of taking humanity, and in suffering and dying for man, the sinner would, through repentance, faith, and baptism, be accepted of God [subjective aspect of salvation]. He was buried by John in the liquid grave, and came up out of the water to represent to man, in his holy life, the true pattern for him to copy.

The steps in conversion, plainly marked out, are repentance, faith in Christ as the world's Redeemer, faith in his death, burial, and resurrection, shown by baptism, and his ascension on high to plead in the sinner's behalf. At the very commencement of his public ministry, he presents himself in the character he sustains to man throughout his mediatorial work. He identifies himself with sinners as their substitute, taking upon himself their sins, numbering himself with transgressors, and doing the work the sinner is required to do in repentance, faith, and willing obedience. What an example is here given in the life of Christ for sinners to imitate! If they will not follow the example given them, they will be without excuse." Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, February 1, 1874

Union with Christ and through Christ with the Father

The expression 'in the name' in the baptismal formula is better translated 'into the name'. The apostle Paul uses the identical preposition in Galatians 3:27 and 1 Corinthians 10:2 and in these verses, all translations translate the preposition 'into'.

At baptism, believers are **incorporated into the name of Christ**. In the sight of God, we died **with** Him, were buried **with** Him, resurrected **with** Him and we **sit** at the right hand of God **with** Him (Ephesians 2:6; see also Colossians 2:11-13; Romans 6:3-6). God includes or **reckons us in Him** and we **are accepted in the beloved**.

A better translation would be that we are baptized **into the name** of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You see, baptism is the **incorporation ceremony** that makes us **brothers and sisters** of Jesus and thus sons and daughters of God. It is through Jesus that we become **members of the heavenly family**.

Brothers and Sisters of Jesus

Jesus is the only one who in the fullest sense is the Son of God. However, when we are **born again** through the agency of the Holy Spirit, we become **brothers and sisters of Jesus** and through Him, **sons and daughters of God**. Thus, baptism means to be included in what Jesus did so that we can be incorporated into the **family of God** once more.

John 14:6: **No one comes** to the Father but through Jesus

Hebrews 2: He is not ashamed to call us **brethren**

Psalms 22:22: I announce your name to **my brethren**

And if we are **in Christ** we have **nothing to fear** of physical death and burial because if we are in Christ He will resurrect us (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Members of God's Family

*"Baptism is a most solemn renunciation of the world. Those who are baptized in the **threefold name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit**, at the very entrance of their Christian life declare publicly that they have forsaken the service of Satan and have become **members of the royal family**, children of the heavenly King." Counsels to the Church, p. 295*

All Three Save Man

All three members of the Godhead are involved in the process of saving man and therefore it is legitimate to call them all “Jesus”, ‘Yahweh saves’.

- The Father **devised the plan**, shared **it with Jesus** and was willing **to give Him up** (Romans 8:32).
- The Son **consented** to carry out the plan of living a **perfect life** and **suffering a substitutionary death**.

*“The words, ‘Mine hour is not yet come,’ point to the fact that every act of Christ's life on earth was in **fulfillment of the plan** that had **existed from the days of eternity**. Before He came to earth, the plan lay out before Him, **perfect in all its details**. But as He walked among men, He was guided, step by step, by the Father's will. He did not hesitate to act at the **appointed time**. With the same submission He waited until the **time had come**.” The Desire of Ages, p. 147*

- The Holy Spirit **reveals to us from day to day** what Jesus did to fulfill the plan that was made in eternity. After Jesus returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit came as Christ's **representative** to work on the **human heart** for people to accept what Jesus did for them and to **reproduce** in them the character that He first developed in Jesus. The Holy Spirit applies the **benefits** of Christ's work.

*“Our sanctification is the work of the **Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit**. It is the fulfilment of the covenant that God has made with those who bind themselves up with Him, to stand with Him, with His Son, and with His Spirit in holy fellowship. Have you been born again? Have you become a new being in Christ Jesus? Then co-operate with the **three great powers of heaven** who are working in your behalf. Doing this you will reveal to the world the principles of righteousness.” Signs of the Times, June 19, 1901*

Who is Most Important?

Who is **more important** in the process of salvation? The answer is that all are **equally indispensable**. Salvation was a cooperative effort.

Galatians 4:4-6: All **three are involved** in the process of saving man:

*"The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the **Father**, the **Son**, and the **Holy Spirit** gave **Themselves** to the working out of the plan of redemption. In order **fully to carry out this plan**, it was decided that Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin. What line can measure the depth of this love? God would make it impossible for man to say that He could have done more. With Christ He gave all the resources of heaven that nothing might be wanting in the plan for man's uplifting." Counsels on Health, p. 222*

We cannot '**tricotomize**' the Godhead by saying that baptism is incorporation only into Jesus. Yes, at baptism we become brothers and sisters of Jesus but also members of the heavenly family—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Never does the Bible say that we cannot include the Father and Holy Spirit in the formula. It simply emphasizes that we must do it in the **name of Jesus which is the name shared by all three**.

Importance of Baptism

It is indispensable: **Mark 16:15, 16**

*"Christ has made baptism the sign of entrance to His spiritual kingdom. He has made this a positive condition with which all must comply who wish to be acknowledged as under the **authority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit**. Before man can find a home in the church, before passing the threshold of God's spiritual kingdom, he is to receive the **impress of the divine name**, "The Lord Our Righteousness." Jeremiah 23:6. Counsels to the Church, p. 295*

BAPTISMAL FORMULA BEFORE NICEA

Didaché - Teaching of the Twelve Apostles

He then states in a footnote (op. cit., p. 284), "A new consensus is emerging for a date c. 100 AD."

The *Didaché* **twice alludes to the Matthew 28 baptismal formula**, serving as an **independent witness** that the early church knew this formula and used it at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second at the latest.

J.B. Lightfoot's translation of the *Didaché*:

Chapter 7:1 'But concerning baptism, thus shall ye baptize'.

Chapter 7:2 Having first recited all these things, baptize '**in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**' in living (running) water.

Chapter 7:3 'However, if thou hast not living water, then baptize in other water;'

Chapter 7:4 'and if thou art not able in cold, then in warm.'

Chapter 7:5 'However, if thou hast neither, then pour water on the head thrice in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

Chapter 7:6 'However, before the baptism let him that baptizes and him that is baptized fast and any others also who are able;'

Chapter 7:7 'and thou shalt order him that is baptized to fast a day or two before.'

Ignatius of Antioch (ca. AD. 107-112)

Chapter IX.-The Old Testament is Good: The New Testament is Better:

... The priests indeed, and the ministers of the word, are good; but the High Priest is better, to whom the holy of holies has been committed, and who alone has been entrusted with the secrets of God. The ministering powers of God are good. The **Comforter** is holy, and the **Word** is holy, the **Son of the Father**, by whom He made all things, and exercises a providence over them all . . . For those things which the prophets announced, saying, "Until He come for whom it is

reserved, and He shall be the expectation of the Gentiles," have been fulfilled **in the Gospel, [our Lord saying,] "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."** All then are good together, the law, the prophets, the apostles, the whole company [of others] that have believed through them: only if we love one another. (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians*)

Chapter II.-Unity of the Three Divine Persons.

"There are not then either three Fathers, or three Sons, or three Paracletes, but one Father, and one Son, and one Paraclete. Wherefore also the Lord, **when He sent forth the apostles to make disciples of all nations, commanded them to "baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,"** not unto one [person] having three names, nor into three [persons] who became incarnate, but into three possessed of equal honor. (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Philippians*)

Irenaeus (ca. 130-200)

Chapter XVII.-The Apostles Teach that It Was Neither Christ Nor the Saviour, But the Holy Spirit, Who Did Descend Upon Jesus. The Reason for This Descent.

"And again, giving **to the disciples** the power of regeneration into God, **He said to them, "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."** (*Irenaeus Against Heresies Book III*)

Tertullian (ca. 160-220)

(*Tertullian On Baptism*; Chapter XX.

... Accordingly, after one of these had been struck off, He commanded the eleven others, on His departure to the Father, **to "go and teach all nations, who were to be baptized into the Father, and into the Son, and into the Holy Ghost."** Immediately, therefore, so did the apostles, whom this designation **[apostles]** indicates as "*the sent*." ... (*Tertullian The Prescription Against Heretics*)
Tertullian On Baptism; Chapter XIII.

“For the *law* of baptizing has been *imposed*, and the formula prescribed: **"Go,"**
He saith, "teach the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

CONTACT INFORMATION

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