

The Shepherd's Bible Institute -Semester 2

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The Gospel Jesus Preached

Introduction: The word “Gospel” comes from an old English word meaning “God’s spell” or God’s story. The New Testament Greek word is “Euangelion,” meaning “to proclaim good news or glad tidings.”

Luke 7:22 Jesus prophetically quoted from **Isaiah 61:1** while in his hometown synagogue of Nazareth. He said, *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor.*”

1. Jesus was applying this prophecy to himself. He is announcing the Messianic Kingdom has begun.
2. Jesus is the first teacher to use the expression “*to preach the Gospel*.” “He means we are to proclaim the good news that the King (Messiah) has arrived.

I. The Purpose of the Gospel is to announce the Gospel of God.

“Jesus came preaching the gospel of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.” Mark 1:14-15

Explain: The purpose of the Gospel Jesus preached was to announce the Reign of God. He announces there is a new King in town! Things will never be the same again.!

1. Jesus told his disciples the Kingdom was “at hand.” See Matthew 4:17; Matt. 10:7ff, Luke 10:9

They were to announce this Kingdom had come to the world.

2. Jesus’ miracles were proof of His [God’s] authority over nature, sickness, even Satan & his demons. His resurrection is His great climax to the story!

Apply: The gospel story is the announcement that the King is here (Messiah), and He has brought His kingdom with Him! The Messiah has invaded human culture and brought a new age, a new King, and a new kingdom.

Question: Have we changed the message & purpose of the Gospel Jesus preached? Is our denominational gospel about the Kingdom of God? How much of our Gospel is about the Kingdom of God & His rule?

II. The Person of the Gospel= Mark 1:1; Romans 1:1-4

After Jesus’ death & resurrection, the Apostles understand that God’s story is all about Jesus, His rule & reign in the universe.

1. The Gospel of God= **Roman’s 1:1 & Hebrews 1:1, 2**
The Story is God’s story; He authored it, narrates it, & puts Jesus as it’s hero.

2. The Apostle's now begin to understand that the message of the Gospel is Jesus Christ, the Son of God! Jesus is the story; He is the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing more, nothing less!

The gospel is about King Jesus and His kingdom. When Paul writes to the Corinthian church, he defines the gospel as Jesus crucified, buried and risen again; , *“Now I make known to you brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you were saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 1st Corinthians 15:1*

III. The Power of the Gospel

The Gospel is good news of victory over sin & death. Christ's death & resurrection was for us who believe. It is also about the victory of Good over Evil. The Gospel tells of God's Kingdom winning over Satan's kingdom.

1. The cross & resurrection demonstrate the power of the Gospel to conquer evil.

Romans 1:16= The Gospel is the power of God unto Salvation...

Point: The Gospel is about resurrection Life {Zoe} The very life of Jesus for us, and in us.

1. The Apostles were not ashamed of the Gospel, and neither should we be!

Illustration: John the baptizer was in prison & sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if he (Jesus) really was the Messiah. Jesus said. *“Tell him the dead are being raised, the sick healed, the lame are walking, & the blind are seeing.”*

Apply: We should be ashamed of a powerless Gospel that changes nothing or no one. When preached in the power of the Holy Spirit- The gospel changes, transforms, and restores people and cultures. It brings the kingdom to earth where it restores what was fallen and broken by sin.

IV. The Personal reception of the Gospel= Romans 1:16 b

The Gospel is for those who “believe” that the story is true. It is God's power committed to those who believe! See **Mark 16:15-17**

1. The power of the Story is measured by your faith in it. Those who believe it, see miracles, those who doubt it see only Satan's reign in their lives.

2. Your faith in the story grows as you apply it to your daily life. *“Blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed.”*

V. Beware the Perversion of the Gospel= Galatians 1:6-9

Paul warned of those who come with “another Gospel” offering something more than Jesus!!

Question: Is our Gospel about Jesus alone- *“He is risen”* or is it about church, escapism, or personal advancement. We need to be reminded the Gospel is not about us but rather about Him. Like Paul the apostle, we need know nothing but Christ Crucified, risen and reigning.

Take aways:

Which Kingdom are you living in? Many are ruled by Culture, tribal customs, or fear of man. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has set us free to live in His power & grace.

Have we added anything to the gospel (story)? Have we changed the message from Jesus plus nothing to Jesus plus baptism? Jesus plus good works? Jesus plus church membership or attendance. Jesus plus tithing?

Beware of distorting or changing the message from Jesus to anything else.

What would change in your life, if you truly lived under the sovereign rule of King Jesus? What courage would it take to get you to choose the King & kingdom over family, tribe, or culture?

Notes

The Gospel and the Kingdom of God

Introduction: The word “*gospel*” means “God’s story.” The four Gospels are in reality the story of a King and his kingdom. Each tells the story from a different perspective.

Apply: Western thought- we tend to analysis them and turn the Gospels into an instruction manual for successful living. The danger is it can put you under condemnation very quickly. Better to let each Gospel tell you it’s story and make its point.

The Synoptics- The three Gospels-Matthew Mark and Luke are called the “synoptics” because they tell the Story of Jesus differently, but uniquely the same (synoptic means to “see the same”)

Matthew’s Gospel= Written by Matthew, telling the Jesus story from a Jewish perspective. Jesus is the long awaited Jewish Messiah. The theme is “fulfilled.” Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Covenant promises of a coming Messiah. For example, Matthew’s story begins with a genealogy that starts with Abraham, thus Jesus is the son of Israel, its Messiah, it’s Savior King. Jesus is the Davidic King promised throughout the old Covenant.

Mark’s Gospel=the theme is that Jesus the wonder/worker has come, He is the Servant/king coming to redeem all men. Mark has no genealogy, but rather begins with John the Baptizer. His Gospel is less Jewish and aimed to reach a non-Jewish world.

Luke’s Gospel=his genealogy begins with Adam, showing Jesus is the Savior of the world. He is for all men, not just Jews. Luke was not an Apostle but he interviewed many eyewitnesses who knew Jesus.

John’s Gospel= the fourth gospel, presents Jesus as the Eternal Word, God’s final word to mankind. He is the Word made flesh. His story begins in eternity past, from “the beginning.”

The four Gospels together tells us the story of Jesus:

I. They tell us *one* story.

The story is that all of Creation is coming to a climax in the advent of the Kingdom of God.

They are announcing that a new era has come, a radical event has happened in the coming of King Jesus. Things will never be the same again!

II. They tell *us the rest* of the story-

The Old covenant is being fulfilled in the New. Israel the old has failed but is being fulfilled in the new people of God- the Church. All the Gospels see the Kingdom of God as coming out of the Old Covenant. The whole bible is not many stories but is a unit, one big story, the old covenant being fulfilled in the new.

III. They tell us a *salvation* story- a Redeemer King has come to rescue mankind and establish His kingdom.

Explain: The story begins in Eden's Garden where God creates man in His image. Adam was a king ruling the Garden. See **Genesis 1:28**

Illustration: God's one word to Adam= "You are a King, rule and have dominion."

Satan's one word to Adam= "you are not a King; you are a God"

Apply: the Gospel story is that God's King, Jesus is the 2nd Adam, (see **Romans 5: 12-19**) who climbed up on a Cross and made it His throne and defeated Satan's rule. The 2nd Adam is ruling and his throne is a Cross! Jesus has come and salvation for all mankind is possible to all who will receive His offer of grace and forgiveness.

IV. The Old Covenant *Exodus* story.

Explain: Israel's story is that God has delivered Israel out Egyptian bondage. That story is a continual theme in the Gospels-the King will deliver his people. Our Exodus is the Cross event- the death, burial, resurrection & ascension of King Jesus has provided our "exodus" from sin's bondage. In this sense, salvation is a deliverance from the bondage of sin.

The Gospels & the Kingdom of God

Salvation to the Jews was that a good and powerful King (like David) will win over a bad King. The lesson of the exile is God's judgment on a bad King (pharaoh) ruling over them. The fulfillment story is that our good King Jesus has sacrificed his life for our deliverance.

Illustration: In the book of **Daniel**, he has a vision where he sees the day when God will place His king (the Son of Man) on His throne to establish an everlasting Kingdom, ruling over the kingdoms of man. God's great King and His kingdom is coming.

Note: The Jews always saw this king and His Kingdom as physical, their concept of a Messiah as a Warrior King. See **Isiah 9:6, 7**

Illustration: John the Baptist offered Israel a *Lamb/King*, the Jews were expecting a *Lion/king*! Jesus was their Savior/king to deliver Israel, but the Jews only saw Rome and wanted to be delivered from Rome.

V. The Gospel story is that "*messiah*" is here.

Jesus is Israel (prince of God) fulfilled. Just as the tribe of Israel was God's chosen Son, even so in a greater sense Jesus is Israel, God's promised Son. Jesus is not only the Son of David; He is the greater David.

VI. The Gospels tell us that the new people of God (indwelt by the Israel/Jesus) can do what Israel was meant to do. The Church's calling is to establish the rule of the King in every Nation.

Summary and Action steps:

1. The King has come and brings his Kingdom with Him.
This means “Kingdom Come’ is already here. Where Jesus “is” his rule, power, and presence can be realized. The “already” and “not yet” has begun in the death, burial and resurrection of King Jesus.
2. The Kingdom is here NOW and is in YOU-child of God.
The Kingdom is within every born-again child of God. Christ in you is the hope of Glory.
3. Kingdom rule is available to all who are indwelt with the Spirit of the King. Kingdom subjects have “dominion.” We are not ruled by circumstances, but by Kingdom power and presence. Jesus has given us his authority (see **Matthew 28:18**)
4. God’s Story (Gospel) says that like Adam of old, you have a role to play in the drama. You are to go out and “name the animals.” You have “Kingdom come” authority to do the will of God, to subdue the Earth and spread God’s image throughout the nations.
5. You must believe it, apply it, and bring “Kingdom come” to your life.

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The Gospel Story Distorted **The Galatian heresy revisited**

The Gospel is a story. It is God's story. **Mark 1:14** tells us that Jesus came forth from His temptation in the Wilderness, "preaching the Gospel of God"

Matthew 4:23-tells us Jesus came proclaiming the "Gospel of the Kingdom." See also **Matt. 9:35; & Matt. 24:14**. Thus we see the story (gospel) is about God and his kingdom.

I. What is the True Gospel?

Explain: In **1st Corinthians 15:1-4** Paul defines the "Gospel." He says the Gospel is the story of Jesus- Who He is, why He came to earth, what He did for us, and how we must respond to it. The gospel story centers on God's Son-His Person and Work. It then is followed by a call to repent and believe the story. The Gospel is the work of the Father- it is a Grace work the Father has accomplished for mankind. It is all of God, all of Grace. It has nothing to do with religion, human merit or works.

When the Gospel is preached, adding nothing to it, subtracting nothing from it; the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all you believe it. (**Romans 1:16**)

When did the Gospel story begin?

Explain: the gospel began not with the birth of Christ the Messiah, but rather it began in Genesis with God's purpose in Creation. He created mankind in his image with the purpose that mankind might fulfill its destiny by spreading the Father's image throughout the whole earth. The story of the "fall" of man into sin, man's rebellion, and God's efforts to rescue, redeem, and restore what was lost in the Garden are all little dramas in the bigger story of the Gospel. The entire Old Testament is an unfolding of the narrative of the gospel. The Old Testament is a testimony to Jesus telling us a savior is coming, will come, and He will save, renew and restore his new people. The gospel story in the New Testament is about fulfillment even as the Old Testament stories are shadows and promises pointing to the fulfillment in Christ and His Church.

Observation: There are today many religions distortions of the true Gospel. Much of the New Testament is comprised of apostolic letters to correct these distortions. One of the best ways to learn what a thing really is would be to define what it is NOT. I can think of no better example of what the Gospel is not, than the Galatian heresy.

The Galatian letter

The background of Galatians is found in the book of Acts. Paul comes to Galatia which today is modern day Turkey. Paul preached a pure Gospel of God's grace to them, accomplished through the free gift of his holy Son Jesus. For Paul, Christ's life, death, and resurrection accepted by faith & repentance; are all that God requires for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus life, death, resurrection are the finished work of God- this is the story- the gospel.

Soon after Paul left Galatia, Christian Jews from Jerusalem followed Paul to these new churches, telling them they must obey all the man-made “rules” of their religion. They insisted that the new male converts must be circumcised. In so doing, they added to the gospel story. They added Jewish Kosher rules, Jewish holy days and seasons. The Apostle was amazed they had done this. Paul calls their teaching, “a different Gospel” (1:6). The entire Galatian letter is a refutation of this teaching and a defense of the true Gospel of Grace

Apply: This same distortion of the Gospel is still going on today. Most churches & denominations have in some way distorted the true Gospel. Grace versus works is the repeated theme of the Galatian letter. Paul wrote this letter to refute the ‘false brethren’ of Gal. 2:4, and the different Gospel they preached, (see 1:6)

It was a different Gospel because it distorted Grace= 1:7

It was a different Gospel because it killed Grace= 2:21

It was a different Gospel because it abandoned the Christ=1:6

It was a different Gospel because it abused Grace= 6:13; Romans 6:1, 2

Explain: Paul, who had been a devout Jew understood how easy it is to mix religion and the Gospel. It seems we humans desperately need to justify ourselves before the face of God. All religion is the result of that need to impress God with good behaviors, performance, and religious deeds.

Paul’s past life as a devout Jew- see Gal. 1:10-14

Note: Rabbi Saul was extremely zealous for his ancestral traditions. (See Gal.1:14) This means he had a long list of do’s and don’ts trying to please God! His former life was lived as a rule keeper and rule breaker. His ancestors had added 613 rules (traditions) to the Ten Commandments given to Moses. These 613 traditions formed the core of Jewish pharisaical religion known as the Mishnah or Talmud.

Apply: Modern day Christians also have their lists of do’s and don’ts. Christianity began as a relationship in the Garden of Eden; became a rule book in Israel, an idea in Greece, an institution in Rome; and finally an enterprise in America! The institutional Church is characterized by this accursed “different Gospel.”

II. What the Gospel is not.

1. The Gospel is not a philosophy that makes you a better person.

Explain: The Gospel is not a self-improvement program. The Gospel is NOT about you! It does not improve you, but it will transform you! See **2nd Cor. 5:17**, this transformation makes you like Him. a new creation to live in His Kingdom.

Apply: Beware a distorted gospel that “adds” to your life anything other than Jesus Himself! Our old self cannot be reformed, improved, or even killed. Only the power of the Gospel can

transform us into Christ's likeness.

Illustration: Beware of those who preach a "Joel Osteen" feel good about yourself message, telling you it is the Gospel. It is not. You haven't preached the "good" news until you tell the bad news, which is that we are lost sinners in need of saving Grace. The Gospel convicts us that we are lost without Christ, so that we can repent and be found by Christ. The Gospel will not improve what God condemns-that is our sin nature. Being a Christian is not about improved morals but rather it is about the Spirit of Jesus being lived out in us and through us. (See 2nd Cor. 5:17)

2. The Gospel is not just an entry point (a ticket to Heaven)

Explain: Many have "accepted Jesus" in a prayer of belief, like at a Billy Graham crusade, thinking that is the sum of the Gospel. "I prayed it, now forget it." Some prayed a sinner's prayer thinking it is a ticket to heaven. Let's be clear about this-salvation does begin with a decision to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, however, there is much more to it than that entry point. The Gospel call to sinners is not just to believe, but to believe and "follow me" as Jesus repeatedly said to his men.

Apply: The Gospel is much more than just a ticket to heaven; it is an invasion of the King and His Kingdom into your life. You are a new person, with new citizenship, and a new power for living out the Gospel mandate. When Jesus is your Lord, he then becomes your Savior. Your new birth is a new beginning, but it is not the journey of discipleship. God has purposes he wants to fulfill through your obedient walk with Him. There is work to be done here on earth. The Father wants to continue the life of his Son by his Son living in and through us His people.

3. The Gospel is not Prosperity- (it does not make you materially rich)

Explain; many misguided Bible interpreters make a mistake in taking old covenant teachings about blessings and curses and applying them to the new covenant church. As Christ followers we do not live under blessings and curses any longer. Christ has become "cursed" for us on the Cross (see **Gal.3:13, 14**) the result is that you are blessed abundantly in Christ (see **Eph. 1:18** and **Eph. 2:20, 21**). You may become prosperous, but it is not a promise made to all believers who profess Christ. He has promised to be with us no matter our circumstances. He has promised that if we suffer with Him, we shall be glorified with him. (Romans 8:17).

Apply: Do you think that if you are good, or better, you merit blessing, and if you are bad, you merit curses? This is NOT the Gospel message. In Christ you are blessed beyond measure. In Him you have every blessing God can give. This blessing is not dependent upon YOU, but upon His sovereign will for you. When you are in Christ and Christ is in you-there are no curses upon us-ever again.

Illustration: there is in the modern Church a "give to get" theology which is a false distortion of the gospel. Giving to God in order to get more from God is not the Gospel.

We are to give to God and his work out of a generous spirit, not to bribe God to prosper us. Never! That teaching is a “different gospel.”

4. The Gospel is not Later- (for the next life only)

Explain: Many professed believers have no expectations of present power or privilege from being saved. For them the Gospel is future only. It is only Heaven by and by-oh my! Some foolishly believe salvation is only for the next life. Not so! The Gospel brings with it the power of God. It is power for the present as well as prospect for the future. You don't have to die to go to heaven, you can live out heaven in the here and now, by the power and presence of Christ in your daily life. In Christ the Father provides privilege, provision, protection, power, and purpose for us. The Gospel is for NOW, not just THEN!

Apply: The Gospel is about God and His Kingdom. We are in Christ and His rule, reign, and restoration are at work in us NOW. We can through faith in this Gospel pray, “Thy kingdom come” and see the kingdom lived out in us and through us. We as Christ-followers are to live lives of dominion here on earth to establish the rule of King Jesus.

5. The Gospel is not Love (thy Neighbor)

Explain: The institutional church is alive with this false Gospel of Love only. Some teach that if you just love God and love your neighbor that is what following Jesus is all about. This false gospel tells us that by loving our neighbor we are fulfilling the Gospel message. Well, the Gospel IS about God's love in us, but it is not about us loving our neighbor. This is a different Gospel because it is impossible to do! Only Jesus can love His enemies! All the loving we might do for others must proceed from the Gospel –Christ Himself manifesting the fruit of His Spirit in us. We in our flesh cannot love our enemies. However, Christ's love in us, released thru us can love a world back to God.

Apply: Multitudes of Christian denominations have made their central ministry the doing of good deeds. They call it the social application of the gospel-a social gospel! Never! It may be social, but it is not the Gospel. These good deeds may be beneficial to the poor and downtrodden, but if not accompanied by the “*in Jesus' name*” it is only temporary and not of Kingdom permanence. We are to do loving deeds because He first loved us. This means we are forever telling the story as we pour out the soup in the soup line! The greatest love I can give another man is to tell him of the love of Christ.

What exactly is the Gospel?

Simply put- the good news story is Jesus himself. The Gospel is the story of how God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself (**1 Cor. 5:18-21**) A story is just a story unless it is true. The Gospel story is the truth about How God sent His Son to be our sacrifice, to die in our place, to be raised from the dead in our behalf- this is the Gospel. Jesus is risen and seated at the right hand of almighty God. He is the story and He is the Gospel. That explains why Paul says, “*I sought to know nothing among you save Christ and Him crucified.*”

The Gospel Paul Preached

The Gospel as revealed to the Apostle Paul

What is the Gospel (story)?

As you may know, the word “gospel” is an old English word meaning “glad tidings or good news.” The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news story of God’s forgiveness and salvation through faith in Christ. It is not just a story *about* him, as declared by the four evangelists-Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; but rather Jesus Himself is the story. He *is* the Gospel.

The Bible as narrative

The Holy Bible, God’s Word to us is the “big story” of the Gospel. We could ask, “where does the good news story begin, and where does it end. Common experience when reading the four Gospels might lead you to think the story began in Bethlehem’s manger scene, and it ends with Jesus’ ascension into heaven. Yet, that truly misses the mark. The gospel story is older than the Bible that describes it. The Scriptures tell us the Gospel story was in the heart and mind of God the Father before He created the world. Somewhere in eternity past, God decided he wanted a family, so he created human beings in His likeness. The first humans were God’s children living in a Garden named Eden. The Genesis story reveals the first family as living in a perfect place, in perfect peace, with profound purpose and in perfect relationship with God their Father.

The Garden

Some would mistakenly see the Garden of Eden story as an ancient myth with no basis in reality. Those who mythologize this Eden story will miss a vital lesson in life. Adam and Eve were real people, given the privilege of knowing God in intimate fellowship. This fellowship as God’s children brought with it responsibilities. The first couple were created with the charge to fulfill the Father’s purposes in the earth. Those purposes were part of the original Gospel or good story.

Those purposes were four-fold:

1. **To represent God in all the Earth-Genesis 1:26-28**

Adam and Eve are unique in the animal world. They are beings in whom God created his likeness and breathed into them His own life-giving “breath.” This breath (Hebrew- “nephesh”) is God’s very Spirit, God’s very life. Thus, Adam and Eve are spirit/earth beings. They are unlike any other created beings, created a little lower than the angels (**Psalms 8:3-6**)

2. **To fill the earth with God’s likeness- Genesis 1:28**

Here is mankind’s great assignment. They were to fill the earth with God’s glory by birthing children; God wants a family of sons and daughters who fill the earth with His likeness, thus bringing more and more glory to God the Father. As God’s family grows in number, His likeness, light, and legacy will grow with them. His glory is spread throughout the earth.

3. To cultivate and care for the Garden- Genesis 2:15

We humans, created a little lower than the angels (**Psalms 8:3-6**) are stewards of planet Earth. The Garden was made for Adam & Eve and their children and their children's children. Earth is their "garden" to care for, cultivate, and have dominion over.

4. To name the animals- Genesis 2:19-20

This "naming of the animals" means that we humans have dominion over the animal kingdom. Humans as Sons of God are the rulers of Earth, princes, reigning under the rule of God, the King of the Universe. Adam's assignment was to rule, to lead and care for all things concerning the Garden. Adam and Eve are God's chosen vessels to demonstrate and spread the Kingdom rule of God on earth. This magnificent assignment boggles the mind with its limitless possibilities.

I. The Rebellion- Genesis 3:1-7

When we see what "*fallen man*" has accomplished since being cast out of God's Garden, we marvel at all the human advancements in the earth. Yet, when we consider what Adam was before the Fall; in comparison to what we have become, the loss is staggering. Like Humpty Dumpty of the ancient fable, when mankind fell, he fell ten stories and cracked his head wide open! The Genesis story of Satan's temptation and the rebellion of that first couple is both picturesque poetry and profound fact. Adam and Eve, created as children of the King, were destined to rule as kings of earth. When offered the serpent's bait of being gods, they took the bait. Their fall from grace is colossal. In losing innocence, they discover their nakedness- separated from their relationship to God the Father. They hide from their Father to cover their shame. They no longer display his glory accurately, and their assignment becomes impossible. From that point on, instead of managing the earth for the glory of God, they abuse it for their own interests. To prevent their eating from the tree of life and staying forever in the alienated state from him, God casts them from His presence, removing them from the Garden he had prepared for them. This is Paradise Lost. Astonishingly the original purpose, power, and presence are lost. The Good story has been spoiled; a new script is being written.

The Fall and it's results-

Adam's seed will now fill the earth in Adam's likeness, not God's image. Adam's ancestry will be described as "*sons of Adam, born in sin.*" This "sin" is not just Adam's behavior or the failed morals of his race. This "sin" is an internal disposition in us; it is a description of mankind's nature, his very being. Adam's seed have his fallen "DNA." We are sinners by birth as well as by choice. We are missing the mark of being true humans who reflect the true nature of God. We humans as Adam's seed are now what John Calvin described as "*totally depraved.*" It doesn't mean we are as bad as we could possibly be, but that every aspect of our life has been affected by sin.

Here are some obvious fallouts from the fall:

1. God's family is fractured.

Genesis chapter 3 describes in poetry God looking for his children after the rebellion. The first couple in their nakedness do two revealing things; 1) they hide- the inner knowledge of evil is filling their souls. 2) They cover themselves- shame has replaced honor in their relationship with God.

2. The orphan spirit is birthed.

Being cast out of the Garden, creates a spirit of shame and abandonment in them. They are now outsiders- outside the garden, outside of God's favor, outside their home, outside all that the garden represented. Though still loved by the Father, they are orphans. They have made God the enemy in their own minds. Guilt and shame cover them instead of the love and joy that God intended.

The orphan spirit gives birth to orphan religion.

In the garden there was no religion or any need for religion. It was about relationship, fellowship and destiny. However, outside the garden, having been designed to live in the garden with God, Adam and Eve sought to get back in. Since then, all of humanity has been seeking a path back into the garden. That is the foundation for all man-made religion...trying to do something that will get us back into the garden we were created for. Religion is always fallen man's answer for his shame and guilt.

Just like Adam and Eve all people have tried to cover themselves with whatever "fig leaves" we can find to hide our shame. Religion is always covered in skins saying to whatever we deem to be our god; "*hey look at me I'm not so bad.*" All religion stems from an orphan spirit in mankind seeking a road back to what was lost in the rebellion. Religion is also Satan's lie believed by fallen men. The big lie is that morals, good deeds, or observing cultural rules will atone for our sins and somehow restore relationship with God. They will not, they cannot. Only God the Father can rescue Adam's race. If it is not his disposition to do so, then we are lost forever, children of his wrath and judgment. But it is his nature to rescue. Good News!

II. The Rescue- Genesis 3:14-15

Remember, the Gospel story is glad tidings, it is good news. What Satan meant for evil in the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, God the Father will rescue, redeem and restore. That story is the remainder of the bible's story. What was lost in the Garden, God has begun to rescue and redeem. Genesis 3 moves the story forward. After God discovers (like he didn't already know it?) his children hiding from him, he then pronounces a curse upon the serpent (Satan) and then comes the very first prophecy foretelling the rescue that is coming. **Genesis 3:15b** says, "*He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise his heel.*"

Note: "*He shall bruise his head...*" Help is on the way! The story will not end with the damage done in the Garden. Notice "*he*" shall bruise..."

This “he” is another and better Adam that is coming to crush the serpent’s head. He too will enter a garden, but he will surrender his life to the will of his Father; and out of that surrender he will bruise Satan’s head. This statement is the very first of many types and shadows foretelling the rescue of mankind. **Genesis 3:15** is looking down through the centuries to the day the 2nd Adam will die on a Roman cross, and in so doing he will be bruised (see **Isaiah 53: 5 & 10**) and he in turn will crush the serpent’s head. The death of Jesus, God’s beloved son, will crush and defeat all of Satan’s dark purposes for mankind.

We need to see the entire Biblical story as God the Father “RESCUING” what was lost in the Garden. It is His divine will in action, sovereignly guiding history along the path of the Gospel. Each biblical hero, every heroic story, and all of the Old Testament story lines are small dramas acting out their parts in the larger, greater drama. The Gospel story is the Father rescuing us from our own rebellion. Because God wrote the script to this story; he is its director, producer, and distributor. It’s from Him, by Him, about Him, and through Him. Therefore, it is the opposite of religion, it is all of His doing, His grace, His mercy and love for mankind.

Examples of the Rescue:

- **Noah and his descendants-** The gospel story begins to unfold with the depravity of Adam’s children, so great is this darkness in mankind that God rescues only Noah and his children. He will start over again in the flood survivors that He has rescued.
- **Abraham, Isaac & Jacob-** God the Father wants a people, a tribe, through whom He can carry out his rescue operation. The Gospel story becomes Israel’s story. God makes covenant with Abraham like he did with Noah. This covenant (see Genesis 12) is the Father’s strong promise to rescue not just Abraham’s descendants, but also all mankind. The birth of Isaac, Abraham and Sarah’s miracle son, is a type of God’s miracle Son who is coming to rescue us all. When Abraham faithfully puts Isaac on that mountain altar, and God provides a ram to sacrifice, it is telling us the greater story of the gospel when God will provide His son- the Lamb of God to be sacrificed for our sins. This is “rescue language.”

The Exodus- A repeated and momentous bible drama is the captivity of the people of Israel in Egypt and their climatic escape from pharaoh and the exodus into the desert wilderness of Sinai. This story is another type and shadow of the redemption that is coming. Moses is Israel’s deliverer, even as Jesus is the greater Moses who will deliver mankind. Likewise, Israel’s Exodus from Egypt foreshadows the deliverance of God’s new race of men, who through faith in Christ are delivered out of sin’s bondage into the freedom of Christ’s Kingdom. Therefore, all the Exodus narratives in scripture have greater meaning in illustrating the narrative of the Gospel story; every small story is pointing to the Greater story.

King David and his eternal kingdom- again, in types, shadows, and symbols the gospel story of rescue and redemption moves throughout the old covenant stories. God's covenant with David is central to the narrative of rescue. King David is appointed by God to rule over Israel. He is God's favorite, his vessel to carry forth the story. David is promised that his reign is not temporary but rather it is eternal. David is promised that his seed will rule the whole earth. His kingdom will be everlasting. A savior, a rescuer Messiah will come, he is the greater David, the fulfillment of all God's hopes for Israel. Jesus of Nazareth is that greater David. The cost of mankind's rescue will be the blood sacrifice of His perfect Son-whom scripture calls "Messiah." In every book of the Old Testament this mysterious Savior/Messiah/King is pictured in shadows, types, and symbols, but He is there, coming to our rescue, he is God's answer to all of mankind's sin and rebellion.

III. The Redemption- Isaiah 52:13-53:13

There can be no rescue for Adam's race without a price being paid for the gravity of Adam's rebellion. The wages of man's sin is death. The Old Testament moves the good news story of redemption forward by using multiple images, types, and shadows that point us to a coming savior; a future Son of David who will rescue and redeem mankind.

The Bible's Story is about HIM. When you read your Bible, each drama in some way is foretelling the coming of a Redeemer/Savior. The story of Adam's ruin becomes the Story of God's rescue thru his Redeemer Son who is coming...

In Genesis- He is the Seed of Woman

In Exodus- He is the Passover Lamb

In Leviticus-He is the atoning sacrifice

In Numbers-He is the smitten Rock of Moses

In Deuteronomy- He is the Prophet

In Joshua- He is Capitan of the Lord's hosts

In Judges- He is my deliverer

In Ruth- He is our Heavenly Kinsman

In the six books of Kings-He is the promised King

In Esther- He is my Advocate

In Job-He is my Redeemer

In Psalms-He is my all and all

In Proverbs-He is my pattern

In Ecclesiastes-He is my goal

In Song of Solomon- He is my satisfier

In the Prophets-He is the coming Messiah

In the **New Testament** God's Messiah/king has arrived. He is here to rescue and redeem. The four Gospels, Acts, and Revelation, all tells us that Jesus Christ is that promised savior/king.

In the four Gospels- Jesus is the Son of God come to seek & to save those who are lost

In Acts-He is the Risen Christ (messiah)

In the Epistles- He is Christ at the Father's right hand –praying for us today.

In Revelation- He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He comes to restore the Garden and establish God's kingdom-forever!

The King and His Kingdom

Remember that in the Garden, God was King, and God's kingdom rule was present there. That kingdom was lost when Adam rebelled. However, God is still King of the universe (see Psalms 103:19) Many of the old covenant stories are moving us towards establishing God's Kingdom on earth once more. The coming of David to Israel's throne is an important high mark in the progressing story. The coming Messiah is a direct descendent of David. He is David's "Son." In fact, the messiah will establish David's throne not just upon Israel but as the greater David, will rule the nations (**Isaiah 9:6-7**)

When Matthew tells his story of the birth of baby Jesus, the setting is that of a King, born in a cow-stall. The "Magi", Kings of the East come looking for "the King of the Jews."

The redemption story of the Gospel is not just about God forgiving our sins and getting us ready for heaven. It is much more than that. The story is about a redeemed, forgiven people being brought back into the Garden and the establishment and rule of God's kingdom once again. A major part of the Gospel narrative is that in Jesus the King has returned and He has bought His Kingdom with Him. All His miracles are signs of the rule of the 2nd Adam, living out the life of the Garden where God rules.

The Suffering Servant

The prophet Isaiah sees this coming King in two strikingly different images or roles. One image of Messiah is a conquering King, seated on David's throne. The other role of the Messiah is that of a suffering servant, who will be rejected of his own people (**Isaiah 53:2-3; John 1:10,11**). He comes first as a humble shepherd, a servant (like young David) who is unrecognized as the chosen one (like David).

He is one of us, born of woman, but not seen for who he really is- the promised king. King Jesus comes to us as an incognito, disguised as a carpenter from the tiny village of Nazareth. This explains why in Jesus own day, his own people rejected him. They wanted a conquering King and Jesus gave them a suffering servant. This is critical to our understanding the gospel story. The Messiah, our savior is both a suffering servant and a victorious King. However, He must give His life a ransom for many (**Mark 10:45**) before He conquers our greatest enemy- sin and death. It is His sacrificial death for all mankind that redeems us. Jesus' crucifixion looks like a human tragedy, yet it becomes God's great triumph to crush the head of the Serpent.

Crucifixion and the Cross

Months after Jesus is risen from the grave and his disciples are preaching the victory of the resurrection, they are slow to grasp the deeper meaning of the crucifixion. The early apostles when telling the story of Christ's death, repeatedly blame the Jewish leaders- Scribes, Pharisees, and Romans for the crucifixion. Carefully read Peter's message in **Acts 2:23**, **Acts 3:13-14**, and **Acts 4:10**. Peter says, "*This same Jesus whom you crucified...*" ; referring to the Jewish leaders.

My point is that in the early months and years after Christ's death the disciples are focused on the *meanness* of the crucifixion, not the greater *meaning* of the Cross. It will be years later that the Apostle Paul will stop talking about crucifixion and begin speaking of "*the word of the Cross.*" (**1st Corinthians 1:18**). From crucifixion to "the Cross" is the Holy Spirit moving the gospel story forward. The "cross" is redemption imagery. It is gospel theology is a single word.

The Cross as Redemption imagery

When rabbi Saul is transformed into Paul the Apostle, God uses the great mind of Paul to reveal the rescue and redemption that is in the death and resurrection of His beloved Son. Paul's writings show us the insights God gave him to explain the gospel to us. Paul's word from the Cross is five-fold.

Paul uses five "*Picture Words*" from Roman & Jewish culture to explain the death of Christ. It took him years to really process what God was doing in allowing his Son to die on a cross, but when it was revealed to him, it became a message God was sending us from the cross.

1. The 1st word picture from the Cross is "Redemption" Freedom is the key idea.

The background of this word and its cognates-*redeemed*, *redemption*, *ransom*, is the ancient slave market. Even as Jesus was dying on that cross, somewhere there in Jerusalem, slaves were being bought and sold. The definition of "redeemed" in Paul's day would be "*to be freed from slavery by the payment of a ransom price.*" Jesus used this imagery of his own death when he said, "*For the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a 'ransom' for many.*" (Mark 10:45) Slaves are redeemed from slavery by the

purchase (ransom) price being paid. The imagery is that Satan “owned” the human race. The day Christ died there was a war going on to free the slaves!

The ransom price to set sinners free is the sinless life of God’s Son for the sinful lives of the sons of Adam. Christ by his death paid the ransom to set us free. Sins are paid for -in full. Satan has no claim on the redeemed. They are slaves no more- but rather are the freed sons of God. The Cross says the slaves of sin were being set free! The two key ideas in Redemption is forgiveness and freedom. (See **Ephesians 1:7; Romans 3:24; Col.1:13, 14; 1st Peter 1:18, 19**)

2. The 2nd word picture from the cross is “Atonement” Peace with God is the key idea.

The background of “atonement” is the Jewish sacrificial system. Just a short distance from the crucifixion scene was the Temple where the blood of animals was being sacrificed as an appeasement to the wrath of God against sinners. The most often used words of Christ’s death are that he “*atoned*” for sin or that he made “*propitiation*” for sins by his blood being shed in our behalf. The NIV translates this word as “*atonement sacrifice*.” (see 1st John 2:2); while the KJV, NASV, and others translate it as “*propitiation*.” (see **Romans 3:25**) Atonement means “at one- meant.” The idea behind this atonement is peace with God. The entire Book of Leviticus is about atoning sacrifices being made as an offering for sins. Because God is Holy, he cannot be approached without blood sacrifice for sins. This explains why John the Baptist said of Jesus, “*Behold the Lamb which God has provided, to take away the world’s sin.*” **Col 1:20** says, “*through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*” **Rom 5:1** tells us that Christ’s death is our atonement that makes peace with God possible, by the “*taking away*” of sins. The background of this idea is the **Day of Atonement** in Jewish Culture. On this atonement day a scape goat is released by the High priest to symbolically carry away the nation’s sins for a year. (see **Isaiah 53:6 and Hebrews 9 & 10**)

This “peace with God” is made possible because the shed blood “*cleanses, blots out, and removes* the guilt caused sins. These are the words used by Scripture to describe what was happening the day Jesus died on the cross. Jesus is our scape goat, He is God’s provided lamb that was slain for us, that we might have all guilt and shame blotted out and forever cleansed. **Hebrews 9:22** says, “*Without the shedding of Blood there is no redemption.*”

You might ask, “Why does God require blood to remove guilt?” Scripture says that life is in the blood, and the pure (sinless) blood of Jesus is sacrificed for our sins. It was his life for our life, his blood for our life. Jesus’ blood is the atonement for Guilt and the removal of Guilt. Jesus’ death both propitiates and expiates our sins; meaning it provides a substitute sacrifice in our place and in so doing removes all our guilt and shame before the face of Holy God. This is Paul’s second word picture from the Cross.

3. The 3rd word picture from the Cross is “Justification” the key idea is to be declared innocent.

This word picture is from a Roman court room. Paul often uses court room legal words like, “justified” or “justification” to describe what was really going on the day Christ died. God is the judge, we are the accused, and we have been found guilty in the Courtroom of Eternity.

God’s Courtroom

The Cross event has these participants in the drama of a court room:

The Judge= God; **The judged**= the sinner; **The justifier**= Jesus; **The justified** = those who believe!

Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, the issue of guilt is settled “out of court.” The Cross is God’s court room! The righteous Judge of the universe now can look upon us “*just as if I’d never sinned.*” (justified). This is true because in Christ all sins are blotted out, forgiven and all guilt removed. Paul will say “*there is now therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.*” (see Romans 8:1-4) Later in Romans he says there is no charge against us in the court room of eternity (see Romans 8:33,34) “*Who will bring a charge against God’s elect, it is God who justifies...*” (see **Romans 8:31-34**) The Judge has become our savior, our justifier and even our Father. These are the words often used to describe Christ’s death, words like “justification, and “justified.” God has declared us guiltless and innocent before the Law of God. What a glorious idea. We are not innocent, unless God says we are, and He says all who believe in this word of the Cross are declared not guilty!

4. The 4th word picture from the Cross is “Reconciliation” the Key idea is family and fellowship. (See Romans 3:25, Romans 5:11, 2 Cor. 5:19)

This word picture comes from family life. It is best illustrated in the parable of the runaway son we call the prodigal. Recorded in **Luke 15** is a beautiful “reconciliation story. A son is lost and was returning from a life of sin and waste in a far country. The forgiving heart of the prodigal’s father is a picture of God reconciling the world unto himself through the death of his only begotten Son. God the Father sent His son to the cross, so we could be accepted back into His family. We are “*adopted*” in Christ, the sons of Adam can become sons of God by simply believing this word of the cross. (See **Romans 8:14-16**). How amazing is this- the Judge has become our Father in Heaven when we believe this message from the cross.

Christ the Risen Lord

The word (message) from the Cross must include the story of an empty tomb. Wherever you see a crucifix with a bloodied Jesus, know that is not the gospel. The gospel says the cross is empty and so is the grave. Jesus on the cross appears to be a victim, but not really. He has laid his life down. It was not taken from him. He is the risen Christ-the Victor. Those original Jesus followers who mourned his cruel death, soon were rejoicing in his resurrection from the grave.

After the resurrection, those who tell us the story begin to call Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus “the Christ.” Translated, this “Christ” means anointed one, or messiah. It is a proclamation that Jesus is now greater than Caesar, He is Jesus Christ the Lord. In that Roman culture, only Caesar is called Lord, yet those followers now proclaim that Jesus is not just Lord; but he is the Lord of Lords! He is not just King Jesus; He is the King of Kings! Why so? It is so because Jesus has conquered death! He is the Risen one! The ruin that came to Adam in the garden, is now being redeemed and restored in the 2nd Adam.

Think on this- there was no death in Eden’s Garden. Adam and Eve had bodies that were not subject to physical decay or death. Physical death is the result of the fall, the natural world is corrupted by Adam’s rebellion. Now comes the 2nd Adam, who dies our death and is raised to life by God the Father. His resurrection is a foreshadowing of the Kingdom Come that Jesus promised. There is in the future a resurrection of the righteous in Christ, and Christ will rule with his new race of men and women in a new earth, a “new Jerusalem” where there is no more decay, corruption or death. The Risen Christ, the 2nd Adam will restore what was ruined in the Garden centuries ago.

Here in this fallen world, the Kingdom of God exists but it is not yet complete. It is here, like a mustard seed, like a leaven in the lump of dough, but the day is coming when all things will be restored. Christ’s resurrection is wonderful, but it is only the first fruits of what is to come. Paul says to the Corinthians, *“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”* (1st Cor. 15:20)

IV. Return and Restoration

The bible’s good news story that begins with Adam’s **Ruin**, then becomes God’s **Rescue** operation, leading to Christ’s **Redemption**, will climax in the **Return** of King Jesus, to finalize His **Restoration** of the Kingdom of God. All things are pointing us to the restoration of the Garden where God is King.

It is the Apostle Paul who reveals this final restoration more clearly than any others. When we read 1st Corinthians 15: 20-28 we see that the gospel story of Jesus that began in Eden’s Garden will climax in the story of Christ the King, ruling over God’s kingdom. This kingdom will be a new Garden, a new Earth, a new Capital city- the new Jerusalem, where King Jesus will rule from a restored David’s throne. Upon His return, when all God’s enemies are vanquished, Christ will turn his kingdom rule over to God the Father (see 1st Cor. 15:28)

Now but not yet...

This restoring all things as they were before Adam’s rebellion, is essential to the gospel’s message. We must forget the foolish idea that our salvation only includes the forgiveness of our sins and a home in heaven. As wonderful as that is, there is much more to the story. The gospel is not just the gospel of our salvation, it is the gospel of the Kingdom.

Every born- of- the-spirit believer is a citizen of the kingdom. Each believer has within him the indwelling life of the King. Jesus said, “*the kingdom of God is within you.*” It is here- NOW. Every saved soul is a restoration project for the Father. In the here and now, we are being transformed into his image, and upon his return, at the speed of an eye’s blink, we shall be changed, meaning we will be restored to our original state before Adam’s fall.

Till your garden...

God’s restoration project in each of His children is His energy in us to fulfill our “garden dominion” calling. All of the charges given to Adam and Eve for successful life in the Garden; are also important to each of us as God’s children. We too, have a “garden to till.” Your spiritual gifts, your calling, your walk in the Spirit is uniquely designed by the Father to equip you to do your part to bring in the Kingdom.

The Church has been pushing back the darkness for centuries. Each individual Christian’s life, witness and God energy has been fulfilling the “kingdom Come” command of Christ. As His will is done in each of us, His will is being done on the earth among the sons of Adam’s race. Everywhere the believer goes, so goes the Kingdom of God. As each of us tills our garden we are preparing earth for the King’s return to restore all things to their fullest.

Can you even imagine what human existence would be like without two thousand years of the Church’s presence in the cultures of men? Without the Kingdom come presence of God’s grace and love, the demons would rule the earth. So, while we are ‘imagining” try this; can you imagine what the world would look like if each of us who say we are Christ-followers, would actually be faithful to till our garden? Imagine that! The “not yet” of the kingdom would be the here and now of God’s great purpose in mankind.

Review

Now, we can answer the question, “what is the Gospel of Jesus Christ?” It is a much bigger, greater, and more glorious story than most people realize. It is the bible’s great theme, it’s bigger story. It is the scriptures’ really good news. What was lost in the garden so long ago, is being restored, and will be culminated when the new heavens and earth are established by the God who created it all. Our God reigns- always and forever! Amen

Notes

Biblical hermeneutics

How to Read, Interpret, and Apply Scripture

The Goal

In **2 Timothy 3:15-17**, our purpose in reading scripture is to be equipped thoroughly for every good work. To do this we must approach Scripture with the purpose to hear something from God that enhances my relationship to God thru Jesus Christ.

Thus, the goal is to see Jesus in His Word to me, *“to make you wise unto salvation thru Christ”* v15

As you read Scripture, Scripture reads you, questions you, reveals your thoughts (Heb. 4:12) - and it leads to a Person, not just truths or principles. All Scripture points to Christ’s death and resurrection; to God’s forgiveness, thus leading you to a personal relationship with God through Christ. Approach Scripture with a strong desire to be fully equipped to be what I am called of God to be, and to do what I am called of God to do.

- Don’t leave the Word until like Jacob of old *“you have laid hold of that which has laid hold of you.”*
- Wrestle with the text until it yields to you, and you find it to be honey to your taste & gold to your soul.

Six good questions the interpreter can ask:

1. Where does the Text fit in the narrative of Bible history?

Each Bible text must be interpreted considering God’s bigger story of redemption & restoration. See the Bible not as many stories or stories within stories; but see it as God’s BIG story. The Bible only has one story, a story of Father/God redeeming mankind and restoring what was lost in the Garden.

1) Where does the text fit into this bigger Story?

On a timeline, where does the text fit into the greater story of *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself”* **2 Cor. 5:19**? Is it before the patriarchs-Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Is it before the Law of Moses or after? Is it in the Gospels and thus before the fullness of the Spirit in the Church age? (The Gospels written after the cross and resurrection, are written from the timeline BEFORE Christ’s death; thus they are “under the Law.”)

Example: Jesus teaching on Divorce are spoken “under the Law” yet our understanding of divorce must include our being “in grace.”

2) Ask yourself, “What covenant was in effect when it was written”? Is this text an old covenant truth (or promise) or is it a fulfilled new covenant truth? How you decide this, will greatly affect how you interpret the text.

2. What would the original hearers have heard?

Without asking this question you will fall into speculation, allegory, and spiritualizing the text. Ask, “How did the 1st recipients receive or view its meaning”? In order answer this question you must read and understand the text in its original context. There are at least two kinds of context for a passage of Scripture. The interpreter must have knowledge that the Scriptures include various kinds of literature and thus require different approaches to interpretation. First ask yourself, “What kind of literature is the book or the text”?

Is it a narrative? Many books in the Bible are narratives. A narrative is a story, or a drama being told. This includes books such as Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, 1st & 2nd Samuel, 1st & 2nd Kings, Acts, and others.

Is it wisdom literature? Books such as Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are what we call “wisdom” literature. This type of literature is different from narratives in that it is often filled with poetic language, or prose that uses hyperbole, allegory, or repeated phrases for emphasis.

Is it Prophetic literature? The prophets enforce God’s covenant with Israel by asking, “why is God doing what He is doing & what will be the results of disobedience. This literature has its own features such as the “oracle” or “vision” which are unique to the prophets.

The four Gospels: These are Holy Spirit inspired biographies of Christ’s life, message, and sacrifice.

Each was written by different authors for different purposes, but all are telling the same story of Christ’s life, teachings, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The interpreter needs to know the gospel writers intended recipients and purpose to give correct meaning to the gospel he is reading.

Example: Luke was not an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry. He was a like a reporter collecting data from eyewitnesses and writing them down. He wrote his gospel account to send to his friend Theophilus.

However, John the Apostle, an eyewitness to Jesus’ life and teachings, tells us why he wrote his gospel. In **John 20:31** he says, “*but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name*”. Therefore, we call the Gospel of John-the gospel of belief. John wrote his gospel story of Jesus to non-Jews; yet, Matthew’s gospel is very much written to convince Jews that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the promised Son of David. The theme of Matthew’s gospel is “fulfilled”.

Is it a parable? A parable is a unique kind of literature. It is an earthly story with a heavenly (eternal) meaning. The details of a parable are often not meant to be taken literally. It uses illustrative, pictorial, and dramatic language. If the reader concludes this parable is literally truth, he will make great mistakes and misunderstand God’s true meaning.

For example, in Luke chapter 8 is Christ’s parable of the Sower and the seed. This story is highly symbolic, not meant to be taken literally. In Luke 8:19, Jesus says, “*The seed is the word of God*”. You know don’t you that a farmer’s seed put into soil is not literally the same as the Holy Spirit putting God’s Word into your heart. It is the symbolic language of a parable.

Is it apocalyptic literature? Such is the book of Revelation, which is highly symbolic, requiring some knowledge of this type of literature to correctly understand its intended meaning. Its images of dragons, angels, demons, wars, and monsters with seven heads can be bewildering to those not familiar with this Jewish apocalyptic prophetic style.

Is it an epistle? The epistles are letters written to persons or churches. Letters from apostles Paul, Peter, James, and Jude are apostolic letters written to real people and churches but written under the Holy Spirit's guidance and inspiration.

So, the literary context demands reading the text carefully, considering the words, sentences, and paragraphs preceding and following a passage. The literary context locates the passage within the larger purposes of a book.

Example: See **Luke 17:5** where the disciples said to Jesus, "*Increase our faith*".

The context will show this is not a prayer for more faith, but the opposite- it is a statement of doubt. If you did not read "*Lord, increase our faith*" in its immediate context you would miss its true meaning.

Notice also that a literary context looks for the place of the text in the entire book. Ask yourself, "What is the nature of the purpose of the Book"? Our goal is to discover the author's original intent.

Example: Any time you see a "therefore" in the writings of Paul, you must go back to the preceding

paragraph, or even chapters, to see what the "therefore" is referring to. By doing this, you discover what the "therefore" is "there- for". It is there for a reason!

Romans 12:1 begins, "*therefore, I urge you brethren...*" Here, Paul's "therefore" is based upon all God's mercies cited in **Romans 3-11**. Paul is saying that because of all that God has done for us in Christ, we therefore should present our life before him as a living sacrifice in service to His glory.

Historical context

What is the historical background of a text that might either shed light on its meaning or culturally influence its interpretation? This must include the reader's knowledge of the culture, place in history, customs, idioms, family life, morals and social structures of the date and time the passage or book was written. Ask yourself, "How did the 1st recipients receive or view its meaning"? What did the author intend for them to hear?

A good example is the apostle Paul writing to the Roman church saying, "*Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated*" (**Romans 9:13**). What does this mean? Surely God does not hate Esau? When Paul wrote this to his recipients in Rome, they understood this quote from Malachi 1:21. The Jews in Rome to whom he was writing had knowledge of the Scriptures to understand the story of Jacob and Esau. Therefore, a serious Bible student needs the following study aids:

- A good Study Bible
- A Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia
- A scholarly Bible Commentary

(Many of these Bible aids are available on the internet for your use)

3. How does the Text relate to the Christ event?

Ask yourself, "How does this text relate to Christ- the Living Word of God"?

Jesus told us to search the Scriptures looking for him on every page.

He said in **John 5:39**, “*Search the Scriptures; it is these that testify of me*”. See also Christ’s teaching on this in **Luke 24:25-27**.

Thus, every Scripture must be interpreted Christologically. This means that when reading a text or passage of Scripture, the interpreter is looking for how the text, especially an old covenant text, foreshadows the Messiah, Jesus, or the Church.

This is the meaning of **Hebrews 1:1-2**, “*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*”

4. How does the whole of the Bible comment on the text and on the partial?

The interpreter must let the fullness of Scripture unfold the partial. This is another way of saying that the BIG story of the Bible must always influence how we read and understand the smaller stories.

Example: In Exodus chapter 20 Moses receives the Ten Commandments. We need the new covenant teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount to rightly interpret the Law, and the teaching of Rabbi Paul in Galatians to tell us the purpose of the Law. Thus, the new covenant fulfills the old.

5. What in this text applies to me that I need to respond to?

Scripture must not be read just for study or your personal knowledge. Since all Scripture is pointing to Christ, we read in order to worship, to serve, and to magnify Him. We must ask, “How does this ancient text relate to me today?”

The reader can ask himself four questions to help in application of Scripture to one’s life:

- What should I do?
- What should I be? (Realizing who I am in Christ)
- Where should I go?
- How can I see?

Here are some other questions you can ask to aid in the personal application of truth:

- Try rewriting the text in your own language seeking application to your life.
- How does being “in Christ” relate to my understanding of the text?
- What is required of me if I apply the meaning of the text to me?
- How can I take what God has said to me and give it to someone else?
- What action do I take based on this? Page 25

6. How does God get His truth into us?

1. He speaks eternally thru His inspired Word—the Holy Scriptures -**2nd Timothy 3:16, 17**

2. God speaks to us thru His Spirit- see **John 14-15**

We must always acknowledge the unity of the Spirit and the Word- we cannot understand truth apart from the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth. It is the Holy Spirit who can “rightly divide” the Word He wrote. You must prayerfully ask Him to be your teacher.

3. God speaks to us thru His Spirit in His gifted Saints.

Here are some of the ways the Holy Spirit gets truth into us:

- 1) The Holy Spirit gives us illuminated understanding.
- 2) The Holy Spirit can interpret His Word (which He inspired)
- 3) The Spirit will guide us to consensus thru the community of Believers. (Acts 15)
- 4) The Spirit has given the Church grace gifts thru whom He speaks.

The Holy Spirit speaks truth to us through spiritually gifted believers- pastors, teachers, prophets, evangelists etc.

A Simple Three Question Hermeneutic

For daily devotional reading of the scriptures, you can use a simplified method of interpreting the text or passage you are reading. This does not require having Bible study aids like a Study Bible or Bible commentaries. Any Christian can do this, and it will greatly enhance the understanding of the text.

Question #1

What was the writer's message to the people to whom it was originally intended.?

Often this is a question we never ask. We mistakenly think the Bible was written to us, and for us. We forget that The Old Testament is written to Israel. The Epistles of Paul were written to various congregations (churches) in specific locations and for specific reasons. A proper understanding of any scripture begins with an effort to read scripture with the historical content in mind. We must ask ourselves, "What is the author (writer) saying to the people to whom he is writing. When we have a clearer understanding of this original message, we then can ask ourselves a second question.

Question#2

What if anything can the text tell me about the gospel?

We ask this question because behind every short story in the bible is a bigger story, the gospel story. The Holy Spirit inspired the scriptures and all its little stories and dramas to carry along the greater story of God's redeeming love, to bring salvation through His Son the Lord Jesus.

Your Jesus glasses

This second question means you are looking in every story or text for the Messiah, our savior. Not every text is directly about Him, but every text in scripture has application to the Gospel. Often you are reading a text in the Old Testament that it's timeline is under the Law of Moses. However, you as the reader are not under the Law, Jesus has fulfilled the Law for us and we live by Grace in His completed work on the Cross. This is when you must read the text wearing your "Jesus glasses." You must understand the text in the light of Christ's redemption for us. Theologians call this a Christocentric view of scripture. They are correct.

Question #3

How does this text apply to me., as a 21st Century Christ-follower?

Now we can ask the scripture how it applies to us personally. We must not assume every text has some mystical, or deeply spiritual meaning for us. For example, the bible tells us that Judas betrayed Jesus then in remorse went out and hanged himself! That is not a text I want to see as Divine instruction for me, or anyone else! However, there are spiritual principles, and guidelines that the Holy Spirit can use to bless us and instruct us through our devotional reading of the Holy Scriptures.

This Three-fold hermeneutic can greatly advance your understanding of Biblical truth. Especially is this true in reading the Psalms. Next time you read the Psalms-ask the text these three questions and see what God will show you.

Biblical Sermon Preparation

By John R. Stott

The following guidelines for sermon preparation come from Dr John R Stott, a noted British preacher and teacher. We site them here as helpful to any preacher in preparing sermons.

1. Choose your text and meditate on it.

- Read the text, re-read it, re-read it and read it again.
- Probe it, chew on it, bore into it, and soak in it.
- You are not called to preach yourself or your ideas, but charged to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Clarence Edward McCartney: “Put all the Bible you can into it.”

2. Ask questions of the text.

- What does it mean? Or better yet, what did it mean when first spoken or written?
- What did the author intend to affirm or condemn or promise or command?
- What does it say? What is its contemporary message? How does it speak to us today?
- Remember: Keep these questions distinct but together—the text’s meaning is of purely academic interest unless you go on to discern its message for today, its significance. But you cannot discover its contemporary message without first wrestling with its original meaning.

3. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s illumination.

- All the time you study cry humbly to God for illumination by the Spirit of truth. Like Moses, “I pray you, show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18), and Samuel, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:9).
- Stott: “I have always found it helpful to do as much of my sermon preparation as possible on my knees, with the Bible open before me, in prayerful study.
- R.W. Dale: “Work without prayer is atheism; and prayer without work is presumption.”

4. Isolate the Dominant Thought of the Text.

- Every text has a main theme, an overriding thrust.
- A sermon is not a lecture, it aims to convey only one major message
- The congregation will forget details of the message, but they should remember the dominant thought, because all the sermon’s details should be marshaled to help them grasp its message and feel its power.
- Once the text’s principal meaning has been determined, express it in a ‘categorical proposition.’
- J.H. Jowett: “I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching...until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as a crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting and the most fruitful labor in my study...I do not think any sermon ought to be preached, or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.”
- Ian Pitt-Watson: “Every sermon should be ruthlessly unitary in its theme.”
- Don’t by-pass the discipline of waiting patiently for the dominant thought to disclose itself. You have to be ready to pray and think yourself deep into the text, even under it,

until we give up all pretensions of being its master or manipulator and become instead its humble and obedient servant.

5. Arrange Your Material to Serve the Dominant Thought

- the goal is not a literary masterpiece, but organization that enables the text's main thrust to make its maximum impact.
- Ruthlessly discard irrelevant material
- Subordinate material to theme so that it illumines and supports it.
- Golden Rule for Sermon Outlines: Let each text supply its own structure. Let it open itself up like a rose to the morning sun.
- Be precise with your words. It is impossible to convey a precise message without choosing precise words.
- Words to use:
 - Simple and Clear words. Ryle: "Preach as if you had asthma."
 - Vivid words. They should conjure up images in the mind.
 - Honest words. Beware of exaggerations and be sparing in use of superlatives.
 - C.S. Lewis: don't just tell people how to feel, describe in such a way that people feel it themselves.
 - Don't use words too big for the subject.

6. Remember the Power of Imagination—Illustrate!

- Imagination: the power of the mind by which it conceives of invisible things and is able to present them as though they were visible to others. (Beecher)
- Remember that humans have trouble grasping abstract concepts—we need them converted into pictures and examples.
- Exert your greatest effort for illustrations that reinforce and serve the dominant thought.
- Think of illustrations as windows that let in light on our subject and help people to see and appreciate it more clearly.
- Beware of illustrations that draw too much attention (to themselves instead of the subject) or which take people away from the main point.

7. Add Your Introduction

- It's better to start with the body so that we don't twist our text to fit our introduction.
- Stott: A good introduction serves two purposes. First, it arouses interest, stimulates curiosity, and whets the appetite for more. Secondly, it genuinely introduces the theme by leading the hearers into it.
- Don't make the intro too long or too short. "Men have a natural aversion to abruptness, and delight in a somewhat gradual approach. A building is rarely pleasing in appearance without a porch or some sort of inviting entrance."

8. Add Your Conclusion

- Conclusions are more difficult. Avoid endlessly circling and never landing. Avoid ending too abruptly.
- A true conclusion goes beyond recapitulation to personal application. (Not that all application should wait till the end—the text needs to be applied as we go along.)
- Nevertheless, it is a mistake to disclose too soon the conclusion to which we are going to come. If we do, we lose people’s sense of expectation. It is better to keep something up our sleeve. Then we can leave to the end that persuading which, by the Holy Spirit’s power, will prevail on people to act.
- Call the congregation to act! Our expectation as the sermon comes to an end, is not merely that people will understand or remember or enjoy our teaching, but that they will do something about it. If there is no summons, there is no sermon!
- The precise application of your sermon depends on the character of the text. The dominant thought points us to how people should act in response. Does the text call to repentance or stimulate faith? Does it evoke worship, demand obedience, summon to witness, or challenge to service? The text itself determines the particular response we desire.
- Consider the composition of your congregation. It is good to let your mind wander over the church family and ask prayerfully what message God might have for each from your text. Consider their unique circumstances, weaknesses, strengths, and temptations.

9. Write Down Your Sermon

- don’t take too long to get to this stage! Get something on paper, don’t endlessly noodle on vague notes (this is my temptation).
- Writing obliges you to think straight.

10. Edit it Again

- View hitting your time goal (40-45 minutes) as just as essential to its overall effectiveness as anything else you do. People will take more away if you say less.
- Ruthlessly cut the unneeded and extra. Look for places where you can be more concise.
- Err on the side of cutting things—especially long quotes.

11. Pray over Your Message

- Use the 30 minutes before you leave for church to pray over your message.
- Stott: “We need to pray until our text comes freshly alive to us, the glory shines forth from it, the fire burns in our heart, and we begin to experience the explosive power of God’s Word within us.”

Notes

Practical Steps to Sermon Preparations

By Barry Wood

A Biblical sermon is a message from which the major points come directly from the Scripture. This is exegesis. Too many times preachers are more prone to eisegesis, than they are to exegesis. They read into the Word, rather than extract truth from the Word.

A good sermon is interesting to listen to. The three most important minutes a speaker is on his feet are the 1st three minutes and the last three! You have three minutes to get the crowds attention, or you may never get it! So, begin with your best attention getter. This attention getter is to be related to the subject matter of the message.

Good Bible preaching is really an uncomplicated art when practiced consistently. Each major point in the message that comes out of the text itself will have three parts to it:

1. EXPLANATION
2. APPLICATION
3. ILLUSTRATION

For Example: Let's take a simple verse like **John 3:16**

"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."

Preparation: See if you can state the whole sermon idea in a sentence. For example, let's write a sermon on this verse called, **The Greatest Story Ever Told**.

Key sentence: This verse tells us the story of the greatest *lover*, the greatest *love*, the greatest *gift*, and the greatest *choice* the world has ever heard. Now you create an outline that explains, applies and illustrates these truths.

I. **The Greatest Lover...for God**

Explanation: (the Who, What, Where, and How of the message.)

Here is where you answer some basic questions:

1. To whom was it written?

Look to the historical setting- why did God say this to them?

What was its meaning to whom it was written?

Note: Jesus says these words to Nicodemus, a ruler and religious leader. In the preceding verses Jesus uses an illustration (verses 14, 15) of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness to show the cross as evidence of God's love.

2. What does the text say?

Look at it in several translations.

Review it in commentaries.

Look up key words in a concordance.

Cross reference verses

3. How did it happen? What are the historical details in the text that have meaning?

4. What does it say to us today?
Look for the eternal principle in the earthly setting. In this verse seek to explain these things. Explain who God is. God is love (1st John 4:8) anything else that gives truthful information is put here. God is just, merciful, and God is wrath, etc., however, God is love and love must have an object.

Application: (the “so what” of the message).

After explanation we come to application. Just as “Explanation” is the *Who, What and Where* of the sermon, even so application is the “*so what?*” of the sermon. In the application portion of the message the preacher applies the truth to his congregation. He answers the unspoken “so what” of the listener. He may ask, “What is your view of God?” “How do you see him?” The Kikuyu people of Kenya for centuries called God, “Mungo”, and believe he lives on Mount Kenya! The preacher may say, “Do you know that God is love?”

Application makes the message personal. Jesus and the prophets all did this. They applied the truth to their listeners. Peter at Pentecost, turned to those Jewish leaders responsible for Jesus’ death, and said, “*this same Jesus... you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.... and Peter said to them, “Repent...” (Acts 2: 23-38)*

The point here is that preaching must be applied truth. If a man cannot go away knowing what God wants him to do or be, then he either wasn’t listening or the preacher didn’t do his job very well.

Illustration: (the visual “windows” of the message)

Now we need a story, a picture to visualize the truth. The illustrations are the windows that let in the light of God’s truth to the soul. Long after a listener forgets the rest of your sermon, they will remember the stories. Jesus knew this and preached picture sermons so men could remember. In **Luke 15** Jesus gave us a picture sermon. He tells the Pharisees a story of a man who had two sons in order to teach them about God’s Grace and Love. In **John 3:16** the preacher can give them an illustration to show that God is love.

II. The Greatest Love...so loved the world

Explanation: there are different kinds of love. This word for love is “agape;” it means unconditional love. Only God can love totally unconditionally. Only God can look beyond your faults and see your need. Because we are guilty sinners we need this kind of love. This is GRACE from the Father’s heart. Notice that God’s love has an object, the entire human race. He loves the whole world. None are excluded.

Application: Has God’s love reached your world? God can love you but if your heart is closed to Him by your sin and unbelief, you will not experience the joy of His love. There is a God shaped hole in every human heart that only God’s love can fill.

Illustration: Now we need a picture again, a window to let in the light. Include a good story, a poem, or a saying, even humor to illustrate this truth. So, on it goes through each point, explanation, application, and illustration. This is a simple tool to create a Biblical sermon.

III. The Greatest Object ...**the world**

Explain: Here you can explain to your audience that God loves all people, all tribes, all nations, and all sinners –regardless of color, race, creed or condition. Quote scriptures to support this idea. See **Romans 5:8; Luke 19:10; Romans 6:23;** and many more.

Application: Tell your audience that you can write your own name in here. God loves YOU so much He gave His only begotten Son-for you. Jesus died for your forgiveness and YOUR salvation.

Illustration: Now you give them a good illustration of this personal salvation. Some story they can relate too. Maybe you tell the story of the prodigal son in **Luke 15.**

IV. The greatest Gift... **that He gave his only begotten Son**

Again, you repeat this process of Explaining, Applying, and Illustrating. Sometimes only an illustration is needed- without much explanation.

V. The Greatest Condition...**that anyone who believes in Him**

Vi. The Greatest Salvation... **should not perish but have everlasting life.**

One point-several applications

One more thought is helpful here. Not every sermon has to have three main points. It does not even need two points. Some sermons only have one main idea. For example, this **John 3:16** verse can be presented as one main idea- That is, “how much God loves the lost”. If you choose to use only one point, you can vary the three parts of your message by using Explanation, Application, Illustration, in different orders.

Mix it up

There are times you can use two illustrations together, or explanation, then illustrate, then apply. You can mix it up if it better serves communication. Your audience and how they “hear” you are vital to how you communicate.

For example: In African cultures the people are story tellers. Their ancestry is an oral tradition. Also, the African way of thinking is not analytical like the western mind. So; if your audience is African-use many stories (illustrations) then use the application to apply the stories to real life. You can even use explanation to give biblical authority to your illustrating and applying.

Conclusion:

Finally, every sermon needs **a conclusion.** The ending or conclusion is when you ask the hearers to respond, to take action. You want them to do something in obedience to God’s spoken Word. The Conclusion is when you tell them what they should do. Again, you should be brief, be decisive, and be clear about what you are asking for. The action is related to the body of the sermon. It states what the sermon said. Here you are seeking a response to the good news of the message. So, your conclusion is strong on Application. This is the “*what do you want me to do*” of your sermon. This conclusion is where you ask them to do respond. Maybe here you explain what it means to believe in Christ. You can lead them to pray a prayer of faith that invites Christ to come into their lives and be born again.

Work at it- you will get better

Do you want to become a messenger of God? If so, you must work hard at your craft. Practice, study, and meditate on God’s Word. The preacher is God’s spokesman. As His Spirit speaks truth into your life, you can learn to speak it back to the people in language they can understand. Ask God to make your voice a prophetic voice for your generation. He is eager to bless His prophets.

Notes

The Pastor and the Gospel of Grace

The Security of the Believer

The question is “Can a believe lost his salvation through disobedience and sin?

Every believer has at one time or another doubted his eternal salvation. That is the question before us.

Can a Christian lose his salvation through doubt, sin, or willful disobedience? Can we “fall from Grace?” Is it possible to be saved eternally and then forfeit that precious gift by actions, or deeds that we have done or not done?

The Real Issue

First, when we ask the question, “*can a Christian lose his salvation?*” we must ask a prior question that is even more important, that is, “*how did I secure my salvation in the first place?*” “Does forgiveness come to me because of something I did, or was forgiveness the result of what Christ did for me? Is being saved a result of my efforts or His? I must determine if being saved is by Grace or by works or even a combination of both. How I answer those questions will settle the issue of whether or not I believe I can lose my salvation.

I had it, but lost it

Many major denominations teach that a believer can lose salvation because of some unconfessed or unrepentant sin. The debate is as old as the 17th Century. John Calvin and James Arminius held differing views. Calvin taught “the eternal security of the believer,” while Arminius said “no.” to eternal security. Denominations have divided along lines with these great men.

Calvin says, “I HAVE IT AND CANNOT LOSE IT!

Arminius says, I HAVE IT, BUT I CAN LOSE IT!

So, wherein lies the truth?

A Paradox

Language can be confusing, for example the idea of “saved.” This word implies rescue, deliverance, and redemption. How can you or I be “partially” saved, or “sorta” saved? It is like saying you were almost saved from being shot, or you were almost saved from being run over by a truck. If you were shot you were not saved from being shot. If a truck ran over you, or even a part of you, you weren’t saved from being squished by the truck. Sorta saved or temporarily saved is not really “saved.” In fact, saved from what? In the bible we are saved from “wrath” through Christ. Either we are or we are not saved from God’s wrath.

Eternal or Temporary

Think about the word *eternal* in scripture. It literally means the” life of the ages, or from age to age.” The forgiveness Jesus offers us is repeatedly called “eternal life.” See **John 3:16; John 3:36; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 7:25; 1st John 5:11-12** How then can salvation be both eternal and temporary? The salvation Jesus promised us is expressed as, “*and I give life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.*” **John 10:28**

Notice, if you can never perish, how can you ever perish? And if forgiveness is eternal (forever) how can it not be forever or just temporary?

Gifts and Wages

Scripture often speaks of salvation being a “gift.” The very word for God’s “grace” has the root word for gift in it. Grace is always a gift, never a wage. In fact, wages and gifts are opposites. Wages you earn thru work or labor; a gift you cannot earn, it must be freely given, that’s why it is a gift.

Salvation is a gift to be received, it is never an attainment to be achieved. It is received not earned. It is not a merit we earn, but a mercy God gives. Salvation does not begin in the life of man but in the love of God.

The idea of losing salvation has behind it the thought that it was earned by good behavior and can be lost by bad behavior. This is not what scripture teaches us.

Grace Salvation

Let’s take a moment to examine the meaning of grace salvation and all that it implies.

First, all mankind faces a two-fold liability in the presence of Holy God:

- We are sinners by birth- sons of Adam, born in sin (**Romans 5:12, 19**). Our very nature is sinful, self-centered, and cannot please God. See Romans 8:8.
- We are sinners by choice (**Romans 3:10-23**). Therefore, we are guilty of transgressing against God’s law and his love.

Walls and Barriers

Because of these barriers between us and Holy God, we need two things:

- *Deliverance* from what we are- Self-centered, not God centered
- *Forgiveness* for what we’ve done- Sin

God’s offer of Grace Salvation is that he has torn down the barriers that separate us from himself. Man erected the walls and is helpless to remove them. God must take the initiative, which he has done in sending his Son Jesus to die for us. We cannot change what we are on the inside, nor can we go back in time and undo the wrongs we have done. Mankind deserves justice, but he needs mercy! God’s grace in Christ is that mercy. Someone defined God’s grace as:

G-God’s

R-riches

A-at

C-Christ’s

E-Expense

God’s riches given freely to us is the cross of his beloved Son Jesus. Scripture says it this way, “*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” That is God’s gift of grace salvation.

Four Word Pictures

The NT gives us four beautiful “word pictures” that illustrate God’s gift of Grace to sinners. *These* word pictures show us the love of God in forgiving us eternally and putting us in right standing with Him forever.

Justified= **Romans 3:24** says, “*Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*” The word *justified* means to declare “innocent”, “not guilty” or “righteous”. Paul says that is what God, the righteous Judge of the universe, has done for us. He has declared us not guilty. How did He accomplish such a feat? It wasn’t easy. God was faced with a delicate dilemma. As a Holy God, He must punish sin. As a God of love, He desires to forgive the sinners. He hates sin and loves the sinner. How can He vindicate His holiness and still love the sinner? *Justification* was God’s answer.

An act of grace. Perhaps an illustration of how God justified us would help demonstrate what the cross of Jesus did for us. Suppose I am your father. I am also a district Judge. You are my rebellious teenage daughter or son. You steal an automobile, and, while driving under the influence of alcohol, you run over and kill an innocent child. By chance you are brought into my court for sentencing. All the evidence is in, and you are found guilty on several counts of lawlessness. It is my task, as judge, to pass sentence upon you—my own child. For the sake of the illustration, let’s say the sentence is capital punishment – a life for a life. What a dilemma! As your loving father I desire to forgive and extend mercy, but as a judge I must honor the law and punish the lawbreaker. What is the solution? Suppose as the judge, I came down off the judge’s seat, stood beside you, and passed sentence upon myself as your substitute my life for yours. The law would be satisfied, and you would be justified. You would be declared righteous, innocent. I would have taken your place and punishment—the innocent for the guilty. Someone said justified means, “Just as if I had never sinned”. What a wonderful act of love that would be. Amazingly, that is what God, the righteous Judge, did for us. Jesus (God in the flesh, **John 1:14, 18; Hebrews 1:3**) died in our place. **Romans 5:8** declares, “...*Christ died for us.*” God now sees the sinner just as if he had never sinned – or *justified*. We are pardoned by the Judge of the universe. Forever!

Notice that God has declared us righteous. It is an act of His love. He sees us as innocent when He knows we are not! Jesus’ righteousness has been deposited to our bankrupt account, and God sees us in Christ. We are pardoned without any merit in us. We had nothing to do with it. It is pure grace. We are acquitted, pronounced innocent, and all because of the death of Jesus, our Savior. That is one look at how God removed the barriers. He *justified* us in Christ. We have been eternally pardoned, not just paroled.

Redeemed=A second word picture often used in the NT is this word “*redeemed.*” Jesus has also redeemed us, as well as pardoned us. **Romans 3:24** also says, “*Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*” Even as justification pictures the courtroom, redemption pictures the slave market. It portrays the sinner as a slave to sin and the devil. Christ came to pay the ransom for our freedom. Jesus Himself used this word picture when he said, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (**Mark 10:45**).

This Greek word for ransom means the price paid to a slave owner to purchase a slave. The price that purchased us out of slavery was the precious blood of Jesus. This is Simon Peter's thought when he writes, "*knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ*" (**1 Peter 1:18, 19**).

Redemption has been purchased for us. Our freedom from sin's bondage has been paid for by the blood of Christ. We have been declared not guilty before the Law of God and also set free from slavery. We are never to be put on sale again, because we are no longer slaves, but sons, adopted into the family of God (**Romans 8:15**). We have been forever acquitted and emancipated! The Bible tells us at least five things about our redemption:

- It cost God the life of His only Son (**1 Peter 1:18, 19**)
- It has taken place, historically, on the cross (**Ephesians 1:7**)
- It is eternal, not temporary (**Hebrews 9:12**)
- It is offered to the whole world (**1 Timothy 2:3-6**)
- It must be appropriated by faith in the work of Jesus on the cross (**Romans 3:26, 28**)

Propitiation= Third, God's saving grace is pictured as a *propitiation* for sins. **Romans 3:25** contains Paul's third graphic illustration of what happened on the cross. "*Whom God displayed publically as a propitiation in his blood through faith...*"

This idea of making propitiation is a high priestly word illustrating what happens when a priest offers up an animal sacrifice to God to remove the guilt of sin. It pictures Yom Kippur-the Day of Atonement, when the high priest of the Jews would one day a year offer up an unblemished lamb as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. This word propitiation also pictures the Passover in Egypt when the blood was put on the doorposts of Israel's houses and the Angel of Death "passed over" them. The Passover is a shadow fulfilled in the Cross of Christ where the messiah's blood was posted on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins.

The main idea in propitiation is that the sacrifice of the innocent blood of Jesus both removes our guilt and expiates God's wrath against us. To propitiate is to "cover over" and to expiate is to remove or blot out. Both of these Jesus did for us. **1st Corinthians 5:7** says, "*For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.*" John the Baptist said it, "*Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*"(**John 1:29**)

Benefits of Christ's "propitiation"

First of all- God has forever cleansed us of all unrighteousness. Our sins are gone, blotted out forever. See **Col. 2:14** where this one sacrifice for sins removes all guilt for all time.

Second, this means God is not mad at us anymore! His wrath toward us who are saved is GONE! Jesus took God's wrath upon himself on the cross. Therefore, when a Christian sins (and we all do) he need never fear the wrath of God. God's love for us in Christ is unconditional. Even God's discipline to sinning believers is not punishment to get even for offended justice but is the work of love teaching us to walk by faith. Propitiation says, "God has cleansed me and loves me eternally."

Reconciliation= In **Romans 5:10, 11**, Paul uses another picture word several times. It is the family word *reconciliation*. This term was illustrated for us by our Lord Jesus, in the parable of the prodigal son (**Luke 15:11-32**). When the wayward son came home to this father, and the two embraced after the son's confession; that was a picture of reconciliation. To be reconciled to God basically means to be restored to fellowship with our heavenly Father, because all the barriers are down. Because the sin, guilt, and wrath are gone, we now have eternal peace with God. God is our Father; we are His children, and fellowship is secured.

Putting the Puzzle Together

Paul has been painting a picture for us. It is entitled *Saved by Grace*. This picture is like a giant puzzle. As we put the pieces together, we gain a perspective of the whole. Notice this progression:

Propitiation: God has cleansed us and removed all guilt.

Justification: God has pronounced us innocent; we are pardoned.

Redemption: God has freed us from bondage and death.

Reconciliation: As a result, we are reconciled to God and restored to fellowship.

Paul says in **Colossians 1:22**, “*yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.*” These are the results of grace salvation. We have forgiveness, freedom, and cleansing, so He can present us before Him “. . . *holy and . . . beyond reproach.*” All of this simply means that God has accepted us in Christ. Sins are no longer the issue. All the barriers are gone, removed forever. No matter how many sins you have committed, nothing can keep you from God. His grace is greater than all our sin.

Eight troublesome scriptures:

There are only 8 scripture passages in the New Testament that seem to indicate that “*falling from Grace.*” is possible. We will examine them one at a time to see what is taught here.

John 15: 5,6 “*if anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*”

1. The verses are allegorical & symbolic, we should not base any critical doctrine on allegory.
2. The issue Jesus is addressing is bearing fruit (righteousness), not salvation, or disobedience. The issue is our “abiding” in Christ which is about our fellowship with Christ not our relationship to Christ (salvation).
3. He who abides bears fruit as the life of Jesus’ Spirit flows thru him. We are worthless to any spiritual production apart from abiding in Christ. This allegory of roots, fruits, vines and branches is about our being in close fellowship with Christ which will make our lives fruitful and worthwhile, not “worthless.”

Galatians 5:4 “*you have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from Grace.*”

1. This sentence must be read in the “context” of the whole book & theme of Galatians, in which the Apostle Paul is defending “grace salvation” against those Jewish believers

from Jerusalem who came to Galatia teaching a “different gospel.” See **Galatians 1:6**.

2. These false teachers (Judaizers) were mixing law & grace; telling the church that the men must be circumcised, they must observe Jewish Mishnah rules and holidays. They were adding these “laws” to the cross of Christ as saving works.
3. Paul taught Grace-plus-nothing is salvation. He calls their teaching a “different” gospel. It is different because it adds works to the completed work of Christ. See **Galatians 2:20, 21**.
4. Paul affirms to the Galatians that our sins and religious performance are no longer the issues, but that God’s grace given to us in the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ is all sufficient for salvation-plus nothing. To add any human work is to “fall away from the principle of salvation by grace.”

Hebrews 6: 4-6

“...if they should fall away...” This phrase raises the question of can a Christian lose his Salvation thru disobedience.

1. If it teaches losing salvation, it also teaches that a believer who can lose it, cannot get it back. He has committed the “sin unto death” of *1st John 5* If it is teaching that you can be saved, then sin away God’s grace, then it is also teaching total apostasy-that you cannot ever be resaved. I do not think that is the teaching here.
2. The writer of Hebrews describes those in **Heb. 5:12-14** as those who “*ought to be teachers*” thus they are saved but immature. They need to grow up in the faith. Then in the following passage in **6:1-6** he tells the same saved people to go on to maturity. He further describes them as:

“Those who have been enlightened...
Having tasted of the heavenly gift,
Made partakers of the Holy Spirit,
Tasted the good word of God,
And the powers of the age to come.”

All these are descriptions of a born-again believer in Christ. The writer then declares that “if” it were possible for these true believers to fall away from the faith (renounce faith in Christ) then it is impossible to renew them to salvation ever again. Why? Because there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved (**Acts 4:12**) Christ would have to come back and do it all again! Thus if it were possible to be saved, then lost, you can never be resaved!

3. Probably, this section (verses 4-6) is a “hypothetical” straw man statement showing that Christ is the only way of Salvation, and to turn away from him is to be forever lost. See *1st John 2:19* I believe it is a hypothetical not actual statement. It is a “what if” situation. This passage in reality is teaching the impossibility of a truly saved person ever being lost.

2nd Peter 2:20-22 “...a dog returns to its own vomit.”

1. To whom were these words spoken? See 2:1= false teachers, who denied the Master who bought them with his precious blood (see **1st Peter 1:18,19**)
2. Peter is speaking to those who came right up to the door of salvation in Christ, perverted the truth, and then turned back to their sensual ways.
3. This is not unlike many thousands of Church members who “prayed the sinner’s prayer” but there was no true repentance & re-birth. Then they ‘fall away’ without having ever truly been saved.

James 5:19, 20 “...will save his soul from death...”

There are several possible ways to understand this verse:

1. If a Christian strays from the truth, turn him back and save his soul from the death of hell. If this is the meaning, the verse is teaching apostasy.
2. If a Christian sins, turn him back and save his soul from the “death” of lost fellowship here on earth. This idea minimizes the word “death’ making it equal to darkness or deprivation.
3. “*save his soul*” could have the idea of “delivering his personality” from death. It would thus translate, “deliver his life from the deadly results of sin.” This is the most probable meaning in the light of other scriptures like **James 4:8** and **Galatians 6:1,2**

Revelation 3:5 ...and I will not erase his name from the book of life”

1. The context is the Seven Churches of Revelation
2. The Sardis church has two kinds of people in its membership, saved and lost. He is telling the saved that their salvation is secure, and because they are worthy, their name is forever in the book of Life. This phrase does not imply that God has an eraser he uses on folks that commit some unforgiveable sin.

Final thoughts

Those who are saved forever from God’s wrath are described by Jesus, Paul and Peter as “born again.” When you are born from above (spiritual birth) you cannot be unborn. When you are adopted into God’s forever family, you cannot be unadopted. What grace gives; it does not retract. God’s only requirement of us is to trust his love for us. He asks us to live by faith. He even offers to give us faith as a gift of his grace. Whether your faith is weak or strong, it cannot affect your acceptance with God. Faith is the empty hand, the instrument by which we accept God’s free gift.

Notes

Blessings and Curses and the Gospel of Grace

Introduction:

A very common teaching among Christian pastors and denominations is the Old Covenant concept of blessings and curses. Although this teaching is in the Old Covenant, it is only a shadow that is fulfilled in the completed work of Christ on the Cross. Jesus became a curse for us on the Cross and as result, there are no blessings apart from Him and no curses that come upon us from him. Because there is much misunderstanding of this teaching, the following is to clarify this Biblical truth.

Obey, Obedience

Behind the idea of curses and blessing is the issue of obedience and disobedience. In the OT “obey” is very close to the word “to hear.” To obey is the correct response to the voice, the call or the word of God. In the OT the idea that you can casually hear God’s voice or his word and not obey is unimaginable. When God speaks- you are expected to “hear” or obey. This explains why the word for obey in the Greek NT is literally, “super-hearing.” Thus to hear God’s word is to obey God’s word. Also, in the OT there is no word for disobey, but rather words like “rebel” or “revolt,” are used.

Trust and obey

In the OT obedience is intimately connected to our humble agreement with and our unconditional trust in God’s commands. This trust and obey connection began in the Garden of Eden. There we see Adam living in perfect trust in God to provide all his needs. Adam lived in harmony with his Father/God, trusting God, loving God. We see him humbly enjoying God. Adam and Eve experienced the highest level of peace by trusting God’s character, his love and concern. This perfect trust was reflected in their obedience to all God asked of them. This pre-fall relationship of trust and obey was a perfect pattern for human existence.

This is a lesson for all of us. Distrust is the open door to disobedience. When the serpent came to Eve his goal was to create distrust in God’s character. His weapon was doubt. He wants us to doubt and distrust who God is. Satan always wants us to either distrust God’s sovereignty, God’s compassion, or his interest in us. Think about it- when the enemy can get you to distrust the Father’s sovereignty you will be tempted to distrust and disobey. Why? Because if God is not all powerful, then he cannot always be in control. He cannot change the mess our lives are in. Satan will often try to get you to distrust God’s care for you. If you distrust his compassion, you begin to manipulate him to gain his favor. Finally, Satan will tempt us to doubt God’s interest in us. The enemy tells us the Father is detached, totally removed from human affairs. He has no interest or purpose for us. When we begin to believe this lie, we no longer trust God to order our lives. All this leaves us with is the need to manipulate God by using our obedience as a weapon to control him in some way.

Faith and Obedience

In the scriptures the idea of trusting God is synonymous with “believing” God. Faith and obedience are closely related ideas. The best example of belief that produces obedience is that of Abraham in Genesis 15. Abraham is 99 years old, and his wife Sarah is barren. God tells Abraham that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. When Abraham hears God’s pronouncement, the scripture says, “*and Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.*” (**Gen. 15:6**) Paul quotes this verse in **Romans 4:3** to demonstrate that believing God is evidenced by obedience. Paul’s point is that Abraham’s obedience came out of his faith (trust) in God.

When we read carefully the book of James we understand that real trust/faith in God produces good works. These faith/works are the obedience of faith, see **James 2:26**. Faith in God brings about a pure kind of obedience.

Obedience without faith

What we learn from this is that any obedience we offer to God that does not come from our trusting God is potentially evil. It is tainted with self-will, self-pride, and the need to control. Sadly, many Christians continue to offer God a false obedience that comes from a religious spirit that dishonors our Heavenly Father. In point of fact, obedience that comes from distrust actually has created much of the world’s religion. Being obedient to impress God, to get something favorable from God, or to manipulate God will never produce fellowship with God.

Distrust and faulty obedience

1. Fear as motive:

There is much obeying God that comes from the fear of God. It sees God as a tyrant who is eager to punish and slow to forgive. Those who obey out of the fear of hell or other judgments have never seen the face of God in the face of Jesus our suffering servant lord. When we serve out of fear of punishment, it reveals a fundamental distrust in the cross of Christ to make us “right” in God’s eyes.

2. Duty as motive:

The apostle John described folks who think God’s commands are a burden to keep. In **1st John 5:3**, he says Christ’s commandments are not “grievous” or burdensome. All legalistic religions that keep score on your good days and bad days think obedience is a duty or burden we must bear. John says because we have experienced God’s love in Christ, his commandments are not a load to bear but rather an opportunity to express our joy in serving him. Only obedience that has delight in it, is truly NT obedience.

3. Guilt & Shame as motive:

Guilt and shame are twin sisters. Both are ugly! Guilt over failure produces shame. Shame is guilt gone toxic. There are many, many toxic Christ-followers whose obedience is guilt motivated because they distrust God’s love & mercy. Their obedience is reluctant, casual, and filled with regret. They just know that curses from God are right around the corner-about to catch up with them.

4. Manipulation as motive:

Few believers would readily admit to trying to manipulate God, but thousands do it- and often. Their distrust goes like a game played out this way- “God, if I do this, then you are honor bound to do that.” I can get God to serve me and my wishes by obeying certain rules he has laid out. For example, manipulators use **Luke 6:38** as an excuse for a “give to get” theology. They actually think they can treat God like a casino slot-machine that is rigged in their favor. They give (obeying) expecting to get more than they gave- even a hundred-fold. Those who try this manipulation game totally ignore the context of Luke 6:38 which is to love your enemies, pray for them, and do to others as you want them to do to you (**Luke 6:31**)

Better than Sacrifice

For example, God says to King Saul after he disobeyed by offering his religious sacrifices as a substitute for obeying God’s voice, “*Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.*” **1st Samuel 15:22-23**. Religious people daily offer God a kind of obedience that comes from shame, guilt, duty, fear, or manipulation. Modern day radical Islam is a prime example. Their interpretation of Islamic law (sharia) tells them that through Jihad they can manipulate Allah to give them blessings of virgins in paradise. The jihadist foolishly believes God can be bought and controlled by human efforts.

Many Christians do much the same thing when we think that by tithing, we can get blessings from God. The so-called “prosperity gospel” tells millions that God delights in our sacrifices (obeying without trusting). It says by giving money you can bribe God to give you more money. You can give in order to get. The other side of this false teaching is that if you do not give or “plant your seed money,” then the devourer (curses) will come to your house. Thus, obedience is manipulation to get blessings and to avoid curses.

Blessings and Curses

You may be wanting to remind me that the OT teaches us to believe in blessings and curses. We often site **Genesis 12:3**, “*I will bless them that bless you, and I will dishonor them that curse you,*” to teach that God will bless those of us who bless modern day Israel, and God will also put a curse on those who do not bless modern day Israel. Another OT passage commonly used to teach that blessings and curses are in the church today is **Malach1 3:10, 11**. We are told (by some) that tithing will bring us God’s blessing and that refusing to tithe will bring the devourer (curses) upon our prosperity (crops). Are we to believe this is still God’s word to us today? I do not think so.

Progressive Revelation

All of those who teach that curses come upon those who disobey, get their theology from the Old Covenant, not the New Covenant. Their mistake is in a failure to understand the proper relationship between the OT and the NT. Mature bible students understand the concept of progressive revelation in the scriptures. This means that Moses knew more of God’s character, purposes, and will than his predecessor Abraham. Abraham did not have the Law, Moses did. Then later, the Prophets of Israel are given more revelation of God’s purpose for Israel than

Moses knew. They speak repeatedly of God's desire to send a Messiah to redeem mankind. They knew more than Moses. God was progressively revealing himself to us. Even so, Jesus knows more of God than Moses because he is greater than Moses. He is greater than the prophets because he fulfilled the Law & the prophets. Jesus the Christ is the full and final revelation of God. In Him is the fullness of God.

Curses in the Old Covenant

This helps us understand why blessings and curses are taught throughout the OT, but not in the NT. In the OT narrative God is working out his purpose to redeem and restore what was lost in the Garden of Eden. The curse comes upon fallen mankind with Adam's rebellion. Disobedience brings God's wrath often called a "curse." When God makes Covenant with Abraham, he again stresses obedience but warns of curses (disfavor) on those who disobey. Then God gives Moses his Law, and the standard is raised even higher. Israel's standard to measure obedience is the Law. The law is full of promises to bless those who obey, and also curses upon those who do not. This blessings and curses principle is true for those OT peoples living in that era of history-under the Law.

Curses in the New Covenant

The Apostle Paul receives even more revelation as he interprets what happened at the crucifixion of Jesus- God's Messiah. Jesus is God's chosen lamb who through his death and shed blood has taken away the sin of the world (**Ephesians 1:7**). In writing to the Galatian Church, Paul says in **Galatians 3:1-13** that we, the new people of God, are no longer under the Law and its condemnation. He calls us the true sons of Abraham because we are saved by faith in Christ's sacrifice and not saved by our deeds of the law (**Gal. 3:7**). We are blessed along with Abraham the believer (**Gal. 3:9**). He then boldly declares we are free from all the curses of the Law: *"For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "the righteous shall live by faith." But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us-for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.-so that in Christ Jesus the blessings of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."*

What a joyous declaration "*Christ became the curse for us.*" Notice that the curse is removed for those who believe in Christ's saving work. Because we are "in Christ" our curses, disobedience and sins were on the cross with Jesus, we are freed from living under the law's condemnation and curses. There is no more curse for the believer, only blessings.

Not keeping score

What this means to the believer in Christ is that God is no longer keeping "score." The "score" (debt) was put on Jesus shoulders and carried to the cross. The score card is full, then paid in full. Now think on this- it is impossible to make "points" with someone who is not keeping score! Therefore, any obedience I offer God that comes from a motive to impress him, get something

from him, or to make him love me more is foolish and useless. Any obedience that is based on distrust in Christ's all sufficient sacrifice, will ultimately create a religious spirit that can never create fellowship with God.

In Christ, or under Law

So then, we are free to choose, we can be free in Christ or under bondage to the law. The choice is ours. Those Christians who live in guilt, shame, or bondage have not "believed" in the obedience that comes from faith in the completed work of Christ. They are living like OT Israel- condemned by the law.

Galatians tells us if we offer God any kind of obedience that has any motive to gain God's favor, then that obedience nullifies Grace.

Think of it this way- all OT law keeping was based in distrust in God's character, love and mercy. That's evidenced by Israel's first and greatest commandment in **Deuteronomy 6:4, 5** "*Hear, O' Israel: The lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" Here is proper motive to obey God. We obey him because we love him, trust him, and want to please him.

Which do you choose- Law or Grace? Christ or Moses? Blessing or curse? You cannot have it both ways.

Transformed people

The only thing that ever changes people is a transforming look at the Cross of Christ. Facing the Ten Commandments does not change people; it may tame them for a while, but it can never change them.

God's love when revealed and received is what changes a man. When we are captured by the amazing grace of Christ, then and only then can begin to serve and obey out of faith and trust.

How then does God bless us?

Since there are no curses for those in Christ, how about the blessings side of obedience? Since I cannot obey to get more blessings- how do they come to us? Think of it this way- since God only blesses perfect obedience, none of us is that righteous. (**Romans 3:10**) All we can ever offer the Father is our partial obedience. That can only disappoint any child of God who desires to please God. God only has one Son who has offered him perfect obedience and that of course in his only begotten Son-Jesus. He gave God perfect obedience by always pleasing the Father (**John 8:29**).

The only pure grace filled living that can satisfy the human spirit is the obedience that comes from faith. It is born out of trusting the Father. Only Christ in us can live out obedience thru us.

What God demands he supplies

For the believer, who wants to please God, he must know and trust the fact that what God commands us to do, he beforehand supplies the power to do for us, in us and thru us.

It is recorded in Matthew 12 that Jesus was in the synagogue, and he sees a man with a crippled hand. He commands the man to "*stretch out your hand!*" (**Matt. 12:13**) Jesus was asking the Cripple to do something that was impossible for him to do.

The Obedience of Faith

Romans 1: 5 & 16:26

*“...Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for his name’s sake. **Rom. 1:4-5***

*“But now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;” **Rom. 16:26***

Introduction:

Scripture reveals a progressive revelation concerning God’s will regarding obedience. As we move through the timeline of God revealing his will to us we see the kind of obedience that honors God and the sacrifice of his Son for our disobedience.

The Old Covenant (OT)

Obedience in the Old Testament is based on fear of retribution. It is an obedience to avoid God’s displeasure or even His wrath.

There is a problem here; obedience that springs forth from the well of fear, or duty only lasts as long as the fear lasts. Fear is a motive, but it is inadequate to change a heart. When the fear is gone-so is the obedience.

Illustration: it is like a child’s obedience done for fear of being caught or punished. Once out from under the thumb of the punisher (parents) the child will rebel. He never “owned” the obedience; he only owned the fear of punishment.

Secondly, the fear of the Lord, brings genuine guilt when disobedience occurs. In Israel this guilt is not just individual, but corporate, penetrating the whole tribal community. Guilt is such that God calls them a “disobedient people.” The result is a culture motivated by morals, mores, and Moses. Social pressure becomes the policeman of obedience.

Finally, Paul tells us in Galatians that God gave the Law to Israel not to save them or reform them, but rather to lead them to a higher and greater motive for obedience-faith in Christ’s completed work on the Cross. (See **Galatians 3**). He is saying you must meet Moses before you meet Jesus! The high standard of Moses’ law will reveal your sin and show you the need for a Savior.

The New Covenant (NT)

Jesus comes and puts a new face on Israel’s God. He introduces them to His Father in heaven. His Father is the dad in Luke 15’s parable of the prodigal son. Jesus lifts obedience out of the muck and mire of the pig pen struggle for perfection. He reveals by his own obedience a kind of relationship with God that seeks only to please a loving Father, and to give Him glory. It reveals an obedience that is of faith and trust in the Father’s heart of love.

What really changes people, making them willing to obey God?

1. Will Laws, rules and principles, do it?

Not really. In fact, just the opposite happens. You might put a sign up in your yard that says, “*Do not walk on the grass.*”

What will it accomplish? Only that it will guarantee every kid in the block will defiantly walk, run and bike on your lawn! Laws and rules can restrain and restrict, but never transform. Laws only reveal our selfish sin nature, they can never transform it.

2. Will God’s Grace+ works bring about obedience?

No, not really. It is human nature to not trust grace or God’s love as all sufficient. We seem to want to add something to the Cross of Christ. Our impulse is to not fully trust God’s Grace, but to add rules or morals as proofs of our good intentions. This idea came up before the early Church in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabus, along with other brethren go up to the Jerusalem mother church to debate this issue of grace + works (obedience). After much intense discussion the Elders of the Jerusalem congregation wrote a letter to the Gentile believers saying in effect, “*we must not put a burden on you Gentiles that we ourselves cannot bear.*” (See **Acts 15:19-29**)

Here is their conclusion about serving God to gain favor with God: “if you include any obedience on your part to gain favor with God, you are nullifying God’s grace.”

Why is this true?

1. Only Perfect Obedience can please God

Back in the 1990’s here in America, a men’s movement became popular known as **Promise Keepers**. Many thousands of Christian men attended these rallies. It was a movement that meant well but was misguided somewhat. Why? Because we make promises to God that we cannot keep apart from His grace. Making promises to a Holy God is futile because His character demands perfect obedience not just partial or promised obedience. Only Jesus has offered God perfect obedience. Hebrews tells us Christ was tempted, tested, and suffered, yet still was obedient through his suffering. (**Heb. 4:8**) Our job is not to try to copy him or imitate him, but rather to trust in Him. Our task is not the imitation of Christ but rather simple trust in His perfect obedience in our behalf.

2. Religious Manipulation

There is also a kind of obedience that seeks to control or manipulate God. The idea being that we can control the Deity by our behaviors that earn his favor. Thus by obeying, some think they can balance the scales between blessings and curses from God. They suppose that God has a super scoreboard in heaven, and he has angels keeping score on us.

The gospel (good news) is that you cannot score points with a God who does not keep score! The Cross of Christ is God’s scoreboard. The Cross shouts out to us-“the debt is paid!” **2 Cor. 5:21** says it well-“*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” Do you see that? In Christ we have been declared “righteous” because the righteousness of Christ in ours by simply trusting in the completed work (perfect

obedience) of Christ. Someone has said, “How do you score points with a God who is not keeping score?” It is impossible; so why do we keep trying, performing, and even manipulating?

The Obedience of Faith

Like bookends the letter to the Roman church begins with the “*obedience of faith*” (**Rom. 1:5**) and ends with the “*obedience of faith*” (**Rom. 16:26**). A good translation of this phrase is the “obedience that results from trusting God’s Grace in Christ Jesus.” It is an obedience that springs forth in joy from trusting the loving Grace of God. It is an obedience that faith (trust) produces. In **Romans 1:4** Paul even says that the whole purpose of the Gospel is to bring about “*the obedience of faith*” to all the nations. This obedience that faith produces is God’s gospel for all men.

This gospel of trusting God is the opposite of man-made religion. Religion is self-trusting performance, whereas true Obedience is not about getting something from God but rather faithfulness to what God has already done in Christ. Any efforts to relate to God that is based on distrust (of God) is evil. Why is it evil? Because it is obedience that is rooted in *SELF* and self-promotion. Any obedience based on distrust in God’s goodness, grace and mercy will always create religion. It will not produce fellowship with God.

Commands and Provision

The good news of the Gospel is that when God demands our obedience, he has previously provided for it. He never asks us to obey without first making provision.

For example: God commands husbands to love their wives even as Christ loves the Church and gave Himself for it. My question is- Who can love like that? I cannot! In fact, you cannot either! Only Christ in us, living and loving through us can love our wives that much.

In Luke’s Gospel we see a great example of trusting/faith. Jesus enters a synagogue and as he was teaching there he sees a man whose right hand is withered. Jesus tells the man to raise up and walk over to him (the man obeys). Jesus commands the man to “*stretch out your hand!*” and *the man did so; and his hand was completely restored.*” (**Luke 6:10**) Notice the command and the provision of power to perform. The man’s hand was crippled, he could not stretch it out, yet he trusted Christ and did as he was asked to do, and his faith allowed him to obey.

This is how Grace-filled obedience blesses those who obey and blesses God. We obey God because we worship and adore God. We are Sons of God eager to please God.

Oswald Chambers calls obedience, “my utmost for His highest- my best for His glory. “When we sin (disobey) we have no sense of condemnation or shame, but we run to the Father claiming our forgiveness and trusting God’s grace to cover our disobedience.

Living in grace provides fellowship with the Father and turns duty into joyful service. Every command becomes not a burden but a promise of a blessed fellowship and partnership with God our Father.

*“Obedience that does not have ‘delight’ in it, is not New Testament obedience.”
Dudley Hall*

The Theology of Suffering **Lessons from Job**

Introduction:

The man that can stand up here and thoroughly explain suffering is a man who has clearly never suffered.

God's best attempt at explanation is the book of Job. Job's testimony has withstood the test of time because God inspired it and preserved it.

The book of Job tells us there is a deep suffering before which you cannot say a word. All you can do is bow your head and leave room for God to enter and fill it with Himself.

Some suffering is so devastating that one can hardly say, "he does all things well."

The preface to Job:

Poor Job did not know the preface to his own story. He suffered not knowing God & Satan had made a battleground of his soul! His suffering was **according to the will of God**. It had nothing to do with his sin, failure or life circumstances. God willed it.

Apply: there are times when your suffering is for no other reason than God allowed it! You are caught up in a cosmic struggle between God & Satan. There is an invisible battle going on and YOU are the battleground!

Job= teaches us that when the saint suffers, he does not always know why- but he does somehow know down deep in his soul that all is well!

Apply: Job did not listen to his accusers. He knew they were wrong.

Job= his friends interfered with what God was doing in Job's life. **Hands off!** None dare interfere when God is working in the life of one of his saints. God is bringing these things into the life of His child to produce bread to feed the world!

Apply: Do not interfere in the disciplined suffering of another saint.

Job= The God of the Bible is a suffering God. When the mask is removed from life and we see all its misery and shame, behind it all we see a God who cares, who is involved and who suffers with us. Our Heavenly Father's heart is broken daily by a suffering world. Job's friends mocked and accused him because they were ignorant of who God is and of his dealings with a suffering mankind.

Apply; During our suffering, God is the only one who does not mock us. He too was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief.

Lesson: All suffering is not for perfecting. We all know people whose suffering has made them mean and insufferable.

Apply; Suffering only perfects those who accept the call of God in Christ. Refuse it and suffering can consume you.

Suffering is a mystery at times-

Like Job, we don't know the Preface (what God is doing) we feel only God's absence, when in reality he is there in the midst of it.

Apply: There were three men on a cross- the bad thief, the penitent thief, and the Son of God, all three suffer the agonies of crucifixion. All suffered- yet for different reasons.

Job=suffered physical pain- but the Bible knows little of physical suffering and does not make a big deal of it. Our culture sees physical suffering as a curse. We demand creature comforts as proof of God's favor. Not so. The Scripture says, "*for he that suffers in his flesh has ceased from sin.*" In other words- physical suffering is often God's purifier.

New Testament light on Suffering:

"If anyone suffers as a Christian..." 1st Peter 4:16

Lesson: When the world sees a man willing to suffer as a Christian, it is first amazed, and then it is dazed, then finally disgusted!

Illustration: Men like pastor Youcef Nadarkhani of Iran is in prison. In October 2009 he was accused of apostasy by the Muslim government of Iran. He refuses to recant his faith in Christ. Also, in 2016 Pastor Saad Abidini suffered in an Iranian prison for over two years before world-wide political pressure caused his release. All he had to do to be released was renounce faith in Christ and accept Islam. He refused.

Apply: To suffer as a Christian means that there is a fundamental difference between you and the rest of the world. It is more than just your Biblical worldview they differ with. The world takes exception to your loyalty to a person- Jesus Christ. That is what they find inexcusable. "*Yea though he slay me- still will I praise him*" The world's spirit of antichrist has a contempt for that loyalty, it disgusts them, and they think us foolish even crazy!

Illustration: The world slandered Christ on the cross- "*he saved others, why can he not save himself?*" They take our theology and twist it into contempt, satire, & sarcasm.

Apply: To suffer as a Christian is to have no answer for the world's satire and sarcasm. The world turned on Christ at his crucifixion by turning his good words into jest & jeer. They will do the same thing to you. He gave no answer, and neither can you!

"If anyone suffer according to the will of God" 1st Peter 4:19

There is some suffering that is intentional, other that is preventable. There is also suffering that is inevitable in that it is from God.

Apply: Job's suffering was intentional- by God. Jesus suffering was intentional- by God. Suffering can be grand and glorious when the heart is right with God. A man is never more dangerous than when he is at peace in the center of God's will!

Illust: If there were no night, who could appreciate the coming of day. No night –no stars, or moon's splendor against a dark sky.

Apply: Your darkness is often God's "*treasures of darkness*" **Isaiah 45:3**

Suffering that is according to God's will is not so much about perfecting or teaching you, but rather it is God's opportunity to show others His purpose and grandeur in life thru our suffering. Through Godly suffering we become God's bread to feed the world.

Apply: God's will for you to suffer is rarely stated explicitly but it comes out of a life of obedience. It is impossible to live in continual obedience and not suffer for it. The men who do not suffer in this life are not worth their salt! The finest men & women of God suffer & the devil uses their suffering to slander God.

WATER BAPTISM-
It's History and Theology

The Origins of water baptism:

A study of history reveals the presence of Water Baptism during Old Testament times. When Gentiles wanted to identify with Israel and become Jews (not racially, but religiously), they had to go through a three-fold process: circumcision, animal Sacrifice and water baptism. So the first instance of baptism was that of Proselyte Gentile immersion. This was done in a pool in the Temple court of the Gentiles.

The Water Baptism mentioned in the New Testament is our topic of study.

This was:

- Instituted by the Father (Jn. 1:6, 33)
- Commanded by the Son (Mt. 28:19)
- Attested by the Spirit (Mt. 3:16; Acts 2:38b)
- Instructed by the Apostles (Acts 10:48)
- Practiced by the Early Church (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 9:18)

The Meaning and Mode of Water Baptism

The English word 'Baptize' comes from 'Baptizo' (Greek) which in turn comes from the root "bapto". The Greek-Bapto means "to Dip" (Lk. 16:24; Jn. 13:26; Rev. 19:13) It carries the idea of dipping a substance into a fluid and then taking it out again.

- Historical Usage- the verb "Baptizo" can be traced back into the earlier, classical form of the Greek language as far as B.C. 5. It has a continuous history in the Greek language right down into the 1st and 2nd Centuries A.D. Throughout, the word retains one unchanged basic meaning- "to dip", "to plunge", "to submerge", or "to immerse". E.g. Between 500 and 400 B.C.- Plato; 400 B.C.- Hippocrates; Between 200 and 100 B.C.- 2 Kings 5:14 (Septuagint); Between 100 B.C. and A.D. 100- Strabo; 1st Century A.D.- Josephus; Between 1st and 2nd Century A.D.- Plutarch
- Technical Note- 'Bapto' and 'Baptizo' are never used in the passive sense. This means that water is never said to be baptized on someone; rather, someone is baptized into the water. It carries the sense of "to bury in the ground."
- Biblical Evidence-There is the immersion baptism done by John (Jn. 3:23); the baptism of Jesus (Mk. 1:9-10); and the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:38-39)
- Other Evidence for Baptism as Immersion are found in **The Didache**: An early handbook on Christian ministry, written between 100-110 A.D., which distinguishes between 'pouring' Greek

ekxeo, and “immersion” *baptizo*. Church historian Philip Schaff, the reformers Martin Luther, and John Calvin all state that immersion was the custom of the ancient church. Josephus (1st Century Jewish Historian) describes John the Baptist as ‘John the Dipper’. Early baptism for those Gentiles who joined the Jewish faith was by immersion. It is worthy of noting that there is another Greek word that can be used for “sprinkling” it is the Greek verb, “*prosraineo*. It wasn’t until A.D.1311 that the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Ravenna made ‘sprinkling’ or ‘immersion’ alternatives as modes of Baptism. It was in 1644 that the Church of England adopted sprinkling by vote of Parliament.

Significance of Water Baptism

There are two extremes in Christendom: one group believes that baptism is so powerful that it can impart life to a spiritually dead sinner (baptismal regeneration), while the other group believes that there is absolutely nothing that takes place in water baptism- it is just a purely symbolic activity. But both these extremes should be avoided.

Baptism is not a magical act; neither is it a meaningless act. When a true believer enters the waters of baptism it is a spiritually significant moment in his profession of faith in Christ. His repentance and faith has made him (her) a new creation, and water baptism is his public announcement of being “in Christ.”

- Water baptism is an Identification with the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:1-5; Eph. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:24) In Baptism, the Christian testifies to his faith in Christ and His work on the cross. He is publicly declaring his faith in the Gospel. He is basically ‘identifying’ and ‘joining’ with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is declaring that Jesus died for him, was buried for him and was raised for him and considers himself as having died, buried and risen with Jesus.
- It is a Clothing with the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27) In Baptism, the Christian is ‘clothing himself’ with Christ. Through this act, he is declaring that he belongs to Jesus and that henceforth it is no longer ‘*he that lives but Christ*’. Just as a uniform declares which school a person belongs to, baptism works in the same way to declare that the believer belongs to Jesus. It is a public testimony that the person being baptized is now a Christian.
- It is an Expression of the reception of Forgiveness of Sins (Acts 2:38) In Baptism, the Christian expresses outwardly the fact that he has received forgiveness of sins. This Scripture portion reads: Repent and be baptized ‘for’ the forgiveness of sins... This does not mean that we receive forgiveness of sins only if and when we are baptized. The word “for” in Greek is the preposition “*eis*” it means here: ‘*on account of*’, or ‘*because of*’. The verse thus reads: “Repent and be baptized on account of having received the forgiveness of sins”. Forgiveness can never come through Baptism. It comes only through Jesus (Lk. 24:47; Acts 5:31; Acts 10:43; Eph. 1:7) and His blood (Mt. 26:26; Heb. 9:22; 1 Jn. 1:7).

- It is the Testimony of a Good Conscience (1 Pet. 3:21) In Baptism, the Christian testifies that he has received a good conscience towards God. We were enemies with God due to our sins. But through our relationship with Jesus Christ, we have been reconciled and now have peace with God (Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:18-19). Our hearts have been sprinkled by the Blood of Jesus to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and we can therefore come boldly before the very presence of God (Heb. 10:19-22). Note: This Scripture portion describes Baptism as the answer, response, or pledge of a good conscience before God.

- It is an Entrance into a new Public Life as a Christ-follower (Acts 2:40-42; Rom.6:4) In Baptism, the Christian publicly proclaims an end to his old way of life-the old order. The old-world system is henceforth buried or submerged under water, and he comes out into God's government or system. He is henceforth joining and fellowshiping with the church, the people of God. In those days, baptism to a Jew in the name of Jesus Christ meant giving up Judaism and losing all fellowship of his nation with all his political rights and privileges.

The Bible commands those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:12, 37; 10:47-48; 16:33-34). Note: There is no baptism before personal conversion to be found in the New Testament.

This truth can easily be seen by the fact that People always took baptism after the experience of salvation, not before. (Acts 8:12; 9:17-18; 10:47-48). God always works on the 'inside' first and then on the 'outside'. He changes a man's actions by first changing his heart. E.g. Faith (Inside) and Works (Outside) We are told to believe in your heart (Inside) and confess with your mouth (Outside) (Rom. 10:10) Man looks at the appearance (Outside) but God looks at the heart (Inside) (1 Sam. 16:7) In the Bible, ritual always comes after inner spiritual reality. E.g. Abraham first believed. He was circumcised only after 25 years. (Heb. 11:8; Acts 7:2-4; Compare Gen. 12:1-3 with Gen. 17:9-19; Compare Rom. 4:1-4 & 10, 11)

- Why is it then that Infants are not eligible for Baptism? First, there is no Biblical evidence for such a practice. The whole significance of baptism proves that no infant can take part in it. Even the Didache did not allow for Infant Baptism. The Christian life is one where each individual is held accountable to God. There is no room for proxy. So an infant cannot take baptism with another person believing on its behalf. For example-Salvation: I cannot be saved for another; The Power of the Holy Spirit: I cannot receive the anointing of the Spirit for another; Holiness: I cannot be holy for another; Judgment: I cannot give an account for another. Jesus commanded that his disciples be baptized. A disciple is a follower, a learner who can be taught. A disciple has a Master. An infant can never be a disciple! Even when people came to John the Baptist, he commanded that each person should first repent. Only those who repented were given Baptism. (Mt.3:8, 11; Mk. 1:5; Lk.3:8-14; Acts 13:24).

Common questions raised to support Infant Baptism

"The Bible mentions "entire households" being baptized. Were there not infants in these homes?"

We must clearly understand that the issue is not whether infants were present in homes. Surely, they may have been. But a study of each household clearly reveals that whether or not infants were present, only those who believed were baptized. Cornelius: Acts 10:44, 47, 48; The Philippian Jailer: Acts 16:33-34; Crispus: Acts 18:8; Stephanas: 1 Cor. 1:16 and 16:15; Lydia: Acts 16:15 (In this case, it is not specifically mentioned that only believers were baptized. But this does not prove that infants were baptized because the Greek word for ‘household’ may mean Lydia’s servants or her workers, employed by her for the cloth trade- 16:14).

“Didn’t Jesus rebuke the disciples for preventing babies from being brought to Him? Did He not say that we should not hinder the little children from coming to Him as the Kingdom of God belonged to them? (Mt.19:13)”

Yes. But remember that these babies were brought to be ‘blessed’ by Him; not to be ‘baptized’ by Him. The two are radically different. To baptize is to help a person identify with the work of the Cross; to bless is to seek God’s benefits for that person.

“Has not Circumcision been replaced by Baptism in the New Covenant?”

No. Circumcision and Baptism serve entirely different purposes. Circumcision was only for Israel/Abraham’s descendants; it was a sign of one’s national relationship with the Lord. It was not for all believers.

This is why Naaman, and the repentant Assyrians were not asked to be circumcised. (See 2nd Kings 5) Baptism, on the other hand, is for every believer; it is a sign of one’s personal relationship with the Lord. Circumcision was only for males; baptism is for all, irrespective of sex. Circumcision was done on the eighth day; Baptism is done immediately after a person believes in the Lord. If Circumcision had indeed been replaced by Baptism, it makes no sense as to why the Jews in the early church demanded that the Gentile believers who were already baptized be circumcised as well (Acts 15:1-2). Surely, the Jewish Christians did not consider baptism as a replacement for Circumcision.

“Does not 1 Cor. 7:14 support Infant Baptism as it states that children of believing parents are already holy?”

The whole passage (vs 12-16) is a reply by Paul to the issue of ‘mixed marriages’, where only one partner was a believer. The situation was that some men and women, who were already married prior to hearing the Gospel, were confused as to whether their marriages were now still acceptable to God as one of their partners was an unbeliever. They wondered if they had to divorce their unbelieving partners. A related issue was “What must we do with regard to children?” Paul tells these people that a ‘mixed marriage’ is acceptable to God as the believing partner can exercise a holy or godly influence over the unbelieving spouse and so bring the partner to salvation. And naturally, if the parents are thus acceptable to God, it is also legitimate to have children. So, when Paul speaks of children being holy and unbelieving spouses being sanctified, what he means is that the presence of believers in a home, places that family in a holy atmosphere, which gives unbelievers the possibility or opportunity to experience salvation. He does not mean that they are already saved.

- What the Bible does say about Children

We do not have to fear whether infants or little children who die before hearing the Gospel will perish in hell. God is just, merciful and loves all children, whether they are born in Christian homes or not (Mt.18:2-3; 19:14). He does not hold them accountable until they are able to discern good from evil (Deut. 1:39; Is. 7:15-16). The duty of a parent is only to bring up children in the fear of the Lord (Eph. 6:4) and to train them in the right way (Prov.22:6).

- How Infant Baptism arose in the church:

This doctrine was first mentioned by Irenaeus (2nd Century A.D.), opposed by Tertullian and later became a practice in the 5th Century. Historically, infant baptism arose because of false teachings of sacramentalism in the Roman church. When the church fathers began to teach that baptism gives a person saving or mystical grace and teaching “Baptismal Regeneration” (water baptism washes away sins). Some political reasons were also there. The Roman Catholic Church wanted to secure everyone into her system. By making everyone from birth itself a “Christian”, the Church made sure that the people belonged to it and were under its control.

Time of Water Baptism

In the Bible, we find that those who heard and accepted the Gospel were baptized ‘immediately’. There was no delay (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 8:36-38; 16:31-34). The only exception was in the case of Paul who was baptized after 3 days, and that too, for no fault of his (Acts 9:18).

Some other Questions on Water Baptism

- The Link between Baptism and Salvation

Salvation is often thought of only in terms of being delivered from hell. Thus it causes a big problem when it is taught that baptism is an integral part of the salvation experience. But we must note that salvation takes place in three stages. And the whole process must be experienced in order for a person to be truly and fully saved! There is the salvation in the past- deliverance from the penalty of

sin, salvation in the present- deliverance from the power of sin, and salvation in the future- deliverance from the presence of sin. When a person repents and believes, he immediately becomes a believer. But the salvation experience is not yet over. The next step is to take water baptism. And even after this, he has to continue in the Christian faith. Only then will the salvation process continue to be worked out in his life. It is only at the return of Christ that we will be fully saved.

- Are we to be baptized using the Trinitarian Formula?

Which is right- being baptized in the name of Jesus, or in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Mt. 28:19, 20 says we are to be baptized ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’.

The reason the Trinitarian formula is not mentioned in the Book of Acts is because over there, the emphasis was on the difference between the baptism of John or the Jewish baptisms and the baptism which Jesus had introduced. However, whether we use either formula, we are witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and have no need to be legalistic about it.

- Why was Jesus baptized?

“To fulfil all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15). In other words, Jesus was baptized as an outward act of obedience to his Messianic calling. He wanted to do everything that was pleasing to God. In this manner, He is an example to us demonstrating how we too need to lead lives that are wholly pleasing to God.

- Should we be ‘baptized for the dead’?

(1 Cor.15:29) No. This was not an apostolic practice. Paul doesn’t say, “Why are WE baptized for the dead...” but “Why are THEY baptized for the dead...” This passage refers to the topic of Resurrection. Paul was trying to prove the truth of Resurrection to those Jews who disbelieved. To further establish his point that there is indeed a resurrection, he pointed to the practice of the Jews themselves. By taking baptism for the dead, they had shown that they really had a fear of resurrection even though they wouldn’t admit it. So, here, Paul was simply taking an example of the existing custom to his advantage; he was not writing it as a rule for Christians.

Water Baptism-Statement of Faith **Kingdom Ministries Fellowship**

Biblical Baptism

Water baptism of believers in the New Testament Church was used as a public testimony to a believer’s faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. New Testament baptism was BELIEVER’S BAPTISM. We see a good example of this in **Acts 16:30-33**; where Missionaries Paul and Silas, have openly preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the ancient town of Philippi. They were arrested for preaching, beaten severely by the Roman jailor, and thrown into the Roman prison. At midnight, these two battered and beaten men of God began to sing praises to God and God heard them and sent an earthquake to set them free. All the prison house was shaken, the jail doors sprung open, and the prisoners were free to flee the prison-but none did. They were so awe struck by this miracle they remained in the cells. When the frightened jailor looks into each cell, and sees the prisoners all there, he brings Paul and Silas out of their cell and says, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved.” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.”*

Paul then told the jailor and his family how to pray a prayer of faith and repentance and they received Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Now, verse 33 is very important- after this jailor and family all believed in Christ, immediately (in the middle of the night) they all were baptized. *“And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, (those of Paul and Silas) and immediately he was baptized, he and his household.”*

The jailor washing the very wounds he had inflicted, is visible evidence of his repentance. He and his family being baptized in water is a visible, public sign of their faith in a risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

Lessons we can learn from this conversion of the jailor in Philippi:

1. Baptism is for believers only
The jailor and family were saved by faith when they “*believed on the Lord Jesus.*” Baptism is not a saving sacrament. It is not a means to Grace. “*For by grace you are saved, through faith, it is the gift of God, not a result of works (water baptism) lest anyone should boast.*” **Ephesians 2:8, 9**
2. Baptism is “in water” not just “with water” meaning there is only one type of New Testament water baptism-total immersion. The original Greek word used in the New Testament means to “bury or immerse.” The idea of sprinkling or pouring water over the head was not a Biblical practice. It came about centuries later by the Roman Catholic Church. All water baptism experiences in the Book of Acts is by immersion. Paul’s imagery in **Romans 6: 4** is a picture of a death, burial, and raising from the grave, which immersion baptism symbolizes.
3. Water baptism is a visible drama illustrating two things:
 - 1) The Believer’s faith in the death and resurrection of Christ.
 - 2) The believer’s new birth from death unto life.
4. Water baptism is a public act of obedience to Christ. **Matthew 28:19** quotes Christ as saying, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the son, and the Holy Spirit.*” You cannot call yourself an obedient Christ-follower without being baptized. Water baptism is the new believer’s first public act of obedience as a witness to your new life in Christ.

Baptism a symbol

Because baptism is only a symbol of what has already happened to the Believer (his being born again) it is not essential to his salvation, but it is essential to his faithful obedience to Christ as Lord of his life.

Illustration #1

Water baptism is like a soccer player putting on his team’s uniform. The uniform tells all who see him “I am on this team, and not the other team.” The uniform identifies him with his team. Even so, water baptism says to all who witness it, this person is on Christ’s team, this baptized believer is a Christ-follower.

Note: The uniform does not make you a soccer player, it only tells others you are on this team. Even so baptism does not make you a Christian but is a way to tell others that you are professing to be a Christian.

Illustration #2

Another illustration of the symbolism of baptism is that of a wedding ceremony between a man and a woman. The ceremony is a public announcement of the love between two people and their

“Oneness.” The ceremony does not make them married, nor make them truly love each other, however, it is the public witness to the love they feel for each other, and their desire to declare it to all their friends and family.

What believer’s “say” at the time of baptism

We can profess our faith both verbally and in the symbolic act of baptism. The early church did both. In **Acts 8:37** the Ethiopian Enoch is eager to be immersed and asks Phillip what he must do to “merit” water baptism. Phillip answers, “*if you believe with all your heart, you may be baptized. And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”* Verse 38 says, “*And he ordered the Chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.*”

This helps us understand that only true believers are candidates for baptism. We encourage pastors and others who baptize others to ask them three questions as they are standing in the pool of water:

1. “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?”
If the candidate response is “yes” the 2nd question follows:
2. “Are you trusting Christ’s death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins?”
If the candidate answers “yes” this 3rd question follows:
3. “Do you promise to follow Jesus all the days of your life no matter what the cost?”
If “yes I promise” is the answer; then you baptize the person in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

Baptism Class

Before baptizing any candidate, there should be a baptism class meeting in which the pastor or a trained Elder teaches this lesson to those about to receive water baptism. Each person should be taught, then questioned about their personal salvation experience so that they clearly understand what they are doing. The three questions listed above are asked of each candidate, then repeated verbally at the time of immersion.

Hopefully this practical guide can assist pastors in both explaining baptism to their people and in the actual practice of baptizing them.

The Lord's Supper Theology- Holy Communion

Sacrament or Memorial?

1st Corinthians 11:16-34

Intro: the world of Paul's day was a communal society, where the "table meal" was the main social gathering. People gathering for food and fellowship. The early church became known for their "love feasts" a nickname given them by outsiders, who did not understand what the believers were doing when they gathered to remember Jesus' sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins on the cross.

1st Corinthians 11:16-19

The Corinthian Christians were abusing the Lord's Supper because of their party spirit and carnality. The common meal was like our "pot-luck" meals where each family brought some food to be shared by all. However, the "haves" were not sharing with the "have-nots." The poor (some slaves) were being left out, with no food.

In addition, the love feast was becoming abusive in drinking too much wine and not sharing the food.

Abuse of the Lord's Supper: v18-22

- 1) Divisions among them v18
- 2) Some "approved" to eat with, others not v19
- 3) The Lord's supper is not about eating and leaving others hungry v21
- 4) The Lord's supper is not a means of drunken partying v21
- 5) It is shameful behavior to abuse the Lord's table with such selfish behaviors v22

Proper use of the Lord's Supper: v23-34

Explain: Paul's explanation of how to observe the Lord's Supper came to him by oral tradition given him by those Apostles who were there the night of Christ's betrayal.

Note: this Corinthian letter was written before Mark's gospel and is the 1st recorded words of Jesus. Paul is quoting Christ's instructions given to the apostles. See Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20

The broken bread= Jesus was observing the Passover meal (Heb seder) Exodus 13:8 commands the Jews to remember this night and tell the story of God's deliverance to their children forever. Traditionally there are three matzas at the table. During the meal, a child will hide the middle matza as symbolic of Elijah Coming (Messiah) in the future to ultimately deliver Israel.

Apply; Jesus changed the Passover meal forever when he took the middle matza (in Heb. Afikomen) and instead of hiding it, he begins to break the afikomen saying to his men "this is my body which is broken for you." He is saying "Elijah has come & and you are looking at Him!"

This is my body v24= This cannot be literal because Christ was still in his physical body when he said this. Yet the church has debated over this continually:

- 1) RCC- says the bread literally becomes the body of Christ "eaten" by the believer at the communion table. This is called "transubstantiation" - means the bread become another substance, the body of Christ
- 2) Luther and other reformers, say no, not literally but Christ's body is present "with" the believer as he/she partakes of the bread. This is called "consubstantiation."
- 3) Evangelical tradition says we the church are Christ's body, and Jesus was speaking symbolically meaning His spirit is present with us as we remember His sacrifice on the cross.

This Cup is the new covenant in my blood' 11:25

Explain: Even as the blood of a lamb was smeared on the door posts on the Israelite houses in Egypt to identify God's people to the Angel of death, even so, Christ's blood is our "Passover." The Jews celebrate that Passover as reminder of God's Covenant with them as His people. Paul tells the Ephesians "*In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*" Eph. 1:7 Christ's death for us who believe is God's new Covenant promise to the Church.

Note: There is no magic in the cup. The wine does not actually become Christ's blood. We believers are not cannibals or vampires!! The cup(wine) symbolizes Christ's bloody death on the Cross. We drink the cup to remind us of what it cost the Father to forgive our sins and make us his covenant people.

SACRAMENT: The term "Sacrament" "when applied to observance of the Lord's Supper implies more than a sacred observance. It implies that the communion table has saving grace, even saving effects. If the bread and the wine really become Christ's body and blood, then to partake is to reenact the death of Christ each time the supper is observed. The RCC has used this Sacrament to punish those they excommunicate by refusing to allow them to the table (forgiveness of sins).

Apply; This is not biblical and is an incorrect understanding of Christ's meaning. The key to his meaning is in this injunction to "*do this in remembrance of Me.*" 11:24-25

HOLY COMMUNION: This term is used by most Protestant denominations. Implied in the title for the Lord's Supper is the mistaken idea that as the believer partakes of the bread and the wine, a mysterious miracle happens-Christ is "present" "with" the elements in a supernatural way. Thus, the believer is communing with Christ. So taught Luther & Calvin' and other liturgical churches.

Again, this is making more of the remembrance than Jesus intended or taught.

ORDINANCE: Evangelical believers prefer to name the observance as Paul did- the Lord's Supper. (1st Cor. 11:20. To evangelicals the biblical idea is that of an "ordinance." This word, from the Greek means a "tradition" a practice passed over from one generation to another. Jesus shared this meal with His disciples to tell them the old Passover is now fulfilled in the new passing over of sins done through his shed blood and death on the cross. He wants us to remember his sacrifice forever until He returns. His command to remember is the new Exodus 13:8 where Moses said to Israel, "*you shall tell your child on that day (Passover) 'it is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.'*"

Who is unworthy at the Lord's Table? V27-30

Explain: there are two ideas in Paul's mind about the Corinthian believer who brings shame to the Lord's Supper. He names some as "unworthy" of the Table Meal with Christ. Who are they?

- 1) The partaker who has no appreciation for the remembrance of the Cross when he/she observes the Lord's table.

The purpose of the observance is a “looking back” and gratefully remembering. Even as Israel through the ages has remembered how God delivered them from bondage in Egypt, even more so, we the new Israel should gratefully reflect on the death, burial and resurrection that delivered us.

2) The partaker who an unforgiving spirit towards others. In Corinth, the church was divided, prejudiced towards others, selfish and proud. There was a “Judas spirit” among them- they were “unworthy.

Apply: How seriously does God the Father take offense at this carnal abuse of the Lord’s Supper?

V 29-30 *“For he who eats and drinks, eats, and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason, many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep”*
God judges those who take lightly the sacrifice of His Son.

V29b- *“judge the body rightly”* is a reference to the Church body, the Church gathered to worship thru the tradition of the lord’s Supper.

Apply: This Judgment is not for destruction but for discipline v32 See also Heb. 12:7-10

Eucharist, Sacrament, Holy Communion, Lord’ Supper **A Historical look at Denominational Views**

Matthew 26:26,28

What is the meaning of Jesus words,” *Take, eat, this is my body”* and *“drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on the behalf of many for forgiveness of sins.”* How should we correctly interpret Christ’s challenge to “eat His flesh and to drink His blood?” (John 6:53.54) We shall list below the various understandings of these words and then offer our conclusion.

Christ’s Real Presence in the Bread & Wine

1. Transubstantiation-Roman Catholic Doctrine

St Augustine and the Eucharist

The doctrine of transubstantiation was taught by Augustine, Bishop of Hippo 354-430 AD

In his sermon to neophytes (young disciples) Augustine taught that what we receive in Communion is the same Body of Christ that hung on the Cross, from which we are fed. He says: “Recognize in the bread what hung on the cross, and in the cup, what flowed from his side.”

In a commentary on Psalm 33, he speaks of Christ holding His own Body in His hands at the Last Supper: “Christ was being carried in his own hands when he handed over his body, saying, ‘This is my body’; for he was holding that very body in his hands as he spoke.” In *De Trinitate*, he speaks similarly of the Mass as a sacrifice in which Christ is Priest and Victim: “And what could be so acceptably offered and received, as the flesh of our sacrifice, made the body of our priest?”

2. Definitive Change-Eastern Orthodox

Eastern Orthodox Christians use the term "change" from the Greek *μεταβολή*, to describe the change of the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Jesus. Their belief is similar to transubstantiation but prefers different language to avoid agreeing with Roman Catholics.

3. Consubstantiation-early view of Martin Luther & John Calvin. Some Anglicans today. Consubstantiation is the belief that "The bread retains its substance and ... Christ's glorified body comes down into the bread through the consecration and is found there together with the natural substance of the bread, without quantity but whole and complete in every part of the sacramental bread." The same beliefs as to the substance of the cup (wine).

4. Sacramental Union-Lutheran churches

the belief that consecrated bread is united with Christ's body and the consecrated wine with his blood for all communicants, whether believing or unbelieving, to eat and drink. This is the position of the Lutheran Church; it objects to philosophical terms like "consubstantiation" but remains silent on how the actual substances become the real body of Christ.

5. Objective reality with no explanation of technicalities- Anglo-Catholic & Methodist

The belief that in the sacrament the bread and the wine are really changed into the body and the blood of Jesus, but they resist the terminology of "substance" to explain what is changed, often avoiding this language, and the manner in which the transformation takes place.

Christ's Spiritual Presence- Reformed Anglicans & Presbyterians

Modern Reformed theology likes to speak of the "spiritual presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. They use terms like "pneumatic presence" denoting the Holy Spirit's presence with the believer as he/she partakes of the Lord's Supper. They affirm Christ's "mystical presence" without any idea of the substances of bread & wine being somehow morphed into the actual body & blood of Jesus.

In the **American Book of Common Prayer** (1928) we read, "And we most humbly beseech thee, O merciful Father, to hear us, and of thy almighty goodness, vouchsafe to bless and sanctify, with thy Word and Holy Spirit, these thy gifts and creatures of bread and wine; that we, receiving them according to thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood.

2. Memorialism- Baptists and non-denominationalist

The belief that the key to understanding the meaning of the Lord's Supper is in Christ's admonition to "*do this in remembrance of me.*" It is the belief that the bread and wine are symbolic of the body and blood of Jesus which was sacrificed on the cross for our sins; and in partaking of the elements the believer commemorates the sacrificial death of Jesus; Jesus is not present in the sacrament, except in the minds and hearts of the communicants. Indeed, the memorial meal is not a sacrament at all. The "sacred" act was done at Calvary and not at the Table. This view dates to the Protestant Reformation as taught by Ulrich Zwingli and is held by Baptists and many Evangelical groups.

The Seven-Fold Work of The Holy Spirit

There are in Scripture seven different descriptions of how the Holy Spirit works in the life of a born-again believer in Christ. These seven descriptions are not seven distinct different works of the Spirit. Some of them are but different ways of describing the same experience. The seven descriptions are:

The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit, John 14:17

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 4:4,5

The Sealing of the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 1:13

The Earnest of the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 1:14

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Romans 12: 6-13, 1st Cor. 14, Ephesians 4: 7-11

The Filling of the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 5: 18

The Anointing of the Holy Spirit, 1st John 2:27

Six came as Birthday Gifts

Although there is some discussion and difference of opinion on the matter; most Biblical scholarship will agree that all but one of these works of the Spirit took place at the moment one is saved. A person receives Christ as savior and is born “from above” of the Spirit; and is indwelt with the Spirit of Jesus, baptized into the body of Christ, given spiritual gifts, filled with His Spirit, and sealed forever, which is the earnest of our salvation. Wow! What a marvelous thing it is to become a child of God. It is a supernatural transaction and transformation!

We leak

So, every believer has been filled with the Spirit at least once. At the instant of the new birth, the new babe in Christ is full of Jesus. The problem is many times we “leak” like a rubber inner tube on an old tire. We don’t stay filled. Through disobedience we can quench the Spirit. Therefore, Paul urges the Ephesians to “*keep on being filled day by day,*” **Ephesians 5:18**. Note that we have emphasized the tense of the verb, which is continuous action. Living the Christ controlled life, or the Spirit filled life is the result of our yielding to Christ, moment-by-moment and day-by-day.

The Normal Christian Life

Being filled with the Spirit is not a second work of the Spirit, or even a “deeper” work of God in us. Being Spirit filled **is** the Christian life. Only Christ is “Christian” and only His life in us can live a life pleasing to God the Father. His filling us produces the fruit of the Spirit Paul wrote about in Galatians Five. The fruit of the Spirit is nothing less than the character of Jesus being lived out in our behavior. God wants every child of His to walk in the Spirit, filled with the life of His Son. The Spirit filled life is the normal Christian life. Anything less is subnormal!

The Anointing

This brings us to the seventh work of the Spirit in us. The first five are completed works of God in the believer. The sixth began at salvation and is to be God’s work in us every day, (the filling is a process based on our obedience and yielding to the Holy Spirit.) Now we come to the seventh Holy Spirit work, the anointing of the Spirit. John the Apostle says, “*the anointing*

which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things...” **1st John 2:27** The anointing seems to be a special, yes unusual, work of the Spirit which God bestows on a few chosen men and women.

The Anointing in Scripture.

Even as the filling is for holiness and Christ-like living, the anointing is for power in service to God. There can be no anointing without the filling. Being filled, and totally surrendered to God is the prerequisite for the anointing. One need only look at the Old Testament to see how God from time to time anointed those whom He sovereignly chose to anoint.

- He anointed certain kings, like Saul and David.
- He anointed the prophets, like Elijah and Elisha.
- He anointed Samson.

We read how the Spirit of Jehovah God from time to time, “came upon them.” Then for various reasons the Spirit would leave them. Usually, he left for two reasons: 1) the task He called them to was done, or 2) the anointed person committed some sin and the anointing was taken away.

In the New Testament, we read of Jesus, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...” (See **Luke 4:18,19**) as He quotes Isaiah 61. Even Paul knew when this anointing was upon him. He describes his preaching as “*with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.*” (**1st Cor. 2:4**)

Anointed Servants

As you read of great men of the church you will hear them allude to the need for the anointing. They struggle to minister in their own strength, then comes a barren time and they know they need the Holy Spirit’s power.

Dwight L. Moody the gifted American evangelist of over 100 years ago once wrote, “Right there on the streets of Chicago, the power of God seemed to come upon me so wonderfully I had to ask God to stay his hand...I was filled with a sense of God’s goodness, and I felt I could take the whole world to my heart. I took the old sermons I had preached before without any power, it was the same old truth, but there was new power. Many were impressed and converted. This happened years after I was converted myself.”

Charles G. Finney, of the early 19th Century had a similar experience with the Holy Spirit coming to anoint and empower him years after he had begun his ministry. He describes it this way; “as I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire, I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world. The Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me body and soul.” He says the results of this fresh anointing were seen the next day as every person to whom Finney spoke was deeply convicted or converted. In the evening of the next day, he had invited an atheist over for dinner and as Finney was blessing the food, the atheist was saved! This is the power of an anointing of the Spirit.

Billy Graham

How else do you explain the mighty ministry of Billy Graham? His message was simple and direct, but certainly not eloquent or impressive. The results are because of the anointing upon him. God has chosen him and empowered him to preach the simple gospel message.

Have you this Anointing?

So, can every believer have a special anointing for service in the Kingdom? Yes, we can. Because the Bible says we have this anointing (**1st John 2:27**), why don't we see more of it? In fact, a better question is, do you have this anointing upon you and your leadership? Is there a freshness to your testimony and your witness? Are people's lives being changed when they meet you?

This anointing for service is not a permanent thing. In Acts the Disciples were filled with the Spirit to preach at Pentecost (**Acts 2:4**); then we see them in Chapter four in the upper room again praying for more Spirit power and for boldness to overcome their enemies (**Acts 4:31**). Peter was present both times the Holy Spirit empowered them, and he was filled both times. This tells me that each task God calls us to, needs a fresh anointing to accomplish that task! The Disciple leader cannot live on yesterday's experience with God to do today's work for God. The question is, "have I this anointing upon me now?"

Wait, Tarry, Receive

In Luke **24: 49**, Jesus tells his followers to do three things after He leaves them to ascend into heaven. He tells them to:

1. Wait till they are empowered by the coming Holy Spirit.
2. Tarry in prayer as you wait. This was for cleansing, surrender and humility.
3. Receive the Holy Spirit and His seven-fold blessing. They obeyed, waiting, tarrying at prayer, and they received the mighty power of the Spirit.

How unlike leaders today! We may organize but we seldom agonize! We may plan and prepare but we know little of waiting and asking for the anointing. But then we don't often see the results these early followers saw!

What is the secret of the Spirit's Anointing?

Let's examine how we can have this anointing upon our ministry. The steps are not mystical or magical. Assuming you are a yielded, Spirit-Filled leader already, then the steps are direct and effective. God wants to anoint your gifts and your calling, more than you want it. That's part of the problem.

1. There must be an intense desire and thirst for the Spirit's power in your life.

Isaiah 44:3, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. For I will pour out my Spirit..."

Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Jeremiah 29:13, "ye shall seek me and find me when ye shall seek me with your whole heart, says the Lord." Remember when Jacob had an "all nighter" with the Angel of the Lord?

Jacob holds on, desperate for forgiveness and a blessing. He tells the Angel, “I will not let you go till you bless me.” Now what kind of a puny angel is this anyway? He is so weak he can’t get loose from Jacob. Something’s wrong with this picture! I have always felt this fight was fixed from the start! God wanted Jacob to struggle and desperately seek the blessing. God wanted him to have it more than Jacob did. For the average leader in Christian work the prevailing problem is self and self-sufficiency. Until we are humbled and desire what only God can give, we’ll never have the anointing.

2. There must be prevailing Prayer

If we want to be endowed with power, we must pray for it, just as those pre-Pentecost disciples did. Jesus said, “You have not because you ask not.” All the great saints of God have travailed and prevailed in prayer till the power came. In **Acts 4:31** we read, “and when they had prayed, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” Moody, Finney, and R. A. Torrey, all tell of long hours before the throne of grace seeking a fresh anointing for service.

Where the power comes from

Many years ago, when Billy Graham was a very young preacher beginning his citywide crusades, he came to preach a crusade in Fort Worth Texas. A young student evangelist at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary there in Fort Worth, came to Billy Graham’s hotel room during the days of the Crusade. He knocked on the door of Billy’s room and asked to see Billy Graham. Cliff Barrows who told me this story, told the student, “Billy is busy now and cannot be disturbed.” The student was insistent saying, “I’ve got to know the secret of Billy’s power. How is he so mightily used of God? Cliff took the student to the bedroom door, opened it silently, and showed the student evangelist the secret. There on the floor, stretched out in agonizing prayer was young Billy Graham. Cliff Barrows shut the door and said to the student, “there is his secret, he does that for hours at a time, every day.”

Not begging God Understand that when we have a deep hunger and thirst for the anointing the work in us is probably already done. We don’t have to plead with God to anoint us; He is ready when we are. However, much prevailing prayer is to prepare the soul to receive what God is ready to give. Only as we wait before Him in prayer can He talk to us, prepare our hearts and get us spiritually ready for His glorious power. After the filling comes the anointing!

3. There must be expectant Faith

After the waiting and praying, there must be faith that the anointing will follow. Here we distinguish between the normal Spirit filled life, based on surrender and faith, for which there is no waiting or tarrying long in prayer, except for heart preparation, and the repeated anointings of the Spirit which come only as we tarry in prayer. The key to these repeated anointings for each special task is the word “until.” Jesus, before He left this earth, told the disciples to tarry “until” the power came. They did, and it came! God must know that we believe Him and that He can trust us to give Him the Glory. When He sees that in us, the power will come. Are you willing to pay any price He may require of you to be used of Him? If so, then believe and pray till the anointing comes.

What are the evidences of the Anointing?

How can you know God has answered your prayer? The evidences are very clear.

- There will be victory over sin in your life.
- There will be the Fruit of the Spirit in your life.
- There will be a burden for lost souls.
- There will be power in your service to God.

Notes

What are Spiritual Gifts?

Introduction:

12:1 begins “concerning spiritual *gifts*...” Notice “*gifts*” is in italics in most translations. That is because the word “gifts” has been added. The Gr. Text is simply “spiritual matters.” Paul in these following chapters will cover several matters, but primarily Spiritual gifts. There are several key New Testament passages that describe what we call spiritual gifts. They are Ephesians 4:1-8; Romans 12:3-8; 1st Corinthians 12:1-11; and 1st Peter 4:10. Ephesians 4 tells us that the first thing Christ did when He ascended on high was to “gift” his body the church. This lesson is designed to understand what is the proper use of these gifts.

I. Spiritual Gifts are Supernatural Gifts 1st Cor. 12:1

Explanation: Your gift is a “grace” gift. It is what the Greek language calls a “*charismata*”—a thing of grace

This means a grace gift is not a natural talent or ability. Your gift is of God and independent of natural talent.

In fact, natural ability can be a hindrance in exercising your gift. Your gift may or may not be in an area of any natural talent you may possess. **See 1st Cor. 2:2, 12, 2nd Cor. 12:9**

II. Spiritual Spirit are Salvation Gifts 1st Peter 4:10; 1st Cor. 12:7

1. You have one or more gifts simply because you are a born-again person. At the moment you are born again the Holy Spirit came into your life. He came in on your spiritual birthday-bearing gifts to equip you for service. You received your gifts the day you were saved.

Every Christian has a gift “*each one is given a manifestation of the spirit-for the common good.*” **1st Cor. 12:7** Every Christian has a function in the body of Christ **1st Cor. 12:12 ff** The church is a body- the spiritual body of Christ, and even as a physical body has many parts and organs that function together, the church as Christ’s body has parts (gifts) that must function to be healthy and spiritually alive.

2. So, happy birthday! Have you opened your gift? Jesus came in to dwell in you and his hands were full, bearing gifts. Your gift is for you to serve him, the church, and the world.

Note: The difference between the Fruit of the Spirit and Gifts of the Spirit.

Fruit of the Spirit is about Christian character or Christlikeness.

Gifts of the Spirit has to do with ministry skills. They are a Christ ability within you to do work in the kingdom.

Note: Gifts are not evidences of spirituality. You have your gift-regardless of your spiritual walk.

Note: Satan can duplicate or imitate the gifts of the Spirit-but not the Fruit of the Spirit. For example, the gift of tongues can be of God, or it can be demonic. 99% of what passes as tongues today is either psychological, Satanic, or carnal. Only 1% is the NT expression of a gift. Look at the Corinthian Church, it was carnal, immature, and worldly yet it had charismatic Gifts.
Note: When anointed of the Spirit, the gifts have great power and spiritual effect.

3. Not everyone has the same gift or gifts. 1st Cor. 12: 4,8

Differing parts of the body have different functions. All are needed.

Note; there are no short cuts to spirituality- seeking Tongues or the “baptism of the Holy spirit” as a quick fix to spirituality is false.

III. Spiritual Gifts are Sovereignly Bestowed 1st Cor. 12:11

We are never told in scripture to seek a gift or pray to receive a gift. An exception is 14:13 which probably means “pray that there is an interpretation in the church gathered.

1st Cor 12:31= cultivate or earnestly desire the best gifts-not seek tongues!

Note: the gift he gave you at salvation has your Destiny imprint on it. It helps define who you were born again to be!

1. When God put his gift in you, no one needs tell you how to get it.

Example: Some churches put people in a “tongues” drill. “Open your mouth and start saying “la la la real fast” This is false teaching! You will not see a church helping people get the gift of giving, or the gift of service-so why the gift of tongues?

2. When your gift of God you’ll want to exercise the gift according to Scripture.

Example: 1st Cor. 14: 34, 35 forbids a woman to speak in tongues in church assembly. Therefore, any exercise of gifts should submit to apostolic teaching.

IV. Spiritual Gifts are Service Gifts 1st Cor. 12:7, 1st Peter 4:12

The Gifts are not given to us for our own personal satisfaction or benefit. They are bestowed on us to edify the body of Christ. See Ephesians 4:11-13 where the gifts are for the equipping of believers.

Note: My gift is for you and your gift is for me. Through the spirit-led use of our gifts we serve the Body of Christ.

V. Recognize and Strengthen your gifts.

1st Tim 4:14 “Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery,” Paul told Timothy to stir up the gift that is within him and not to neglect it. So, how does a believer “stir up his gift?”

1. You recognize your Gift by personal inclination.

Note: your gift is normally what a spirit-filled believer wants to do. Not always but usually. Your gift is the expression of your spiritual passion.

A Listing of Spiritual Gifts

Romans 12; 1Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4

Introduction: Spiritual gifts are defined as Holy Spirit enablement's for service in the Body of Christ. They are Christ endowed abilities to continue His work in the world.

Example: If a believer has the gift of teaching, that person has Holy Spirit knowledge, wisdom and discernment to interpret and explain the Word of God. Jesus, the teacher, resides in that person.

The Greek word often translated as a spiritual gifts in "charismata" which literally means "a grace matter, or a grace thing." It is a gift of God's grace to the believer.

THE GIFTS (CHARISMATA) IN SCRIPTURE

The Gifts in Romans 12

1. Prophecy- Romans 12:6, 1 Cor.12:10, 1 Cor. 14:42.
2. Teaching- Rom. 12:7 1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11
3. Exhortation (encouragement) Rom. 12:8, Acts 11:23, 13:15
4. Service Rom. 12:7 1 Cor.12:28
5. Giving - Rom. 12:8, 1Cor. 12:28
6. Leadership, Ruling, _ Rom. 12:8, 1 Cor 12:28
7. Faith- Rom 12: 8
8. Mercy Rom. 12:8

The Gifts in 1st Corinthians 12

9. Word of knowledge 1 Cor. 12:7
10. Gifts of healings 1 Cor. 12:9
11. Miracles 1Cor.12:10
12. Discernment of spirits 1Cor. 12:10
13. Tongues 1Cor12:10, 12:28, 14:5
14. Interp. of tongues 1Cor.12:10, 14:5

The Gifts in Ephesians 4

15. Evangelist Eph4;11, Act 21:8
16. Pastor/teacher Eph. 4:12
17. Apostle- Eph. 4:11

1st Peter 4:10-11

18. speaking- 1 Peter 4:11

*** Some add " Helps' as a separate gift (1 Cor. 12:28) making the # 19.**

New Testament Gifts

By Barry Wood

LOOKING AT GIFTS FROM DIFFERENT BIBLICAL AUTHORS:

Apostle Paul:

Romans 12:3-8

1 Cor. 12:7-18, 28

Ephesians 4:11-12

Apostle Peter:

1 Peter 4:10-11

Observations:

Romans 12= the emphasis is on the Gift itself

1 Cor. 12 = the emphasis is on the manifestation, or working out of the gift

Ephesians 4 = the Gifts are personified=the Prophet, the Apostle, the Evangelist, the Pastor/teacher

3 Greek words translated “gifts.” Three relate to Spiritual Gifts.

Doron = Idea of offering. The thing given.

Doria = A free gift. Always used of a spiritual or supernatural gift (Eph 4:7) (Acts 2:28)

Charisma = A gift of grace Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 1:7, 12: 4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 1Tim 4:14; 1st Pet 4:10

EVERY PRESENTATION OF GIFTS IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF A DEEPER TRUTH:

1.ROMANS 12:3-6 = Paul’s introduction to gifts.

4 words of advice in Romans 12:

1. Everybody has a gift - verse 6
2. The gifts differ
3. No boasting in the gift - verse 3
4. Stick to your gift = If prophecy, let him prophesy

***Your gift sets the boundary of your ministry!**

I. 1st CORINTHIANS 12 = GIFTS

1. Verse 8: WORD OF WISDOM = Practical Insight - Acts 15

An utterance, spoken; Gr.=sofios

Practical insight into the ways and will of God

Pastor James = Acts 15, spoke a word of wisdom at the church council in Jerusalem.

2. **Verse 8: WORD OF KNOWLEDGE = John 4= Jesus and woman at the well**

- not acquired by study
- an utterance of knowledge
- reveals facts, hitherto unknown
- Acts 5 - Peter, Ananias and Sapphira

3. **Verse 9: GIFT OF FAITH**

- Gr. Pistis**=-not saving faith that we all have as a fruit of the Spirit
- This is *wonder working* faith. A special endorsement from the Holy Spirit
- A God given ability to believe what others cannot believe

4. **Verse 9: GIFTS OF HEALINGS Gr. “Charismata iamaton”**

- Note:** this is a double plural = VARIOUS KINDS OF HEALINGS
- It doesn't always have to be with the laying on hands
- It doesn't always have to be with anointing of oil
- a. Should use doctors where possible.
- b. It is not God's will for everyone to be healed.
- Example:** 2nd Cor 12:7-9 = Paul's thorn in flesh; he prayed 3 times to be delivered. God does not heal every sickness no matter how much faith we have.
- *We haven't come into everything redemption bought for us.

5. **Verse 10: MIRACLES**

- (Gr= operations of powers)
- An ability to go beyond the natural, often seen in Apostolic miracles in ACTS.
- a. Jesus = raising the dead
- b. Acts 28:3, 4 = Paul bitten by serpent

6. **Verse 10: PROPHECY**

- (to speak forth)
- a. Foretelling = immediate insight, inspired speech a “Thus saith the Lord” (Old Testament prophets)
- b. Forth telling = Acts 11:27; Acts 21:10
- The New Testament = the major emphasis is forth telling, a message aimed at the heart
- An ability to speak for God - the whole council of God.
- 1 Cor. 14 = almost translated as the word "Preaching"

Note: The prophet is living so close to God he knows what God is thinking and can speak it in language people can understand. His mission is to get you to repent!

7. **Verse 10: DISCERNING OF SPIRITS= Gr= to judge through**

- Discerning = To divide, to pass judgment upon.
- Acts 19:13 - Satan can imitate the work of God
- Gift of discernment is the ability to tell whether it is God working, or Satan working..

8. GIFT OF TONGUES= Gr-‘kinds of tongues’

It is a known language in Acts 2

It is an Ecstatic Utterance in 1st Cor.14

Note: You cannot build a tongues theology on the book of Acts. It was a unique, one-time event

9. INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES 1st Cor.14:13

Ability to explain, translate tongues. **The Gr=hermeneutics**

Only gift God tells us to pray for.

Can mean one of two things:

a. Pray to receive the gift of interpretation

b. Pray that there would be an interpretation in the fellowship.

10. 12:28 = GIFT of HELPS =Gr-lay your hand to.

Ministry to come to aid of another; It is Practical service to others.

This gift is the most abundant of the gifts.

Some people when they help, they mess things up more!

Those who the have gift of helps:

a. Have a desire to help.

b. Have an ability to help.

11. GOVERNMENTS, ADMINISTRATIONS 14:28

"Steering" one who can steer a program. Could be the same gift as Leadership or Ruling

II. ROMANS 12:3-8 =NAMING OF GIFTS

Two sins against gifts:

Misuse

No Use

Those gifts listed in Romans 12 are less spectacular than those in 1 Cor. 12.

Seems that Romans 12 gifts are of a more practical nature and more widespread.

1. PROPHECY - Verse 6

a. Foretelling

b. Forth-telling - The primary emphasis of the New Testament

Prophet has a word from God and declares it.

Prophet doesn't explain it, just declares it.

1 Cor. 14 Prophecy benefits two kinds of people

a. Believers: 14:4

to build up

to encourage

to comfort

- b. Unbelievers: verse 24, 25
to convince them
to judge (convict) them
See **Revelation 19:10** "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"
Point: Prophecy declares the whole council of God =The Jesus event

2. MINISTRY - Verse 7

(could be helps in 1 Cor. 12:28)

Gr=diakonia="thru the dust" English word Deacon comes from this word.
waiting on tables, practical serve. Physical needs.

Acts 9:36 - Dorcas "woman of good works"

1 Peter 4:11 "as God gives him ability" "physical strength"

It is hard work. God will have to supply him physical strength.

Those who have the gift of helps=You have:

a. an ability to help

b.a desire to help

3. TEACHING - Verse 7

This is different from prophecy

Prophecy = aimed at THE WILL, the prophet wants you to repent or obey.

Teaching = aimed at THE UNDERSTANDING; The teacher wants you understand truth

*Not natural talent, but a Christ enablement to discern truth and teach it to others.

This person has a God-given ability to communicate divine truth!!

4. EXHORTATION - Verse 8

It Means = to come to one's side to help

*Acts 4:36 = Barnabas is called the Son of Comfort

Aimed at the heart!! The Will!

The Exhorter challenges you to take what you were taught and do something about it.

Exhortation is to get us to act upon the Word of God.

Bro. James = "Be doers of the word and not hearers only". An Exhorter!

*Teacher = unfolds the Word, with no challenge, he wants you to understand the Word.

Exhorter = challenges you to apply the Word. His motto is "You can do this!"

*Christian counselor: challenges person to put Word into practice

*Needed: charismatic counseling

5. GIVING - sharing with

*Acts 4:36, 37

This word means "to share one's own possessions"

The person has a supernatural ability to discern those who are really in need and those who are not!

12:8= Give with simplicity "liberality"
Gr=the root word is meta didous "without looking back" as in giving with no regrets.
"sharing with" can give without looking back!
**Person doesn't have to be wealthy to have this gift.

6. LEADERSHIP, "RULING"

Verse 8
Proistamenos (Gr.) = "He that is placed in front"
Same as "governments" in 1 Cor. 12:28
government = guiding, steering. Can be done behind scenes.
leadership is standing in front of, he publically takes lead.
*This gift is the take charge and see it gets done ability.

7. MERCY- Eleown (Gr) = pity

The mercy gift can visit the sick or grieving. It is the outward manifestation of pity. Mercy goes with cheerfulness. Mercy is not overwhelmed by sickness or despair.
This person has the resources to meet need of those who need mercy
Going to those who really need pity, kindness
Going to the handicapped, sick, poverty stricken.
Gift of sympathy -- doing something about it.

III. 1 Peter 4:10, 11 Gift of Speaking

Verse 11: gift of "speaking" -- preaching the Word of God
- may be the gift of prophecy or teaching.
-may be simply the ability to speak for God.

Notes

Spiritual Gifts and Their True Manifestation

<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Gift</u>	<u>True Gift</u>
Proclamation of divine revelation	Prophecy 1 Cor. 14:3 Rom.12:6	Preaching truth in the Spirit- Sunday sermon
Teaching Biblical truth	Teaching Rom. 12:7	Teaching the things of the Spirit with wisdom and light given by the Spirit, dependent on Him to give understanding to the hearer- Eph. 1:16-19.
Enabling	Faith- 1 Cor. 12:9	Holy Spirit given faith in what is in accordance with God's Word and will.
Revelation	Wisdom- 1 Cor. 12:8	Holy Spirit clarity in the stating of revealed truth-applying facts.
Understanding	Knowledge- 1 Cor. 12:8	Application of spiritual truth to practical experiences of life under inspiration of the Spirit.
Protection	Discerning spirits 1 Cor. 12:10	Spirit led ability to determine what is from Him and what's of demonic deception.
Manifest Love	Mercy- Rom. 12:8	Holy Spirit inspired acts of love revealing the love of Christ.
Manifest Love	Exhortation- Rom.12:8	Holy Spirit inspired counsel or consolation, revealing the wisdom and pure love of Christ.
Manifest Love	Giving- Rom. 12:8	Giving that is under the direction of the Holy Spirit
Maintain Order	Governance- 1 Cor. 12:28 Rule- Rom.12:8	Ruling under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and His wisdom
Service	Helps Ministry Rom.12:7, 1 Cor. 12:20	Material service rendered under the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit – Ex. 35:30-35

Spiritual Gifts and their Counterfeits

<u>Gift</u>	<u>Fleshly Manifestation</u>	<u>Satanic Manifestation</u>
Prophecy.	Preaching with enticing words in human Wisdom depending on the orator, emotional sensationalism or sentiment.	Preaching doctrines that are false and un- biblical under direction of evil spirits- 1 Tim. 4:1
Teaching.	Teaching with man’s wisdom and man’s ability to give understand- “what I think”-opinion	Teaching of false or unsound doctrine under the inspiration of evil spirits.
Faith.	An effort of belief that depends entirely on the persons will power and emotional attitudes.	Faith, inspired by evil spirits, occult power in any form, false doctrines, or satanically inspired politics
Wisdom.	Spiritual truth with reliance upon natural ability and to give the desired understanding.	Revelations supposedly from the spirit world, but received from demons.
Knowledge.	Human wisdom attempting to adjust spiritual truth to practical life. Acts 26:9, Rom. 10:2	Satanically inspired systems, based on satanic principles, for the betterment of man’s ideals and nations ambitions
Discerning Spirits	Using human wisdom to judge between what is from God and what is from satan.	Evil spirits immediately discern what is of Christ the impartation of that knowledge to someone under their control.
Mercy.	Acts of love inspired solely by human effort, and limited by human love.	Acts of interest in human welfare that are inspired by evil intent.
Exhortation.	Effort to help and counsel based on only human reason and wisdom	Counsel inspired by satan and based on his principles. Such as peter’s advice to Christ. “Get behind me!”
Giving.	Giving for merit and only as a duty or in response to emotional or sentimental appeals.	Giving inspired by evil spirits that supports or which carries out his purposes. False systems don’t lack \$\$
Governance.	Allowing human ability and psychology to be the source of leadership and rule.	The Antichrist spirit- wisdom from evil sources, led by personality.
Service.	Service to gain merit with God! Human work for human gain	Cunning given by satan to enable others to do his work under the guise of good.

<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Gift</u>	<u>True Gift</u>	Continued
Special signs	Miracles 1 Cor. 12: 10, 28	Direct intervention of divine power in responses to faith given by Holy Spirit	
Special signs	Healing- 1 Cor. 12:9	Healing by God's power in response to Faith given by Holy Spirit	
Special signs	Tongues 1 Cor. 12: 10, 28	Utterances produced on certain occasions by the presence of the Holy Spirit to communicate to the body of Christ.	
Special signs	Interpretation of Tongues-1 Cor. 12: 10, 28	The Holy Spirit's revelation to someone to understand the scriptural meaning of an utterance given in tongues given to the body of Christ.	

Gift

Fleshly Manifestation

Satanic Manifestation

Miracles. Natural phenomena or coincidences attributed to God's work by emotional religious enthusiasm.

Miracles bought through satanic power- such as pharaoh's priests and magicians.

Healing. Assumed divine intervention but really a manipulation of psychic means, power of suggestion, whether real or imagined.

Healing wrought by satanic power as seen in certain cults.

Tongues. Ecstatic utterances manufactured or feigned in order to appear as genuine. Confusion and discord accompany it.

Utterances of an evil spirit who controls a person. May appear pious, but often are vile and demonic. Confusion and false teaching ensue.

Interpretation.

of Tongues A false interpretation, faked, in order to be seen, accompanied by excitement and often can manipulate the weak.

Suggested to the mind by evil spirits. Unsound and unholy in its application.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE, EXERCISE, AND DEVELOP YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT

Review:

1. Every born-again believer has one or more Spiritual gifts.
2. A Spiritual gift is a supernatural Christ-ability received at the time of spiritual birth to do spiritual work in the life of the church and the world.
3. Spiritual gifts are not "merit badges" or proofs of spirituality; they can be used wrongly, in the flesh or satanically counterfeited.
4. Thus, it is very essential that we be Christ-filled believers so He can guide and empower our ministry.
5. YOUR GIFTS ARE YOUR MINISTRY. You are to be a good steward of your gift. (1st Peter 4:10)

A. A steward is one who received from his master the care of an estate while his master is away. He then is to give an accounting upon his return.

B. See 1st Peter 4:10, it tells us that God has placed His "*manifold grace*" in our hands; you and I are administrators of God's grace! What a staggering truth! Your gifts are in reality God's supernatural grace committed to your care and your stewardship! The point is that one day every Christian will give an accounting of the use of his or her gifts at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

I. HOW CAN I RECOGNIZE MY GIFTS?

Explanation: You are your gift. Your "new self" in Christ is characterized by your gifts. Your gifts motivate and dominate your personality. If you have been obedient to Jesus in your daily walk, you have been exercising your gift whether you know what your gift is or not! You are your gift! Your gift is what you, as a Spirit-filled Christian, enjoy doing in kingdom service. You do not have to know what your gifts are to exercise them. Many Christians have faithfully served the Lord for years without knowing that they had a supernatural ability! The following suggestions are practical ways for the believer to recognize his or her gifts:

1. Through Personal Inclination - It seems that when God "gifts" His children that He gives one motivating gift. This gift seems to be the most influential and colors the use of any others that the believer might have. Paul gives us a good example of this. Paul was motivated as an "apostle to the Gentiles." This was his main ministry - that of apostleship. The word apostle means "one sent forth with a message". We call this gift today a missionary; one who goes to a new area and starts a work for God. The gift of apostleship (missionary) should be distinguished from the office of the Apostle which was unique (twelve men) selected personally by Christ. Paul had other gifts; prophecy, teaching, or even miracles; but these gifts served his apostleship to the Gentiles.

Questions to ask yourself:

- 1) What turns you on as a Christian? As a yielded, available child of God, what do you personally feel inclined to do? Your gift is evidenced by your spiritual passion.

It is the “fire in your belly.” What do you really enjoy doing in kingdom service?

2) I suggest that you study the various gifts of the Spirit. Set aside a time for prayer and fasting. Seek God's leadership to reveal your ministry to you.

3) As you do this, you will feel inclined toward one motivating gift. This is your answer! Let's suppose that after a period of study, prayer and fasting you feel that teaching is your motivating gift. How can you test your inclination?

2. Public Recognition - If your personal inclination is led of God, your supposed gift will be affirmed by the public recognition of the church. That is, others will see your gift and desire to use it. This public recognition comes two ways:

1) The church will use it. Suppose you request a teaching position such as a bible study class, a Bible study group, etc. then you study and prepare to teach. If you get discouragement or no response from those whom you teach, then that is a pretty good evidence that you have not been given a teaching gift. If you are gifted to teach, the church will run to your gift. People will seek and use it.

Note this: Some teaching gifts are not “speaking/teaching. The gift may be in a strong desire to study God's word, to do research, even writing theology books. Some teachers do not speak well, but they teach well.

2) God will bless it. When you find your gift and begin to exercise it, there will be an anointing and blessing of God upon it; especially if you are a yielded, Spirit-filled Christian. God's Spirit will reaffirm your ministry. The church will seek your gift and God will bless and enlarge your effectiveness in using your gift.

3. Personal Exaltation: Another way of affirming your gifts is that there will be great joy in the exercise of your gift. If teaching is your gift, you will enjoy studying the Bible. Preparation for the lesson will be a joy and not a drag. You will get a personal satisfaction in a job well done and you will take heart that you have been used to communicate divine truth.

4. Proper Confession - Also, if your gift is of God there will be a proper confession as to the Lordship of Christ. Your ministry will bring glory to God and not the flesh. **Matthew 7:22, 23** says, *"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness'".*

1) Here, Jesus declares that not all supernatural gifts are from God! These people could exercise gifts of prophecy, demon deliverance, and miracles; but Jesus never knew them. They were lost people; their gifts were satanic.

2) If your gift is of God, it will be used for His glory. **In I Cor. 12:3**, it says that no man can call Jesus Lord unless the Holy Spirit leads him. If a man's ministry is of the Holy Spirit, he will always allow Jesus His proper pre-eminence. His gifting, when properly exercised, will Glorify Christ, not self.

5. By Prophetic Declaration - In **1st Timothy 1:18** and **4:14** there are interesting statements. It seems that Paul, or someone else in authority, spoke a word of prophecy about Timothy. Later, the elders laid hands on Timothy to set him aside for ministry. Sometimes a person may come to recognize his gift through a prophetic utterance. That is, someone tells you what your ministry will be.

1) When Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a small boy, about age twelve, a preacher visiting in his home told young Charles that he would be a great preacher someday. Spurgeon never forgot it, and of course the statement came true.

2) George W. Truett, the famous Baptist pastor of Dallas, Texas was studying law when a pulpit committee from his home church told George that God had selected him to be their pastor, even though George Truett had no desire to be a preacher. He obeyed the call and became one of God's great champions.

3) This kind of affirmation is very rare and must be carefully discerned. There is always some crazy person running around laying hands on people and telling them to get a gift! Watch out! Be careful about letting anyone lay hands on you unless you know and respect their spiritual life and authority.

4) Laying of Hands: This early church practice was symbolic of the following:

1. Act of Consecration = set aside for blessing or dedication
2. Act of Commendation = approval - we do this with young ministers, deacons
3. Act of Commission = set aside for a task, ministry or mission **Acts 13:2, 3**
4. Act of Communication = passing down apostolic power, communicating the Holy Spirit

II. HOW AM I TO EXERCISE MY GIFT?

Explanation: All the gifts are subject to misuse. This is evidenced by the Corinthian church mess in the first century! It is not enough to know what your gifts are. There must be a proper way to exercise your gifts.

A. *There must be a proper acceptance of your gift.* - Paul teaches us four things in **Romans 12:3-6** about accepting your gift.

1. There should be no boasting in your gift. - Verse 3
2. There should be no dissatisfaction in your gift. - Verses 4-6
3. God has measured out enough faith for you to exercise your gift. - Verse 3
4. God has given you enough grace for your ministry. - Verse 6

B. *There must be a proper assessment of your gift.* - **Romans 12:3**

1. There should be no superior attitude.
2. There should be no inferior attitude.

All gifts are equal in the sight of God. We each have job to do, a ministry to perform.

C. *There must be a proper application of your gift.*

1. We are told in scripture to not neglect our gift. **1st Timothy 4:14**
2. We are told to stir up our gifts, to rekindle the fire!! **II Timothy 1:6**
3. We are told to minister to others through our gift. **1st Peter 4:10**

- a. It is poor stewardship not to apply our gift.
- b. It is a sin not to be a good steward!
- c. It is to be done all the time! (The verb "minister" in the Greek is present tense= continuous action)

D. *There must be a proper adjustment of the gift.* - **Ephesians 4:16** says that every member should be properly adjusted to the Head. So, every time you exercise your gift outside the Lordship of Jesus Christ, God will reject it for reward because it will then be a work of the flesh.

III. HOW CAN I DEVELOP MY GIFTS?

Explanation: Use them under the Spirit's control! There are two reasons why Christians do not develop their gifts:

- 1. No use
Some Christians never develop their gifts because they are not willing to serve the Lord in ministry to others. Neglected gifts wither like an unused limb of the body.
- 2. Or misuse.
Some Christians fail to develop their gifts through misuse. If we fail to let the Holy Spirit guide our ministries, then they become abused through misuse, fleshly or selfish motivations.

CONCLUSION:

Seek the Lord, offer yourself to Him for service, ask Him to reveal your ministry to you. Follow your personal inclination, backed up by public recognition and personal exaltation.

Elder-led CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Introduction

Without doubt, one of the most controversial and, tragically, one of the most divisive areas in the Christian church is the subject of church government. All recognize that there should be some kind of government, but what form it should take is point of much contention and divergence.

Jesus said that every city, house or kingdom divided against itself will surely fall (**Matthew 12:25, 26**). The church is likened to God's House, God's City and God's Kingdom. But it has certainly been divided as to its government. This is one of the reasons why the Church has not been able to stand against the Kingdom of Satan. Satan attacks all forms of government as ordained of God, because he is the lawless one, and wants to bring about a lawless society. Rejecting the government and the authority of God he sets himself up as government and authority. He who does not submit to authority sets himself up as authority. He who rejects God's government sets himself up as self-governing.

Satan led an angelic revolt against God's government in the eternities past (**Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:1-19; John 8:44; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6**).

He also brought the revolt of man against God's government in Eden (**Genesis 3:1-6**). There are several vital things relative to the subject of government which need to be considered before dealing more particularly with Church government.

Definition of Government

The word "government" has been defined as:-

- The exercise of authority over an organization, institution, state, district, etc., to provide direction, control, rule, management.
- A system of ruling, controlling, etc., an established system of political administration by which a state, a district, etc., is governed.
- Government involves (a) Territory, (b) People and (c) Leadership.

Thus, we recognize that the Church as God's House, City and Kingdom needs government (**Psalms 127:1; Isaiah 2:1-4; Joel 2:25-28; Acts 2:17**).

Having defined the word we note that:-

Government is God-Ordained

The powers that be are ordained of God. God has ordained that law and order be exercised and preserved in human society through appointed authorities (**Romans 13: 1-8**). The powers that be are ordained of God.

1 Corinthians 12:28. God has set in the Church governments (plural). I.e., steering, piloting, directing.

Isaiah 9:6-9. The government shall be upon His shoulder: No end to it, thus government means "rule, leadership, oversight, to go before, to guide, to captain, a governor."

Isaiah 22:22. The government shall be placed in the hand of Eliakim, which means "Resurrection of God".

2 Peter 1:10 There are those who are presumptuous, self-willed, and not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries. They despise government.

Government in the universe is ordained by God.

The Need of Government

Without government lawlessness and anarchy prevails. There would be rebellion and chaos in the universe without Divine authority. Israel's history records that "there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes" (**Judges 18:1; 17:6; 21:25 19:1**).

Without some form of government, the spirit of lawlessness reigns with its resultant confusion. The mystery is that iniquity is at work today to overthrow governments. The World is in confusion without law and order in the universe. People are created to be governed.

The Government of the church

We come now to a consideration of the government of the New Testament Church, both universally and locally.

The Government of the Church Universal

Government of the church can only be under the Head and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The endeavors of men, of denominations and organizations, to set up a "World church" with a "Central World Headquarters" is contrary to Scripture. It usurps the Headship of Christ. The Pope cannot be "Universal Head of the Church". How can any man or group of men effectively know the mind of Christ for the Church around the world? Countries and cultures may vary, needs of Churches in different localities around the world vary. There is great need for the "many-sided wisdom" of God in Christ. Only Christ, the infallible and Divine Head, whom God has given to the Body, can effectively govern and direct the Church universal.

There were no "Central Headquarters" for the Church in the Book of Acts. Jerusalem as the "Mother Church" did not try to control or govern every local church establishment in the cities of the nations. Jerusalem was not "headquarters" or the governing body over Antioch or Corinth or any other church in the cities. Neither did Rome control Corinth, nor did Ephesus control the Churches in Asia.

It is human nature that desires to set up some "Jerusalem" to the governing head of churches established around the world. This is not to be found in the Scripture. The only "Jerusalem" believers look to be "the heavenly Jerusalem" (**Hebrews 12:22-24**). The "Universal Headquarters" is also in heaven, which is Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church (**Matthew 16:16-19; Ephesians 1:18-22**). Christ alone is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient and is thus qualified to be the Head of the church. He alone can meet the needs of His people, everywhere, at all times (**Matthew 18:15-20; 28:18-20**).

Government of the Church Local

Government of the Church local is also by Christ Jesus. But He Himself governs the Churches in various localities through local ministries.

One of the clearest revelations of Christ amid His Church is the vision to John on the isle of Patmos. Christ had already promised, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I AM in the midst of them". (**Matthew 18:20**).

Now in Revelation 1:10-20 John sees the risen Christ “in the midst of the seven golden lamp stands which represented the seven Churches in Asia. Each of these were local Churches; Churches in cities as His light-bearers.

Christ addressed Himself to each of the “angel-stars”, the messenger of each local Church. Each local church received a distinct and separate letter. No letter was sent to “headquarters” or “Mother church” to send out to the other churches. Christ Himself spoke a word and ministered to each local Church in their respective city. Those things were testified in the local churches (**Revelation 22:19**).

No one church had control over another church. There was fellowship but no denomination formed out of these Churches. Each was under sovereignty of Christ’s Headship. Each was accountable to Him (**Revelation 1-2-3**). The same is true of every local Church in each city in the New Testament.

Each was locally governed. There was no central government. There was no central control. There was no earthly headquarters. Christ was THE HEAD of the church, both universally and locally. He alone qualifies as the builder of His own church. He alone is infallible and knows the need of each local Church, as well as the Church universally. How can any fallible man know such or be “head of the Church”.

The tragedy of Church History reveals how corruption set in and men as Bishops arose and took the place of Christ, usurping His authority and the sovereignty under Christ of the local churches.

It would be profitable at this point to go at the back of this document and read briefly into church History and see how this corruption developed, both Biblically and Historically.

Government of the New Testament Church by Eldership.

In the history of Church government at the back of this document, concerning the Forms of Church Government, it seems that the Divine intention is to have the “three-fold cord” of church government (**Ecclesiastes 4:12**). It is this, which combines three Biblical points and provides for checks and balances in the government of any New Testament local Church. For the sake of orderly thought, we will consider (1) The Chief Elder, (2) The Multiple Eldership, and) 3) Congregational relationships with the Eldership.

1) The Chief Elder – First Among Equals

God’s form of government is *theocratic in character*. That is to say, God *chooses*, calls and *equips* certain persons to be leaders and rulers over His people, investing and delegating them with degrees of authority according to His will. These persons are most commonly called “Elders”, and in any given group of Elders, God generally places *the mantle of leadership upon one specific elder*. This does not exalt this Elder above the other Elders but sets him in responsibility as “*First among equals*”.

a. First the Natural

Nature itself, as also mankind, teaches the principle that someone must take the leadership. The setting up of government is seen even in the animal kingdom.

- In the chicken yard, roosters establish leadership by subduing their opponents. It is called “the pecking order.” The rooster who can out peck all others is the undisputed head of the coop—that is until another arises who out can peck him.
- Animals with antlers, such as deer and moose, establish a horning order.
- Sheep and goats have a “butting order” until leadership is established.
- A flock of geese in flight always have a lead bird, the others following in formation accordingly. The lead bird takes the direction for the flock.
- Sports and games which mankind plays always need leadership. Basketball, Football, etc. have organization, rules to govern, and leadership. Otherwise, there is chaos and confusion, not sportsmanship.

Leadership is established in the animal kingdom in a beastly manner. Leadership is established among men in sports according to their ability to lead. People seek leadership People select their own leaders. It is instinct to follow a leader. It reveals the need to be governed. If this need is not met, then there is confusion and frustration. If men do not have leadership, they will create it. Someone must lead. Isaiah’s times revealed this. When the mighty men had failed, they wanted to take someone to lead and be their ruler. The end result was that “children and women ruled over them”. That is, immature and weak leadership took the lead (**Isaiah 3**). People fear being left without direction (**Ezekiel 13:7**). Bad government is sometimes preferable to no government. Poor leadership is better than anarchy.

People will make their own leadership to be led. It is human nature to want government so much that they will create their own. Human nature demands leadership of some sort. The process of human government.

If there is no leadership, people select someone and nurse him to greatness. During this time, they call him their benefactor, when he changes from such he becomes a dictator because of the defection by the people. Dictatorship or tyranny produces revolution. People then pull him down from the pinnacle of power. The same society who nursed this leader to greatness will also pull him down.

This is what Jesus spoke about when He said the Gentiles have their “benefactors” who exercise authority upon them and lordship over them. But He said this was not the way it would be in the kingdom of God, among His leadership (**Luke 22:24-27**).

Then the Spiritual

Leadership in the Church is not arrived at by “the law of the jungle”, i.e., “the survival of the fittest”. This is not the way it is in the kingdom of God. Jesus reproved the disciples for the wrong motive and desire to exercise lordship and authority over the people as did the Gentiles (**Luke 22:24-27; I Peter 5:3**). It is because Christ Himself, as the risen head of the Church, calls, equips and places His mantle of leadership on that person to lead the flock of God.

We note this in the following:

Christ the Chief Elder

It is recognized that the Lord Jesus Christ is THE CHIEF ELDER above and among all other elders (**I Peter 2:25; 5:4**). He is THE Chief Shepherd, and THE Bishop of our souls. He is THE sacrificial Lamb amid the 24 Elders (**Revelation 4-5**). He is THE Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher. He is the fullness of the Godhead bodily. All the Divine nature, character,

glory, attributes, grace and gifts are in Him in perfection (**Colossians 1:19; 2:9; John 3:33-34**). He is the Head of the church, which is His Body.

The chief elder in the Local Church

While recognizing that Christ is the chief shepherd and Bishop, it is also evident from Scripture that, within a local Church, having plurality of Eldership, Christ will place a mantle of leadership upon a specific one elder to direct the people of God. This is done in conjunction with the multiple, as the proposition presented at the beginning of this chapter shows.

- Paul and Barnabas were spoken as “*chief men among the brethren*” (**Acts 15:22; 14:12**). That is, they were both leading men, men of command *with official authority*.
- There were “*Chief priests*” among the priesthood (**Luke 9:22; 20:1**).
- They were “*Chief Pharisees*” also (**Luke 14:1**).
- They were *Chief rulers of the Synagogue*” (**Acts 18:8, 17**).
- They were *Chief apostles*” also (**II Corinthians 11:5; 12:11**)

So, there should not be any problem in speaking of some specific elder, upon whom God has placed the mantle of leadership, as “the chief elder”. Or “senior elder”, etc. As long as this is not a “pride trip” in the person there should not be any problem, and as long as it is not a matter of giving a person “flattering titles” (**Matthew 23:12; Job 32:21-22**)

The thing that” the chief elder” has to beware of is that Diotrephes spirit and attitude, the desire to have the pre-eminence. He has to truly recognize that he himself is an Elder among other elders, and not an Elder above other Elders!

The thought of “first among equals” is illustrated in the very persons in the Godhead. The Father is the FIRST PERSON, the son is the SECOND, and the Holy Spirit is THIRD. However, Father, son and Holy Spirit are persons. For the purposes of creation and redemption, however, there is this order in the Godhead. The Father is indeed “first among equals”. There is no competition, but recognition. Each person has distinctive function and ministry, yet are one in mind, will and Judgment.

God has thus demonstrated in His own being the truth for man to follow. So, it is with Christ. Christ’s is “the firstborn”, “the first begotten”, and in relation to His humanity – not his Divinity. But he is the “firstborn among brethren” (**Romans 8:25-28**).

Old Testament Examples

We note some examples from Old and New Testament as to “the chief elder” or the “first among equals”, raised up and anointed by God to lead the people of God. These men may be used as types of Christ but even then we have THE LORD God, then, “the set man” under Him, and the same continues in the New Testament, where we have THE LORD JESUS and “the set man” under Him.

- **Numbers 27:15-23**. Moses, the leader of Israel, asks that God would “set a man” over the congregation of Israel so that they be not as sheep without a shepherd. There must be that” set man” appointed by God, that man with the mantle of leadership and direction upon him.
- Moses and the Elders with him (**Exodus 18:17-26; Deuteronomy 1:14 – 17**).

- Joshua and the Elders with him (**Joshua 7:6; 8:10.33; 20:4; 24:1, 31; Judges 2:7-13**) Joshua was “the set man” as Captain over the hosts of Israel. He was to bring them out and bring them in.
 - Samuel and the Elders (**1 Samuel 15:30**). (Note – Not much record of Saul. He was to bring under his reign!) (**Samuel 18:4**). Samuel the Prophet and Eldership).
 - Saul and the Elders (What a failure in leadership!) **1 Samuel 15:30**.
 - David and the Elders (**11 Samuel 15:3; 1 Chronicles 11:3; 15:25; 21:16**). David was a King, Prophet-priest, yet worked with the elders as the lord’s anointed (**Isaiah 55:1-3**).
 - Solomon and the Elders (**1 Kings 8:1, 3; 11 Chronicles 5:2, 4**).
- ❖ **Josiah** and Elders (**II Chronicles 34:29**).
 - ❖ **Ezra** and the Elders (**Ezra 10:1, 8, 14**). Ezra, the Scribe and Teacher Ministry.
 - ❖ **Ezekiel** the prophet and the Elders of Judah (**Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 20:1-3**).
 - ❖ **The Chief or High Priest** and the Elders (**Acts 24:1**). The Jewish Sanhedrin consisted of 24 Priests, 24 Scribes, then 22 Elders, and then the one High Priest, making the Council of the Eldership. Thus Aaron, the High Priest, then the house of Aaron, and then the Leviticus priestly tribe.

Thus, in each case, we have various ministries of Prophet, Priest or King or Judge, and these men were “set men”, raised up and anointed of God. Others recognized this mantle of leadership upon them. The safeguard was illustrating the principle of “first among equals”.

New Testament Examples

The New Testament follows the same principle as set forth in the Old Testament relative to the “set man” and the plurality of the Eldership in the local churches, even as exemplified in the local city Synagogues,

These men are “chief men” and recognized as leaders that had been “set in the body” as senior ministers.

- ❖ **Peter** and the Elders (cf. **Act 1:5; 2:14, 38; 3:4-25; 4:8-12; 5:1-11**).

Peter was an apostle, but accepted as “first among equals”. The keys of the kingdom were specifically given to him (**Matthew 16:18, 19**). In the Acts he is the one the Lord first used under the outpourings of the Spirit relative to both Jew and Gentile. Other apostles accepted it. There was no strife or lordship position or religious politics. Peter, as an Elder exhorts the other elders in his Epistle also (**1 Peter 5:1-4**).

- ❖ **James** and the Elders (**Acts 12:17; 15:1, 2, 6, 13-22; 21:18**) especially with **Galatians 2:20**. After Peter leaves, James becomes the senior shepherd at Jerusalem. James closes the council at Jerusalem over the Gentile problem.
- ❖ **Paul** and the Elders of Ephesus (**Acts 19:10-11; 18:11; 20:17-35**). After being in Corinth for 18 months and Ephesus for 2 years, Paul calls for the Elders of the Church. They recognized the mantle of Paul’s apostolic leadership.
- ❖ **Timothy** and the Elders (1 Timothy 3; Pastoral Epistles – Postscript). Timothy is spoken of as the first Bishop of the church of Ephesus. There were Elders already at Ephesus. Timothy is left by Paul as “first among equals”. He is not a novice, but a young man of about 40 years of age in this work.
- ❖ **Titus** and the Elders (**Titus 1:5**; postscript of Epistle). Titus ordained the first Bishop of Crete, yet Paul told him to ordain Elders in every city and do the things he had left undone. The same is true to True as for Timothy.

- ❖ **Epaphroditus** with the Bishops and Deacons (**Philippians 1:1; 2:25' 4"18**). Epaphroditus was their “messenger” (apostle), and yet the Bishops and the Deacons were with him and addressed along with the saints at Philippi...
- ❖ **Nympha** and the church in his house (**Colossians 4:15**). He was recognized as the leader and host with the House-Church.
- ❖ **Aquila and Priscilla** also had a House-church (**Romans 16:3, 4**). These were recognized as teachers in the Body also.
- ❖ **The Angel-Stars** of the 7 Churches in Asia (**Revelation 1:11-20**; with **Acts 20:17**). Revelation does not contradict Acts. There were Elders in the Church at Ephesus, yet the letter of John was addressed to “the angel-star” of the local Church.
- ❖ **Christ**, the Chief Elder/Lamb amid 24 Elders around the throne, as “first among equals”, ONLY as to the OFFICE of Eldership (**Revelation 4-5**).
(**Note** – Christ in His Son ship and Deity is above all and is the pre-eminent One, so we only speak of Him as “FIRST among equals” as to the office of a Bishop in His humanity).

Though no one man is especially designated “pastor” in Acts or the Epistles, yet some one person had the mantle of leadership and direction on them and worked closely with other Elders who provided checks and balances for him.

These were “chief men” (**Acts 15:22**). They were those who lead, who commanded, with official authority. They were chief men among the brethren. They were set men among the eldership and recognized as such.

Plurality and Co-equality of Eldership

Having seen that God does raise up leaders of His people in “the set man”, what then is the safeguard this man becoming a dictator or autocrat? What “checks and balances” does the Lord provide to prevent a monarchical Bishop from taking the pre-eminence as did Diotrephes (III John 9, 10)?

The answer is seen in the plurality or multiple elderships and the co-equality of such persons. These provide checks and balances for the “chief elder” who is “first among equals”. He is first in leadership but certainly not exalted above the other elders.

The number of Elders in any local Church will depend on the enlargement of the flock of God. Smaller Churches may be governed by one Elder until the flock comes to increase. The number of Elders is basically determined by the need and by those who are qualified scriptural to fulfil that office.

We consider both Old and New Testaments as to the plurality and co-equality of men called to be Elders. It should be noted that in relation to the New Testament local Churches the word “Elders” is always used in the plural form, even though no set number of Elders is mentioned. It is “Church” in the singular, not churches. It is “Elders” in the plural, not Elder! The Old Testament shows this predominant plurality of eldership in relation to the affairs of nations or the people of God whether Gentile or Israel.

The word “elder” in the Old Testament is used in plurality about 119 times and is used of “age” in official sense. Then the word “elder” used in singular about 24 times (elder, eldest) is used in relational sense.

The word “elder” is as old as the human race and the Bible itself and it is the most common and earliest known ministry of all.

Old Testament Eldership – Plurality

- ❖ The Elders of Egypt (**Genesis 50:7**).
- ❖ The Elders of Israel (**Exodus 3:16, 18; 4:29; 12:21**).
- ❖ The 70 Elders of Israel (**Exodus 24:1, 9, 14; Numbers 11:16-25**).
- ❖ The Elders of the Congregation (**Leviticus 4:15**).
- ❖ The Elders of Moab (**Numbers 22:4, 7**).
- ❖ The Elders of Median (**Numbers 22:7**).
- ❖ The Elders of the city (**Deuteronomy 19:12; 21:2-6**).
- ❖ The Elders of the town (**1 Samuel 16:4**).
- ❖ The Assembly of the Elders (**Psalms 107:32**).
- ❖ The Elders of Judah (**Ezekiel 8:1**).
- ❖ The Elders, Scribes and High Priests (**Matthew 15:2 16:21; 26:3, 47, 57, 59; Mark 14; 34**).
- ❖ The Estate (Council) of the Elders (**Acts 22:5**).
- ❖ The Elders who were patriarchs of the faith (**Hebrews 11:2**).
- ❖ The Elders (Moral Law, **Deuteronomy 12-16; 21:1-21**), and the Priests of Israel (the Ceremonial law, **Deuteronomy 17-26**).

Thus, we have:

- 1) Elders of a House/Family (**Genesis 50:7; Hebrews 11:2; II Samuel 12:17**).
- 2) Elders of a Nation (**Exodus 3:16-18; 4:29; 12:21; 17:5, 6; 18:12; 19:7; I Samuel 4:3**).
- 3) Elders of the Sanhedrin (**Exodus 24:1, 9, 14; Numbers 11:16-20**).
- 4) Elders of the Congregation (**Leviticus 4:15; Judges 21:16**).
- 5) Elders of the City (**Deuteronomy 19:12; 16:18; 21:3-6, 19, and 20; Judges 8:16; Ruth 4:2, 9-11; Ezra 10:14; 1 Samuel 16:4**).
- 6) Elders of the City (**Deuteronomy 19:12; 16:18; 21:3-16, 19, 20; Judges 8:16; Ruth 4:2, 9-11; Ezra 10:14; 1 Samuel 16:4**).
- 7) The Assembly of the Elders (Lit. “The Session, or Sitting “), **Psalms 107:32**. general use in New Testament speaks of the Sanhedrin (**Matthew 27:3, 12, 41; Mark 14:43, 53; Acts 4:5, 8; 24:1; 23:14; 25:15**).

The “Jethro Principle” certainly illustrates the need for and function of plurality of rulership on behalf of God’s people (**Exodus 18:13-27**).

New Testament Eldership – plurality

One the approximately 69 uses of the “Elder” in the New Testament, twice it is used in a relational sense (**Luke 15:25; Romans 9:12**), seven times it is used of an older person and/or elder in official sense (**1 Timothy 5:1, 2, 19; 1 Peter 5:1, 5; II John 1; III John 1**), and about sixty times it is used in official sense in its plural form.

- ❖ The relief money was sent to the Elder (**Acts 11:30**) in time of famine.
- ❖ The ordained Elders in every Church (**Acts 14:23**).
- ❖ The Elders in Jerusalem (**Acts 16:4**).
- ❖ The Elders of Ephesus (**Acts 20:17, 28**).
- ❖ The Elders of Jerusalem (**Acts 21:17, 18**).

- ❖ The Elders are to rule (**1 Timothy 5:1, 17-21**).
 - ❖ The Elders of the church to anoint with oil and pray for the sick (**James 5:14**).
 - ❖ The Elders exhorted by Peter to oversee the flock of God (**1 Peter 5:1-5**).
 - ❖ The Elders to be ordained by Titus in every church and city (**Titus 1:5**).
 - ❖ Paul wrote to the Bishops and Deacons at Philippi (**Philippians 1:1**).
 - ❖ Believers are to obey them that have the rule over them (**Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24**).
 - ❖ Timothy was to make sure that Elders qualify for office (**1 Timothy 3**).
 - ❖ The Lamb was amid the 24 Elders (**Revelation 4-5**).
- This priestly course was founded in the Tabernacle of David worship, as an order of Melchizedekian King-Priests unto God.
- ❖ There were “prophets and teachers” at Antioch (**Acts 13:1**).
 - ❖ There were “prophets” at Corinth also (**1 Corinthians 14:29**).
 - ❖ There were “prophets” at Jerusalem (**Acts 11:27; 15:4, 6, 22**).
 - ❖ There were “apostles and elders” at the Council concerning the Gentiles (**Acts 15:1-5, 22, 23; 16:4**).
 - ❖ A presbytery is a group of Elders in any given gathering (**1 Timothy 4:14**). It is the order of Elders”.

It is “Elders” in the plural, and “Church” in the singular when dealing with local Church.

The wisdom of God is seen in the plurality of Eldership because it:

- 1) Safeguards a church from the rule of the one man, like Diotrephes, or a Monarchical bishop” (**3 John 9, 10**), a spiritual dictatorship and autocrat.
- 2) Provides checks and balances in ruler ship, and
- 3) Makes a channel for the manifold wisdom of God to be released to the Body of Christ, the church, and finally,
- 4) Provides multiple rule and feeding ministry in the local church, as well as
- 5) Provides a covering and protection for all Elders.

Co-Equality of Eldership

Not only does the Old and New Testament show the plurality of Eldership, but it also teaches the co-equality within that plurality of eldership. That is, no elder is to be exalted as a person above another elder. To do so is to violate God’s own law and attitude to his people, for God is no respecter of persons.

(**Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34; Deuteronomy 10:17; James 2:1-9**). He does not show partiality or Favoritism.

The New Testament writers recognized and accepted both plurality and co-equality amongst the Eldership. However, it is a co-equality of office and of elders as persons, but it is NOT a co-equality of Divine ability!

There is a variety of personality, degrees of spirituality and measures of God-given grace and ability

Within the Eldership. They are equal as persons, and equal as far as office. They are all Elders as

Persons! But there is difference of grace-gifts given to them by the risen Head, Christ.

We note this in the following:

- ❖ Peter stood with the eleven as a co-equal apostle, at Pentecost (**Acts 2:14**).

- ❖ Paul accepted Peter, James and John as three “pillars” in the Church at Jerusalem (**Galatians 2:9**) but did not exalt one above the other. They were fellow-apostles, fellow-elders.
- ❖ The 24 Elders in **Revelation 4:4; 5:8-10** are all co-equal as fellow-elders and kings and priests unto God and all gathered around the lamb in the throne of God.
- ❖ Paul proved the Corinthians for their carnality in exalting one ministry above another and glorify men (**1 Corinthians 1:16-16; 3:21-23**).

Thus, all Elder are equal as person and office. But there are differences of grace-gifts given to them which also must be recognized.

Believers who see the plurality and co-equality of Eldership in the church often let the pendulum swing to extremes on this matter and fail to recognize that amongst this kind of eldership God does set some elder as “first among equals”.

They reject the concept of “chief elder” or “presiding elder” or elder of elders” or “chief shepherd” though fear of depriving Christ of His place as THE Chief and exalting some man above others. This fear can be healthy but needs to be balanced out by the word of God on Eldership.

However, as noted previously, though there is co-equally as to office (all being “fellow-elder there is not equality as to ability, responsibility, spirituality or grace-gifts!

There will be different and various measures of the gifts of grace among the eldership as God wills (**1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Roman 12:1-8; Ephesians 4:9-16**). The very fact that God has given variety of ministry gifts, spiritual gifts and talents to the members of the Body of Christ confirms the truths of the same amongst the elderships. It is this fact that should be seen in the examples here of plurality, co-equality of eldership, yet an elder being “first among equals” by reason of Divine given abilities and grace.

They were not set there as leaders of the rest because they were better than the others, but because GOD SET them there, equipping, anointing and enabling them to be “first among equals”.

To whom much is given, more responsibility is upon them. To whom is given, of him will men require the more. He will be a responsible elder among elder (**Luke 12:41-48**).

The measure of ability is the measure of responsibility, which becomes the measure of one’s authority, all of which is the measure of one’s accountability (**Ephesians 4:6**). One does not have authority or responsibility if there is no ability. One is only accountable for what one has.

The authority of an Elder relates to his ability to feed the flock of God. The father in the home has authority, as he is able to feed his family!

The Relationship of Elders to Eldership

This matter will be dealt with more fully in “Unity and teamwork of ministries” in a subsequent chapter. However, for the concluding sections of this chapter some thoughts need to be expressed as to the relationship of the chief elder and the other elders to each other.

For plurality and co-equality of eldership to work and function as God intended, and also the chief elder among them, there must be principles in operation. Otherwise, it will never work. These principles are manifested in the Godhead. Eldership must set the example before the Church of unity, teamwork, and submission recognition.

- ❖ Elders must have a personal relation with the Lamb in the throne (**Revelation 4-5**)
- ❖ Elders must have a personal relationship with each other as elders.
- ❖ Elders must submit one to another (**I Peter 5:1-3**)
- ❖ Elders must maintain unity with others (**Psalms 133**). They must be joined together in the same mind, the same mouth, the same judgment (**I Corinthians 1:10**).
- ❖ Elders must have the same spirit upon them as the chief elder (Numbers 11).
- ❖ Elders must be examples to each other and to the flock of God (**Acts 20:17, 31-35; I Peter 5:1-5**). Paul was an example to the Elders of Ephesus.
- ❖ Elders must take heed to themselves first (**Acts 20:28-32**).
- ❖ Elders must watch that they do not draw disciples after themselves (**Acts 20:28-36**).
- ❖ Elders must watch the spirit of lordship and abuse of authority among themselves (**I Peter 5:1-3**).
- ❖ Elders must realize their safety is “in the cluster” (**Isaiah 65:8**).
- ❖ Elders must be “joined in the spirit” (**Numbers 18**).
- ❖ Elders must accept each other as to different personalities, etc.
- ❖ Elders must be committed to each other.
- ❖ Elders must maintain transparency, honesty and open communication.
- ❖ Elders must maintain servant spirit (**Mark 10:45**).
- ❖ Elders maintain recognition, not competition among one another.
- ❖ Elders must be loyal to each other.
- ❖ Elders must maintain a spirit of humility at all times (**Philippians 2:1-11**).

The Relationship of Congregation and Eldership

What then is the relationship of the congregation and the eldership? When Paul writes to the Philippians Church he addresses “the bishops and deacons with the saints” (**Philippians 1:1**). This constitutes New Testament Church order. Do the people have nothing to say in Church matters? Is all left to the rule of the elders”? Or is there some part the congregation have as members of the priestly Body of Christ? The answer is Yes. However, it needs to be clearly defined as to the part and areas that the congregation plays in the order of the local Church, otherwise all becomes a Democracy! The church is not a democratic institution. It is not “the rule of the people”. The church is a Theocracy – “the rule of God through His appointed authorities”.

It is because there has been the lack of checks and balances on leadership over the years that the democratic system of Church government arose. Hence, instead of government coming down from God through His leadership to the people, the people took the government into their own hands and appointed leaders and thus controlled the leadership.

What the Congregation may not do

According to the Scripture, the congregation may not do the following:

- ❖ Appoint its own leadership by the democratic method, or “hire-fire” system.

- ❖ Control the leadership as to the direction of the Church.
- ❖ Control the finances of the Church as to its generous giving and offerings. One could not see the church in the wilderness doing these things (**Acts 7:38**).
- ❖ Take it into their hands to discipline leadership. This will be dealt with when teaching on *Church Discipline*.

What the Congregation may do

According to the Scripture the congregation may do the following:

- ❖ Pray for those who rule over them.
- ❖ Submit themselves to their leadership and obey them as the leaders obey the Word of the Lord (**Hebrew 13:7, 17, 24**).
- ❖ Consent and confirms matters of building/lands/extensions in the development of Church property, especially as necessary for legal purposes.
- ❖ Confirm the matters of Church discipline and excommunication on non-repentant members (**Matthew 18:15-20; I Corinthians 5** are examples of such).

Comparison of Forms of Government

The three major forms of Church Government as outlined below sets out an interesting comparison and contrast of each with what I understand to be the Biblical pattern of Government. These comparisons will help us set up a Biblical Pattern of the New Testament Church Government.

DENOMINATION	BIBLICAL
EPISCOPAL	BIBLICAL
1. The Elder becomes a priest or clergyman. The bishop becomes the ruler of the Elder.	1. The Elder and bishop are the same
2. One Church with one Elder	2. One church with several Elders
3. Pope, Cardinals, Archbishops etc., lead the whole Church.	3. Fivefold ministries oversee the whole church
4. The Pope or Monarchial leader becomes the Head of the Church.	4. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church.

5. The Elder is ordained by the bishop.	1. The Elders are ordained by the Presbytery
6. Human system of government.	2. Devine order

PRESBYTERIAN	BIBLICAL
1. Bishop and Elder identical	1. Same.
2. Ordination by Presbytery.	2. Same.
3. Plurality of Elders.	3. Same
4. Appointment from below	4. Appointment from above.
5. Popular elections.	5. No popular elections.
6. Democratic.	6. Theocratic.
7. Distinction between ruling and teaching Elders.	7. No distinction: all Elders rule and teach.
8. Highest Court: appeal to man – General Assembly	8. Highest Court: appeal to God.
9. General Assembly oversees the whole Church, i.e., that denomination.	9. Five ministries oversee the whole Church: no denomination.
10. Aaronic-style Priesthood.	10. Melchizedek Priesthood.
11. Human system of government	11. Divine order

CONGREGATIONAL	BIBLICAL
1. Bishop and Elder the same.	1. Same.
2. One man leadership.	2. Multi leadership.
3. Popular elections	3. Eldership appoints.
4. Democratic.	4. Theocratic.
5. Ordination not required.	5. Presbytery ordains
6. No outside interference permitted, as the Board has the final decision	6. Open to Five Ministries for correction
7. Each congregation sets its own doctrine, practices and standards	7. Each congregation aligns itself to the Heavenly pattern
8. Human Institution.	8. Divine order

With all our striving farther to propagate the biblical Government Church pattern, it is imperative that the Spirit of Christ, the spirit of grace, love and humility be manifested in every believer’s attitude. It is tragically possible to build “according to the pattern” and God never to put “the glory” there to seal it!

The government, after all, must be upon HIS shoulders (**Isaiah 9:6-9**).

In conclusion:

1. The presiding elder or bishop presents decision for the congregation and speaks as the voice of authority for the eldership as the “set man”.
2. The group of elders confer and agree on the direction for the churches the church council, the presbytery, acting as checks and balances.
3. The congregation consent, respond and confirm the major decisions of the eldership according to their area of responsibility.

This is how church government finds expression in the local Church! The three valid streams or cords are brought together and “a three-fold cord is not quickly broken” (**Ecclesiastes 4:12**).

Prayer and Spiritual Warfare

The Key to Miracles- Prayer

“What a man is in his prayer closet, that’s what the man really is.”

—Robert McCheyne

Praying is the most difficult thing we ever learn to do as Christians. Prayer is hard work. It is trench warfare. You may think praying is easy, or even a joy. Yes, it can be! But, real praying, praying that reaches God and moves His heart to answer, is not easy!

Perhaps Jesus’ disciples thought prayer was easy, until they spent time with Jesus. They watched Him agonize with the Father and they cried, *“Lord, teach us to pray like that!”* (Luke 11:1 paraphrase). These Jewish men, who had been taught all their lives how to pray, realized there was more to talking with God than they had thought!

I have traveled much, speaking in many hundreds of churches and observing the lifestyle of many Christians. From my travels, I have become convinced that real praying is a lost art. This “prayerlessness” explains much of our “powerlessness” with God. Our prayer life is our lifeline to the Living God. A believer who doesn’t have “prayer power” doesn’t have “God power”. The test of a believer’s *walk with God* is his *talk with God*. The church preaches, teaches, holds conferences and seminars, and plans activities. We do many good things, but not the one essential thing—*praying!*

What is Prayer?

Praying is talking to God. It is the speaking part of our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Christianity is, first and foremost, a personal relationship between an ordinary sinner and an extraordinary God. Like all interpersonal relationships, it must have a speaking part! If the relationship is healthy and alive, there is real communication. God is our Father; we are His children. Our family is in trouble if we don’t talk!

Why Should We Pray?

1. Praying reflects a healthy relationship with God. Every believer should have in his heart a genuine desire to talk to God. When a person prays regularly, there is evidence of such a prayer life in his life and he has desire for more of God. If your relationship with God is good, the desire to talk to Him will be there. Later we will discuss how sin and rebellion destroy our prayer life.
2. Jesus commanded us to pray. *“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart”* (Luke 18:1). We will “lose heart” if we do not pray “at all times.” Praying is an act of desire and obedience. We are to pray even when we do not feel like it.
3. Praying is characteristic of a healthy Christian experience. Jesus was continuously abiding in the Father through prayer. We are to abide in Him and in His Word so that our prayers will be answered (John 15:7). God needs our prayers, because the world needs the answers God gives!
4. Praying opens the door to supernatural power in our lives. Our prayers can put the Lord Jesus to work in our world. Praying with power allows God to do work He ordinarily would not do. Later in this book you will learn about prayer power and putting it to work!

Let’s explore together the “deeper things” of the Word of God. These truths fall into the categories of prayer, spiritual warfare, and intercession. May Jesus take you into the Holy of Holies with Him in prayer and intercession!

Prayer is a conversation between an ordinary human being and an extraordinary God, often about very ordinary things.

Most of us feel at times that church, religion, and our faith are ineffective in producing change in our world. We could all use a miracle. If only we could walk with Jesus like the disciples did!

Miracles Promised

God wants to show you His secrets to miraculous living. In John, we have a tremendous promise from Jesus: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father”* (John 14:12). There is a startling promise! Jesus says every true believer should do two miraculous things:

- Equal Christ’s ministry— *“The works that I do shall he do also . . .”*
- Exceed Christ’s ministry— *“and greater works than these shall he do because I go to the Father.”*

Amazing! How in the world can the average Christian ever hope to *exceed* the works of Jesus? Such a promise seems ridiculous. Obviously, Jesus had something wonderful in mind, but, what and how?

Two Keys to Miraculous Living

Our Lord intended for us to equal and exceed His ministry. He told us how this could be accomplished. In John Chapter 14, Jesus teaches two keys to miraculous living after He is gone from this earth:

- Praying in His name
- The coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell the believer.

Jesus meant for the promise of verse 12 (to equal and exceed) to be accomplished by what He said in 13 and 14: *“And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”* The promise of verse 12 is to be fulfilled by the “asking” in verses 13 and 14.

Prayer in Jesus’ name is a key that unlocks the door to miracles in your life. The most common experience can be a key to miracles. Jesus continues in verses 15 and following to talk about the Holy Spirit to empower the believer. The Holy Spirit indwells us to give content and faith to our prayers. We have what we need to unlock heaven!

Why No Miracles

Why do we not see more of the supernatural in the church or in our lives? Most Christians are ignorant of these truths. Jesus tells us to “ask anything” in His name and He will do it. If we know how to ask, He will perform. When a believer asks the Father in Jesus’ name, then Jesus goes to work, continuing His ministry. The more of us who pray, the more ministry He performs.

When you make a need known to God the Father, He turns to God the Son, and tells Him to go meet your need. Jesus gets up off the throne to go meet your need. You ask, and the Father sends the Son. What a concept! What a promise! *My prayers put Jesus to work!*

What is Spiritual Warfare?

Satan has the power to hold the answer back—for a while to delay the result—for a time. He has not the power to hold it back finally, if someone understands and prays with quiet, steady persistence. The real pitch of prayer therefore is Satanward.

—S.D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Prayer*

The Christian life is a life of warfare. The Christian is a part of an eternal struggle between good and evil. To be a child of God is to fight against the forces of evil all the days of your life. Yet, so very few are truly aware of this spiritual conflict.

Most church members act as though the enemy is dead and they are at last in Zion. Someone has said that the old ship of Zion is not a luxury liner on which we sail leisurely into heaven's harbor; it is a battleship, a man of war in which we engage the enemy daily.

What then is this spiritual warfare? Who is the enemy? What are our weapons? How is this war ever fought? These are the questions for which we shall seek God's answers from His Word.

The Enemy

Paul, writing to the Ephesian believers, describes spiritual warfare and the nature of the enemy: *“Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Our enemy Satan is a mighty foe, a fallen archangel whose heart is full of hatred toward the Lord Jesus and His kingdom. Satan is the spirit ruler of a kingdom of darkness. He leads “world forces of spiritual wickedness.” Whether or not you believe in a Satan and demon forces is vital to your victory or defeat in this conflict. To pretend there is no enemy is to guarantee your defeat. Folks who do not believe the devil exists are those who have more devil in them than anyone else!

A “Spirit” War

Notice Scripture describes this warfare as “spiritual” in nature. We are not fighting in the physical realm—*“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood.”* This is an invisible war fought against invisible foes—Satan and his minions. Many believers are losing this war by default because they simply have not shown up for the war. Satan wins unopposed, because the Christian refuses to fight in this “spiritual” battle. Mark it down: *this war is spiritual, not physical* Church buildings and budgets will not win this struggle.

Church committees and charities will not defeat “spiritual wickedness in high places.” The point we must understand is that our daily problems are not physical in nature. They only seem to be. Behind every physical problem, there is a deeper, truer, spiritual problem or reality. The physical is only the tool of the spiritual. Matthew 16:21-23 illustrates this truth for us. Jesus has just foretold His coming death in Jerusalem. Simon Peter speaks up, saying, *“God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You”* (verse 22). Now, notice the rebuke Jesus gives, *“Get behind Me, Satan!”*

Our Lord does not rebuke Peter, but he rebukes the spirit power behind Peter's words. Satan had spoken through Peter's mind and voice. The problem was not Peter, but the power behind Peter. Often the problem is not in the physical at all, but rather spirit forces at work behind the scenes manipulating the physical realm.

Daily we fight a spiritual, unseen war. In Ephesians, Paul describes our "struggle." The King James Version translates this word as "wrestle." The idea of this word is hand-to-hand combat. This war is your own personal battle. To be saved is to be involved in struggle against these world forces of darkness. Christian, you are involved whether you like it or not. Sadly, so few Christians are even aware of this conflict. Satan is very determined to defeat each Christian, and naturally he prefers to do so without the believer even being aware of his presence.

Spiritual Weapons

If we are to fight a spirit warfare, we shall need spiritual weapons. Our armor and weaponry must be adaptable to the enemy and his tactics. Paul describes the Christian's armor when he says:

"Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." (Ephesians 6:13-17).

Here is a picture of you and me dressed in battle fatigues, armed and ready for battle. The belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, marching boots, a shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit; these are your weapons. What armor! You are equipped for hand-to-hand combat with the devil himself. You are ready: show me the battle, take me to the front lines. Let's get it on! Okay, here is the war; listen to Paul's words in the next verse: *"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints"* (Ephesians 6:18).

Prayer is the War

Now, can you beat that? You are dressed in battle gear, ready to fight, and Paul tells you to pray! Pray? That's right, pray. You see, disappointing as it may seem, prayer *is* the war. The armor is merely preparation for prayer. The Christian warrior is a prayer warrior. This spiritual warfare is fought by an army marching on its knees. Our enemy is spiritual, so we must use our greatest spiritual weapons against him. Prayer is the means whereby we enter the spirit conflict. Here is where many churches and Christian leaders are missing out on the war. We have thought that our problems were lack of funds, facilities, or organizations. If only our church had this or that, then we could do great things for God. God help us! We are never going to defeat the devil with buildings, budgets, or bombs. If and when we overcome the Evil One, it will be through the power of prayer. This has always been God's way.

The Evangelist and Revival

I am an evangelist and I have preached in hundreds of churches around the world. Seldom has a church truly believed that prayer is the battle. To prepare for a week of preaching, the average

pastor will put ads in the paper, on TV, and posters in business places, announcing the coming crusade. He will promote attendance with gimmicks and gadgets to get people to the crusade. All of this is good and proper, but these are physical efforts; the battle, though, is spiritual!

Seldom does the church put on the armor and go to war in prayer. I am talking of real intercessory prayer. This type of prayer causes us to “get down in the trenches” and “wrestle” in hand-to-hand combat until the victory is won. It’s much easier to go hear the evangelist preach. It is much harder to knell in prayer believing God for a blessing or revival. When we leave out this important step, we then wonder why there is no great moving of God’s Spirit among the people.

Years ago, I preached in Romania. There, in a communist country, we preached to crowds of three to four thousand every night in a building that seats only eight hundred. There was no advertising in the paper, no television, and no posters. There was no promotion, because it is illegal in the communist system to promote religion. What a blessing! I almost wish it were illegal in the West. Then maybe we couldn’t depend on the flesh and we would be forced to depend on the Lord. In Romania, the believers face the Prince of Darkness every day. They are in a struggle for survival. Prayer is their one resource, and they are using it as a mighty weapon to tear down satanic strongholds. Thousands are coming to Christ in the midst of great opposition and persecution. Prayer is the war. When we don’t pray, we lose by default.

Prayer and Evangelism

Evangelism is a spiritual warfare won by intercession. When a lost person is born again into God’s kingdom, you can count on it: someone prayed for that person. Someone “stood in the gap” for that lost soul. Only when we drive the enemy off the battlefield of the human heart is the lost man free to respond to God’s grace. Preaching, witnessing, programs, and all other church work are good and necessary, but these are not the real conflict. Satan fears us most when we take our spiritual weapons and use them against him in prayer.

Earlier, we cited the example of Moses and Joshua fighting against Amalek. The battle is recorded in Exodus 17:9-16. As Joshua was fighting the battle down on the plains, Moses was praying for him up on the mountain. Moses was fighting the real battle against the spiritual forces of evil that were empowering the idolatrous King Amalek. Moses intercedes and Joshua prevails against Amalek. You see, Joshua might as well have been a third-string quarterback called in at the last quarter when the Israelites were ahead 100 to 0. As long as Moses was doing battle, it was easy for him to move in and “discomfit” Amalek (Exodus 17:13 KJV).

Satan Opposes Our Prayers

When a Spirit-filled, believing child of God begins to pray excitedly, Satan trembles. He knows that such praying is supernatural. It puts God in the fight. He cannot win against such weapons. This is why Satan will actively oppose your prayer life. Have you observed how difficult it is to spend time in prayer? We find time for every other “religious” activity; we attend church, Bible class, and even witness now and then. However, when it comes to prayer—real communion with God—it seems every conflict imaginable will occur. This is Satan’s work. He will hinder your prayer life whenever possible. Prayer is warfare, make no mistake about it!

Dr. Stephen Alford was for many years pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in New York City. I once heard the great man describe how Satan would oppose his prayer life. He said that for many years he could not understand why his thoughts would ramble in prayer. Often vile, hateful or lustful thoughts would enter his prayer time. Finally, he discovered the warfare. He came to realize that these thoughts were “fiery darts” shot from Satan’s bow to destroy his intercessions and prayers.

Praying is more than meeting God. It is also the time we engage the enemy. This is not to imply that in praying we address the devil. God forbid! However, he is there to oppose us, we must deal with him. In a later chapter, we will discuss this matter of dealing with the devil through the “binding and loosing” mentioned in Matthew 18:18. For now, it is enough to know that Satan does oppose our prayers. He can even delay the answers to prayer.

The clearest illustration that prayer is a spiritual warfare is found in the Old Testament. **Daniel 10:13** describes young Daniel the Prophet spending three weeks in fasting and prayer. After this period of intense spiritual conflict, an angel arrives, sent to Daniel in answer to his prayer. Now, God has never sent an angel (that I could see) to answer one of my prayers, but then I’ve never prayed and fasted as earnestly as Daniel did! When the angel speaks to Daniel, he says a most remarkable thing, “*Do not be afraid,*

Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words” (Daniel 10:12). Notice the phrase, “from the first day.” The angel started to come to Daniel from the first day he prayed. Why did it take him three weeks to get there? In the next verse, the angel explains his delay: “*But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for 21 days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me.....,*”

This is mind-boggling! Here Daniel is praying, and in the unseen, invisible world of the spirit, a battle begins. God sends an angel (messenger) to answer Daniel, but the prince of Persia (an ancient allusion to Satan) opposes the angel. For 21 days the angel battles Satan himself, all because Daniel is praying and fasting! The angel is no match for Satan, so God finally sends Michael, the archangel, to end the conflict and victory is won. Satan was preventing the answer to Daniel’s prayer.

Whether you take this passage to be symbolic or literal, one fact is clear: Praying puts us into the realm of the spirit where the real fight exists. Prayer is warfare, and it is so vital to God that it can even put angels to work. Your prayers, lifted in faith and sincerity, can activate the hosts of heaven. Scripture tells us that God’s angels are ministering spirits sent out to render service for those who touch the supernatural with their prayers (Hebrews 1:13-14).

A Call to Arms

Genuine praying is at the heart of the church’s ministry. Praying is so much more than saying thanks to God or asking Him for things. Prayer is a call to arms. It is very serious business. Through prayer, we touch heaven and attack hell. It is not for the faint of heart or weak in faith.

Most of the remainder of this book is devoted to the “deeper things” of intercession and warfare. You may think we’re already so deep we are in over our heads! Again, we join with Paul in his prayer “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.” Lord, teach us to pray.

Becoming a Prayer Warrior

There is a serious deficiency in the outworking of the spirit filled life if it does not issue in a revitalizing experience in the realm of prayer.

—Arthur Wallis, *Pray in the Spirit*

Each Christian has the right to pray and the ability to pray. However, not every Christian is prepared to enter into spiritual warfare. The deeper things of intercession and prayer are reserved for those who are equipped. Like a young soldier going to boot camp for basic training, the Christian must “*put on the full armor of God*” before being “*strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might*” (Ephesians 6:11, 10).

The Boot Camp of Prayer

The armor Paul speaks of in Ephesians 6: 1-17 is really preparation for prayer. Because prayer is where we meet God and also encounter the enemy Satan, we must be prepared by putting on God’s full armor. The Apostle Paul gives us sound advice on preparing for a ministry of prayer. He tells us to pray by:

- “Standing firm.”
- Using the “sword of the Spirit.”
- Praying “in the Spirit.”

Pray Standing Firm

We are encouraged to stand fast against “*the schemes of the devil*” (Ephesians 6:11) by putting on the full armor of God. What Paul means is that our foundation for prayer must be the completed work of Christ. We stand on the victory He won at the cross. Also, we are to live a holy and obedient life before God. We are armored with the breastplate of righteousness; we have marching shoes on to show our obedience, to go where He commands. So, we pray from a position of strength. We can pray with boldness.

In the next chapter, we will see more about our victory over the enemy when we discuss the weapons of our warfare.

Pray with the Sword of the Spirit

“*And take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Ephesians 6:17). An effective prayer warrior uses his weapon of the Word of God. The sword of the Word is an offensive weapon in a praying Christian’s life. Persons who pray effectively use the Bible in their prayer life. Power in prayer and knowledge of the Bible are inseparable. Do you know how to use the Word in your prayer life?

Hold the Word up to the Lord

Use the Word when you talk to God. Remember, the Bible is a book of promises the Father has made to His children. We can expect God to keep His Word. Hold Him to it in faith. Quote it back to Him in prayer. Often, when I’m praying, Scripture will be a large portion of the context of my praying. At times I’ll begin my time with God just by reading it to Him, I especially like to read the Psalms aloud in my praying. The value of holding the Word up to the throne is that the biblical

promises are like an “IOU” from God to us. We are co-heirs with Christ, so everything that belongs to Christ is our inheritance also.

Praying with the sword is claiming your new birthrights. The believer comes to the throne of God and says, “Father, I am Your child, and You said that You would supply all my needs (Philippians 4:19), and I am going to hold You to Your Word today.”

Hold the Word up Against the Devil

When you pray, use the sword of the Spirit against the enemy. Satan hates and fears the truth of God’s Word. Use it on him—it cuts him to shreds! The sword of the Word can drive Satan off the battlefield and into retreat. There will be times in prayer that Satan will attack you with evil thoughts, desires, or destructions. He will do all in his power to hinder your prayer time. Hold the Word up to him. Isaiah 54:17 says, “*No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper . . .*”

The devil knows he is a defeated foe, but he runs a bluff much of the time. You must let him know *you* know he’s defeated. Quote the Word to him. Often, I just rebuke him to his face: “Satan, you are a liar.” The Bible says, “. . . *the Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil*” (1 John 3:8). Satan cannot withstand the truth of God’s Word; he will flee.

Hold up the Word to Lift the Soul

At times, you may not feel like praying. Quote the Word out loud for yourself and God. Often the Holy Spirit will use the Scriptures to lift your soul upward, to prepare your heart for prayer and intercession.

Pray in the Spirit

Paul then tells us to enter this spiritual warfare by “praying at all times in the Spirit.” You and I cannot become prayer warriors without these three preparations. We learn to pray standing firm on the completed work of Christ, praying with the Word of God as our offensive weapon, and praying in the power and infilling of the Holy Spirit. Real praying is Holy Spirit infused. It is praying that is God breathed and sustained. Only as we are yielded to the Spirit of Holy God can we hope to become holy warriors in prayer. We’ve mentioned the sword of God’s Word as a weapon in prayer, but now I want to turn our attention to two other mighty weapons of prayer warfare: the cross and our identification with Christ.

Using the Weapons of Spiritual Warfare

*From strength to strength go on.
Wrestle, and fight, and pray.
Tread all the powers of darkness down,
And win the well-fought day.*

Charles Wesley

Praying takes many forms—it can be worship where we communicate praise to God. Prayer can be work! The “hardest” praying you will ever do will be in intercessory prayer for other people. And prayer can be warfare. When praying is of the Spirit, from the heart, it will always engage the enemy.

Because there are times when prayer is spiritual warfare, we’ll need spiritual weapons to defeat the “spiritual wickedness in high places” that we will encounter.

A Battle Plan

Every Christian needs a basic understanding of how spiritual warfare is fought and the weapons needed to overpower the enemy. Jesus’ disciples once came against a demon-possessed boy and could not cast out the demon. The father of the boy brought the lad to Jesus, who immediately cast out the evil spirit. Later, the disciples asked our Lord why they had not been able to cast out the demon. Jesus replied:

Because of the littleness of your faith, for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you. Then, some manuscripts add the following words: But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 17:20-21)

We are much like those early disciples. We become powerless against the demonic forces we face every day. We have the resources to move these mountains if only we had the faith and understanding to apply our resources. Let’s study the weapons God has given us to live victoriously and to pray powerfully.

The Weapon of the Cross

In Ephesians 6:11-14, Paul tells us repeatedly to “stand firm.” In other words, “hold your ground.” The “ground” he was referring to is the ground Jesus Christ won for us when He died and rose again. Calvary was a spiritual battlefield in which Jesus conquered enemy territory for God and a lost world. In His victory, He conquered the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In Colossians 2:13-15, we have two beautiful “word” pictures describing our Lord’s victory won at the cross and empty tomb. Paul says,

And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has

taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

The “certificate of debt” that Paul refers to is an allusion to the Roman law of Paul’s day. When Jesus Christ was crucified, the soldiers nailed an inscription above His head on the cross. It read, “*King of the Jews.*”

This inscription was a certificate of debt, a legal charge brought against Jesus by His accusers. In Roman times, it was common for a legal charge to be brought before a judge. The judge would then rule guilty or innocent. If guilty, the accusation or certificate of debt’ would be attached to the cell door of the imprisoned, or in our Lord’s case, nailed to the cross. Therefore, all could see and know the legal charge for which the guilty was accused. Jesus was accused of treason against Rome as King of the Jews; hence the inscription over His head.

Paul says in Colossians 2:14 that when Jesus died, He blotted out the “certificate of debt... which was hostile to us.” Notice, this legal charge or certificate was “against us,” not against Christ. Thus, there was another certificate of debt on that cross; it was invisible, but there, nonetheless. It was a debt we owed that Jesus paid by His death.

Satan is the accuser. He has a sin list on every sinner. He brings his accusation against the sinner at the throne of God. Satan presents his certificate of debt before God. We sinners are guilty as charged, and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Now, what did God do for us? He took the certificate of debt, nailed it to the cross, and blotted it out with the precious blood of His only Son. God settled our case out of court, on the cross.

Satan’s Only Weapon

The truth of this for us to apply is that Satan’s only weapon to use against us is our sins. Jesus has blotted out, totally removed, our sins. Satan has no legal claim on us. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Therefore, by His death on the cross, Jesus defeated the devil. That’s the first word picture Paul used in Colossians 2.

Colossians 2:15

The second word picture is from Roman military conquest. Jesus made an “open disgrace” of the devil through His cross. This “open disgrace” is a reference to Caesar’s conquest in battle. When the Romans defeated an army, they would disgrace the enemy by disrobing the defeated king or general. When this person was disrobed, he and his conquered army were made to march behind Caesar’s chariot (or the Roman commander) in chains and stripped of armor and weapons. When the Romans marched back into Rome, the people mocked the defeated slaves who walked wearily in chains behind the victorious Caesar.

When did Jesus disgrace the devil? At the cross! When did Jesus *openly* disgrace him? When He rose from the grave! When Jesus conquered death, He “*disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them*” (Colossians 2:15). Satan has no weapons to use against the blood-bought child of God.

Using the Cross as a Weapon

How does this relate to spiritual warfare? In every way this war is fixed. We have already won.

The victory is appropriated when we pray! Satan has no claim on us or on those for whom we pray. When we pray using faith in Christ's completed work, we bring Calvary's victory to our situation! In praying for lost people, I remind the devil that Jesus has already redeemed my lost friend. I command Satan to release his hold on that person for whom Christ died. I "plead the blood" of Christ against him. Revelation 12:11 says, "*they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony.*" We can overcome him the same way. The words of Martin Luther's great hymn come to mind: ". . . *we tremble not for him; . . . one little word shall fell him.*"²

His Victory, Our Victory

I want to stress this principle of our total identification with Christ. His victory was for us—we share in it. We are "in Him" and He is in us. Therefore, that which is historically true can be made experientially true in our daily lives. Living victoriously as a Christian is not that complicated. It is simply resting in the victory of the cross. It is, by faith, bringing Calvary up to date in our lives.

Once I wrote to a pastor friend who was to go on trial in Romania. The charges against him were false and unjustified. He faced a two-year prison sentence. When I returned home from Romania, I notified many friends to pray for his upcoming trial and release. We sent letters and telegrams to let the authorities know this pastor had friends in the West. Our ultimate weapon was prayer. I personally gave him to God for protection. I also rebuked Satan and commanded him to "cease and desist" harassing this dear Romanian brother. I brought the cross of Jesus into the fight. Shortly thereafter, word came to us that the charges had been dropped and the trial dismissed. Praise the Lord!

We must not let Satan bluff us, blackmail us, or in any other way deceive us. We are the victors, not the victims. We in Christ are winners, always and at all times. Believe it, act like it, and pray accordingly. "*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Prayer Weapons

These verses tell us what our prayer weapons are to be used for. They are "mighty through God to the puffing down of strong holds" (v.4 KJV). What are these strongholds we are to destroy with our prayer weapons? This phrase probably has reference to areas of bondage (sin habits) in people's lives. Many folks have satanic strongholds of guilt, doubt, fear, rebellion, and overt sin. These are the result of years of habitual sin. These areas of bondage hold people captive to do Satan's will. Through intercessory prayer, we can set captives free.

Suppose you have a friend who is in bondage to a sin habit such as drugs or alcohol. As a prayer warrior your task is to go to battle for your friend. In prayer, you can pull down those strongholds by forbidding Satan to harass, impress, or tempt that person. Command Satan in Jesus' name to loosen his grip on that person's will, mind, or body. *Real* praying can be a fantastic ministry!

Conclusion

In prayer, we use all our weapons. First, through our position in Christ, we can come to God boldly claiming His promises. Then we have the weapons of the blood, the cross, the Word, and the mighty name of Jesus to enter intercession for others. These weapons are mighty in the hands of a Spirit-filled believer who walks in faith and obedience. In the following chapter, we will study further the authority of the believer as he uses his prayer weapons.

Resources

1. The King James Version translates the phrase as “handwriting of ordinance.”
2. “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” by Martin Luther.

What are the Keys of the Kingdom?

“Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.”

—Matthew 18:18-20

I once led a Bible conference for some college students. A young woman in the conference asked a very challenging question: “What did Jesus mean by this statement in Matthew 16:19, when He told Simon Peter: *‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven’?*”

Her question was really a two-pronged question. What are the “keys” to the kingdom of heaven, and second, what is meant by the “binding and loosing” in this statement? These are good questions, and a simple answer is not possible because there are some complicating factors.

I have quoted two texts—one in the chapter epigraph, the other in the student’s question—both of which repeat the idea of binding and loosing. Jesus stated this principle on two different occasions, both remembered and recorded by Matthew. Matthew 18:18 records this statement in the context of church discipline and prayer, while Matthew 16:19 records it as addressed to Simon Peter and the other disciples at Caesarea Philippi in northern Galilee.

What Jesus meant by this teaching is very important to us today. It has enormous value to us in prayer, especially prayer for other people, yet few believers today have any idea what these words mean.

Roman Catholic Teaching

My early church training was Roman Catholic. The verses in Matthew 16:18-19 are an important part of Roman theology. Catholic theologians take verse 18 to refer to Peter as the rock foundation on which Christ built the church. They say these words of Jesus mean that Christ gave to Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. These keys are the power to forgive sin; therefore, Peter and his papal successors have the power to tell heaven whom to forgive and whom not to forgive.

As evidence of this fact, you can visit the Vatican in Rome, and in St. Peter’s Cathedral there is a life-size marble statue of Peter kneeling before Christ. There chiseled in stone beside the kneeling statue is this verse: “I will give unto Thee [meaning Peter] the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever Thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Thus, Roman theology uses this verse to teach the ascending of Peter and his power to forgive sin.

This is not the interpretation of these verses that I find to be accurate. I have no quarrel with the Roman Catholic church except to say that such an interpretation of the words of Jesus is misleading. It doesn’t take a serious Bible student to discover this. In fact, there is a threefold error involved.

First, we ask to whom were these words addressed? To Peter alone, or to the church in general? Those who say Jesus gave the keys to Peter face a difficult textual problem. This is true for two reasons. First, Peter is not the “rock” foundation on which Jesus built His church. Jesus Himself is the foundation of His church. The word for Peter in Greek is *Petros*; which means “a stone or little rock.”

The word translated “rock” in the same verse (Matthew 16:18) is another Greek word, *petra*, which means “bedrock,” massive rock, or foundation rock. Peter is only a *petros*, a piece of the *petra*, not the *petra* itself. The Greek language used here is very specific and distinctive.

Most modern scholars agree that the “rock” foundation on which Christ has been building His church is the divine revelation revealed to Simon in verse 16, that Jesus is indeed the Christ. This divine revelation comes to every true believer. When the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to the human heart, that individual must do as Simon did - confess what the Spirit revealed. That is how people are born again into the true church. That is how we each become a “piece” of the rock. Each believer is a *petros*, part of the *petra*.

Peter or the Church

The second reason for rejecting the idea that Jesus gave to Peter (and, thus, his papal successors) supernatural power to forgive sins is much less complicated. The Lord Jesus repeats this statement about the power to bind and loose in Matthew 18. Here, the context is remarkably different. Here Peter is not addressed at all. These words are used in connection with prayer. Jesus says, “*if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 18:19). Notice, “if any two of you agree,” you can ask and receive. How general can He make it— “any two of you”? Thus, any two of you can bind and loose here on earth.

Christ speaks these words to the church in general. The preceding verses deal with the church disciplining its members. Jesus tells us how to reprove a brother “caught” in a sin. His conclusion to that statement reveals our greatest weapon: if just two Christians can agree on God’s will, they, through prayer, can “bind and loose.” This is extremely important. Matthew 18 teaches us that this power to “bind and loose” is a prayer weapon to be used by the church. It is *not* a special power given to a select group of clergies who are in some way mystical descendants of Simon Peter.

What is Binding and Loosing?

The third error has to do with the meaning of Jesus’ words, “You shall bind on earth” and “You shall loose on earth.” Did Jesus mean to imply that Peter or anyone else could forgive sins? I think not. Neither pope nor priest has that divine prerogative; only God Himself can forgive sins. This can be easily demonstrated; a careful look at the text in Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18 reveals this fact. The King James Version of the New Testament, known as the “authorized” version for 350 years, translates these verses: “. . . *and whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*”

These verbs are translated as though they are a simple future tense. If this were correct, the translation would also be correct. The meaning then would be that “heaven” is waiting for “earth” to tell it what to do. Heaven takes its cue from earth. Thus, anything that I here on earth forbid (bind) or permit (loose), then God must obey by binding or loosing. This is the position taken by

those who teach that man can forgive sins. This error has occurred by a failure to translate correctly the tenses of the verbs used.

The verbs are not future tense, but rather, they are a complicated future passive periphrastic perfect indicative.¹ In fact, in both verses, the first verb is aorist (past tense) and the second is the perfect passive. Neither is in the future tense. The *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*² translates the Greek perfect as “shall having been bound” (or loosed).

The New American Standard Bible correctly brings out the sense of the perfect periphrastic construction by translating the verbs “*whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.*” Notice the “*shall have been*” emphasis. This is the correct rendering of the text. It means that what Jesus really said is just the opposite of how the King James Version reads. Heaven does not take its cue from earth! Never! Earth takes its cue from heaven.

We can only bind and loose what has already been bound and loosed. Whatever Jesus has already forbidden or permitted; we can claim in prayer. This binding and loosing are our authority in Christ, not to forgive sins, but rather to take authority over the enemy in intercession. Binding and loosing are a prayer weapon.

Hog Tie the Devil!

Have you ever wished you could hog tie the devil for just one day? Wouldn't it be great just to command him to leave you or your loved ones alone? At the heart of Jesus' teaching on binding and loosing is this principle—our power over the evil one! Because Jesus has already rendered the devil powerless (Hebrews 2:14), we share in that victory. We look to heaven, see our Lord's victory; then, we, by faith, use our “keys” to command Satan to loosen our lost friends, or command him to be bound from oppressing them.

Every day in prayer we can forbid and permit binding and loosing. These “keys” are our mighty weapons to the pulling down of strongholds spoken of in 2 Corinthians 10:4.

Setting Captives Free

“Setting captives free” is a marvelous principle that lies at the very heart of intercessory prayer. In a previous book, we discussed how to pray for lost people.³ In that chapter it is emphasized that a lost sinner is held captive by the devil. He is in spiritual chains. He is blinded by the evil one so that he cannot see the truth of the gospel. Satan has both blinded and bound the lost person. He needs emancipation and illumination. It is the task of a believing church to pray him free. Once we have driven the enemy off the battlefield of the human heart, then that unsaved person is once again free to make a moral choice regarding Jesus Christ.

When you meet a godless sinner, you should pity that person. He is in the “snare” of the evil one (2 Timothy 2:26). Without our warfare in his behalf, the sinner is hopelessly lost, yet with our persistent intercession, Satan will loose him and he can choose freely to come to Christ. This does not imply that each person we pray for will be saved, but many would be saved if the church could believe and take authority over the enemy. Jesus has given us the keys to the kingdom of heaven—let's learn to use them! The gates of hell cannot stand against a praying church.

Resources

1. A. T. Robertson, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol.1 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 149.
2. *The International Greek-English New Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1964).
3. Chapter 16 in *Questions Non-Christians Ask* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1977), pp.145-53.

What is Intercessory Prayer?

Much time spent with God is the secret of all successful praying. Prayer which is felt as a mighty force is the mediate or immediate product of much time spent with God. Our short prayers owe their point and efficiency to the long ones that have preceded them.

—E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*

Previously we have referred to the term “intercession.” To some people, this is a new concept. Let’s look at expanding on this idea of intercessory prayer. Much of the remaining pages of this section concerns the ministry of intercession. What is intercession? We are told in the Old Testament that when the Messiah comes, He will “make intercession” for the transgressors (*see Isaiah 53:12*). Jesus was, and is today, the great intercessor.

Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Jesus is this very moment living to intercede for us before the throne of God. The word *intercession* comes from a very old Greek word, which was a technical term for one who approaches a king, thus it was used to describe prayer as approaching God. Our English word *intrude* comes from this Greek word. To intercede is to intrude on someone in behalf of another. An intercessor is a “go-between” who pleads the case of someone else. To intercede is to be a mediator.

A Special Kind of Prayer

Prayer takes many forms, but perhaps the praying that is closest to the heart of God is when we pray earnestly in behalf of others. Intercessory prayer is sacrificial prayer. It is not selfish requests for personal wants, but rather it is prayer at its selfless best. Intercessory prayer can be a powerful weapon for good. It just may be the secret weapon of the church.

I once heard intercessory prayer described as God’s intercontinental ballistic missile. It can be aimed anywhere on earth; it always hits its target, traveling at the speed of thought. At times, it may even have a delayed detonation in that it may be answered years after it was “launched.”

The Lord Jesus launched a missile with your name on it two thousand years ago, when in **John 17:20** He prayed, “*I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word.*” The day you were saved, God answered the prayer of Jesus prayed for you ages ago. What a tremendous weapon is intercessory prayer. I believe every time someone is born again, God has answered the prayer of Jesus again. Usually, when anyone is saved, it is in answer to an intercessor’s efforts.

Parents have a secret weapon to use in defense of their children. When you pray for your children, you are storing up a history for that child. I have offered up prayers for my own children years ahead. When they were small, I prayed over their teenage years. This is planning for their future by putting God in their future. God will answer those prayers, years after I’ve prayed them. What’s marvelous about this is that Satan has no weapon against this “stored up grace.” This is also true when we pray for a lost person. The lost person may not listen to you when you witness to him

about God. He may not attend church with you or read the Bible you bought him. However, when you intercede for him and ask Jesus' Holy Spirit to knock on the door of that lost man's heart, Satan has no defense against your prayer. Jesus *will* go to that person and speak to him. Knowing this, should we not be launching our missiles daily? I fear the great sin of the modern church is our lack of intercession. We need the heart of Samuel the prophet who cried out, "*Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you*" (1 Samuel 12:23).

A Parable of Intercession

Jesus told many wonderful stories, but none simpler and moving than the story of the persistent neighbor who came knocking at midnight. Jesus told this parable to illustrate how God feels about intercessory prayer.

And He said to them, "Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he shall answer and say, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. And I say to you, ask and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened." Luke 11:5-10

Bold Praying

If there is one central point to be learned from this story, it is the principle of boldness, daring, and authority! Here comes this very rude guy, banging on his neighbor's door at midnight. He just won't quit knocking until the head of the household awakens and comes to the door to meet his demands. How rude, how persistent, how very stubborn this intruder is. Our Lord's disciples have just asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). In this parable, Jesus is clearly saying, "Come to God's throne boldly. Be daring in your requests."

You Cannot Ask Too Much

Our intercessions should be daring in the size of our requests. Notice the man comes and asks for *three* loaves, not just one. In those days, one loaf of bread was an entire day's supply of food! Amazing, yet that's how we are to come to God. Sadly, though, I've heard well-meaning people tell me you should not bother God with requests for "things." After all, God is too busy to bother with our everyday problems! Now, doesn't that sound spiritual? It may sound pious, but it is not biblical. I'm so glad our God isn't really like that. He wants us to ask big prayers. I've quoted it earlier in this book, but it needs to be shared again.

*Thou art coming to a king,
Large petitions with thee bring.
His grace and power are such,
You can never ask too much.*

Anything that is a genuine concern to you is of genuine concern to God. He wants to supply *all* your needs.

The fellow comes knocking at midnight, and he is not only bold enough to ask for three loaves, he also is stubborn. He will not give up. In verse 7, Jesus said the head of the household will not come to the door until the man just keeps on knocking. “I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.”

Why did he give him as much as he needed? It had nothing to do with friendship. It was because of what the King James Version calls his “importunity.” What in the world is importunity? This now less-familiar word was used to translate the Greek word for shamelessness. The *New American Bible* more accurately renders the word this way: The man was “shamelessly persistent”—he kept on knocking and finally, because of his persistence, the man arose from bed and gave him what he needed. This is how we are to repeatedly approach the throne of God in intercession. When praying for others—their salvation, protection, health, wealth, or whatever—Jesus said we are to ask and keep on asking, seeking, and knocking.’ Then God will give it to us.

Begging a Reluctant God?

A natural question arises here. Are we trying to “pry” things out of the clenched fist of a reluctant God? No, not at all. We must remember, this is a special kind of praying we are dealing with here. We are interceding for others, in such praying, until God answers one way or another. At times, God waits to answer because there is much spiritual growth to be had in the struggle of prayer itself. Recall Jacob wrestling with the angel of the Lord at the brook called Jabbok (**Genesis 32:2-29**). Throughout the night, Jacob struggled with this divine visitor. The angel pleaded for Jacob to release him as dawn approaches. Jacob demanded a blessing before he would release the angel. Reluctantly, the angel blessed Jacob, and Jacob released the mysterious visitor.

We could possibly get the impression here that there is something “fishy” about this all-night wrestling match. Since when can a man like Jacob wrestle with a mighty angel of God and pin him down and force a blessing out of him? It sounds to me as though that fight was fixed! I believe that angel was thoroughly enjoying the tussle. That angel was in no hurry to get loose. It was like a father wrestling with his little boy. It’s as though the angel were saying to himself, “Hold on Jacob; I’m going to bless you if you’ll just hold on a little longer.”

God has much to teach us during our seeking, asking, and knocking. Our faith is stretched, and our character is molded and hardened into persistence. What we learn in intercession is often more valuable than the answer. Praying for others builds in us humility and selfless love.

Intercession Demands Sacrifice

Another vital principle in the story is the sacrifice made by the man who knocked. At midnight, he went out seeking food for his friend. His friend is hungry, but he has no means to feed him, so he totally identifies with his friend’s hunger. He could have said, “If you are so hungry, you go out and wake up the neighbors, let them get angry with you.” But he didn’t do that. Instead, he so identified with the hunger of his friend that it became his problem. That is the heart of the intercessor: identification.

Have you ever felt that way for an unsaved friend? Has his lostness so consumed you that it became your burden? You put yourself in the place of that lost sinner and begin to carry his lostness in

your very soul. His need is your need.

The great reformer, John Knox of Scotland, cried out before the Queen of Scotland, “Give me Scotland or I die!” I see young David Brainerd kneeling down in the snow outside an Indian village, pleading to God to save the savages in those forests of New England during the years of 1743-1747. Young Brainerd would pray for those Indians until he fainted from exposure and exhaustion.

It took years of prayer and witness, but finally Brainerd broke through, and God opened the doors of evangelism. His sacrifice broke his health and cost him his life, but David Brainerd became the first real missionary to that area, and his life has inspired thousands to a ministry of intercession and witness.

Real intercessory praying and living demands the sacrifice of time, talent, even life itself. Only when we identify with the needs and hurts of others will we ever be prayer warriors for them. When we bleed, we bless; it can be no other way. May God give us the concern of Moses, who prayed,

“Alas, this people have committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written!” (Exodus 32:31-32).

That’s the spirit of identification and sacrifice.

Desperate Praying

As we study further the subject of intercessory prayer, we’ll see again and again the element of urgency in those who are true prayer warriors. The prayer warrior is often a desperate person. Indeed, the parable we are studying here just breathes urgency. The man comes at midnight, begging for food because he is desperate for help. He says, “a friend of mine has come to me..., and I have nothing to set before him” (Luke 11:6). The man had come to him and was his responsibility, and he took it seriously.

I pray more Christians today would assume responsibility for the task God gives each of us! Parents, your children are *your* charge to keep. God holds *you* responsible for their spiritual growth. It is not the church’s job to raise your child. It is your inescapable responsibility. Your first and foremost privilege is to pray daily for your children. How God longs to hear parents pray for their children! Tragically, we often do not pray until trouble comes, and then it often is too late. Until we are desperate, we’ll not pray urgent prayers.

The man in the parable was desperate because he had no food to give his visitor. Often, we do not pray faithfully because we think we have adequate resources within ourselves. If we have health, money, a job, or other material means, we tend not to depend on God. Just let those things evaporate, and we quickly discover our inadequate resources to cope with life. This is especially true in the spiritual realm. When we face problems that money and things cannot solve, then we are ready to pray.

The true intercessor *knows* that only God can meet the real needs of our lives. He knows “I have nothing” so he instinctively goes to *his* Heavenly Father, who has everything.

The Ministry of Intercession

Perhaps the greatest need in our world today is more true intercessors. Such people believe in a God who answers prayers. These people are willing to identify with a hurt and dying world. These people will not let go of God until He blesses them. In the pages to follow, we’ll go even deeper into this ministry of intercession, which is so urgently needed.

Resources

1. “Keep on” asking, seeking, knocking correctly translates the sense of the present tense of the verbs.

How to use Testimony in Witnessing

One of the most effective evangelism tools a disciple can possess is the skillful use of his personal testimony. Jesus called us to be His witnesses, and being a true witness means not only sharing the Gospel, but also sharing your personal experience of salvation. One need only look at the ministry of the Apostle Paul to see how the Holy Spirit can use a well-presented testimony.

Your Story

Three times in Scripture Paul tells the story of his experience with Christ. The Apostle tells his story in Galatians 1:13-24. He does so to refute those who were distorting the Gospel of Grace, and by telling his story he sought to validate his calling and his “Gospel.” There is authority and power in any man’s story. Your personal experience of a life event is hard to refute. This is why in a court of law; we call “witnesses” to the stand to testify. A witness is expected to simply tell what he saw or experienced. It is difficult to deny the power of one’s own story.

Every believer has a story and needs to learn to tell it well. Christ has changed his life forever and it is always exciting to hear that good news. The Apostle Paul’s testimony is found in Galatians One, in Acts twenty-two, and again in Acts twenty-six. What I notice in Paul’s testimony of his encounter with Christ is how he seems to have thought it out, organized it, and learned how to share it effectively.

Before, How, and Since

Look closely at Paul’s use of his testimony and you will see a pattern to it.

1 .His life before he met Christ.

In Acts he describes how he violently opposed Jesus and His followers. Paul had a past life before Christ presented Himself to him on the Damascus Road. He shares what he was like before he met Christ.

Even so, when you sit down to write out your story, it would be well to begin with a description of your life before you met Christ. What were you like without Christ? Have you ever thought it through and written it down? Carefully think it out, what was missing that the world, friends, money, education, or sin could not give you.

2. Then he shares how he met Christ.

In Acts 26:12-18, Paul vividly shares the details of how Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus. He leaves no doubt that there has been a time and a place where he met Christ.

Every Christian has had a moment of decision where he yielded heart and life to Christ. It is so powerful to tell the details of that encounter. When you write it down be visual, describing where were you, what were the circumstances, and how you personally received Christ as Savior and Lord.

3 .Finally, he describes his life since he met Christ.

In all three recorded uses of Paul's testimony, he tells us the difference Jesus has made in his daily life. God changed Saul the radical Jew to Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. He was now a different man.

Since Christ has come into your heart, are you a better person? Has He helped you overcome and cope with life's pressures? If so, that's a vital part of your story. People want to know if being "saved" really works. Does it benefit in daily living? Take time to write down the change Jesus has made in you since you met Him.

Brief and Non-Religious

Now here's the challenge. See if you can tell your story in 150-175 words or so. You'll have to re-write it a time or two, but brief is better than long. You see, you'll need to share your testimony "as you go" and "on the go." God will give you many opportunities to share in the strangest places; at the market where you shop, in the street, or on the bus, wherever people are. By practicing sharing in 150 words, you'll open doors to hungry hearts. As God wills you may get to sit down and share Scripture and the full plan of Salvation later.

Secondly, don't be too "religious." By that I mean, many people who are lost do not share the Christian's vocabulary. We tend to talk "Bible talk," by using words that outsiders to the church have never understood. Words like "born again," "repented" and "saved" are better explained than used. Try to write your story by putting your self in the place of the lost person, writing it so he can easily understand.

Practice on a Friend

Finally, when you've prayerfully crafted your encounter with Christ, using the outline of **Before, How, and Since**, ask a Christian friend to listen to it and help you perfect it by making suggestions. Maybe you and your friend both write your testimonies out and you memorize and practice on each other. Now that's a good idea!

One Final Word

As you become comfortable sharing your story, you can begin to add a few Bible verses to each section of your story. For example, in the "before I met Christ" section, as you are describing your feeling of need for purpose in life, you might quote Isaiah, "*all we like sheep have gone astray*" to illustrate that feeling. There are so many great verses to use along with your story, and the Word of God is "*quick and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword*" (**Hebrews 4:12**). God will use His Word to re-enforce your words.

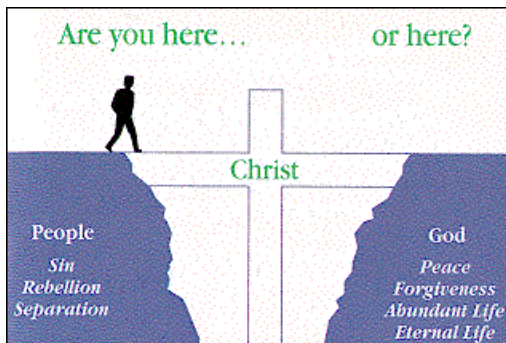
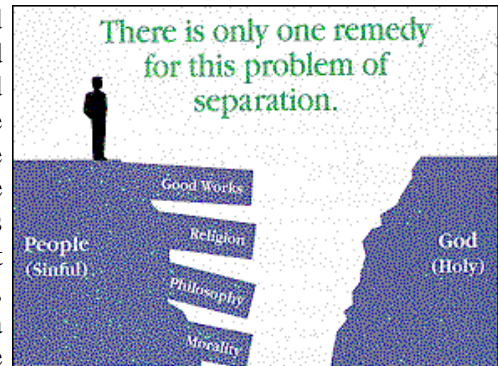
The Bridge Witness Method

One of the advantages of this presentation is that it is effective cross-culturally and can be drawn on a piece of paper, then left in the inquirer's possession to review what may have transpired. On a sample piece of paper draw two horizontal lines about two inches apart, then;



Begin by writing GOD on the right line and PEOPLE on the left line. State that in the beginning God made each person to have fellowship with him, but each person chose to go his or her own way, turned his or her back on God, rebelled against him, and so fell into sin. This caused a separation between people and God (draw the two sides of the cliff on God's side and people's side).

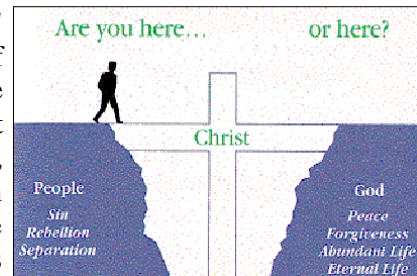
We know that a great separation exists between God and individuals because the Bible tells us that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Write the word SIN vertically between the two sides of the cliff, and write Romans 3:23 under the side of People, noting under it, "All have sinned," then circle the word "all." Now quote Romans 6:23, write it down under the People side, and note under it, "Sin earns spiritual death." Then quote Hebrews 9:27, write it down, and put down, "Judgment is coming." Then say, "This is the BAD NEWS, and write it down at the bottom. At this point a person is in a hopeless and helpless condition with no way of crossing the chasm.



Then quote Romans 5:8, and, as you are quoting it, draw the cross over the term "sin" by drawing the lines starting from God's side. Write down Romans 5:8 and "Christ died for us" underneath the side of God. Now quote Ephesians 2:8-9, write it down, and note,

Rom 10: 9-10

"Redemption is a free gift." (God's grace is free.) Then quote John 1:12, and as you are quoting it write "Believe" on the left side of the cross and "Receive" on the right; write the reference down on God's side with this notation under it: "We must believe and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior." Then say, "This is the GOOD NEWS, and write it on the bottom of that side. This now is the *only* way a person can cross the chasm of sin that separates the individual from God.



The sinner then believes (puts his or her total trust in) that Jesus' death on the cross paid the penalty for the individual's sin, then receives Christ into his or her life through a prayer that invites him to come in and take over. The result of this "transaction" is that Scripture now gives us assurance that a person then

becomes a child of God. When a person confesses Christ as Lord and Savior and believes in his atoning work on his or her behalf, the person is saved - quote Romans 10:9-10 and write it over the whole illustration.

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Bringing Men to Maturity

What are your objectives as you disciple another man/woman? What Christ-like qualities should the disciple-maker (DM) focus on? The Disciple-maker (DM) must work toward the goal of spiritual maturity in his disciple. Paul spoke of this in **Ephesians 4: 13**, “*until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*” The DM must have a “game-plan” to present his disciple complete in Christ.

- ***The DM helps his disciple fulfill his/her God-given Vision.***

You will work on helping him/her fulfill God’s call on their life. His Vision is his heart passion, his energy. The DM must build into that Vision.

Warning: Your man/woman’s vision or calling may not be what you choose for him, but it is what God has called him to do. Support what God is doing in your disciple’s life.

- ***The DM Helps his disciple grow in their Faith Walk***

Work on the disciple’s trust in God to meet every need, especially as it relates to the calling & vision. Focus on Bible truth’s that strengthens the faith walk. Verses like:

Hebrews 11:6; Jeremiah 29:11 & Philippians 4:19

- ***The DM seeks to develop Consistency in his disciple.***

Because we are God’s “lights” in the world, the disciple must be trained to be consistent in his lifestyle. Hold him accountable to be consistent in prayer, Quiet time, soul-winning, and faithfulness to the call of God in his life. **Matthew 5:16**

- ***The DM Helps the disciple become a Prayer/Warrior***

Nothing strengthens faith like real praying. Work on getting him to walk by faith, not sight, by helping him claim God’s promises thru prayer. He must spend time with you praying as he observes your faith and dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 4:6, 7; Proverbs 3:5, 6

- ***The DM Stresses the importance of Integrity & Accountability.***

Weekly give your disciple opportunities to be responsible, on time, and to keep commitments. Integrity is learned over time, and it must be focused upon as a Christ-like characteristic. **Proverbs 11:3, Titus 2:7**

- ***The DM works on the Apostolic qualities that Paul built into his disciples.***

From the Scriptures, search out with your disciple the qualities Paul expected of Timothy, Titus, and others he mentored. List these character Qualities by chapter & verse, then memorize verses that stress these qualities.

For Example: Paul says to Timothy, “*Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.*” **1st Tim. 4:12**

- ***The DM works on the disciple's leadership/multiplication skills.***
- Those who lead others are pacesetters and are not afraid to stand alone for Christ if need be. Your disciple must forever be challenged to lead and reproduce his life in others. Take him soul-winning, review his follow-up methods, and hold him accountable to use transferable concepts ***The DM encourages the disciple to be light & salt in his own family.***

Pacesetting begins at home. Your disciple, if married, must be challenged to lead his family in discipleship. Time must be given to helping him/her apply to his family the truths he is learning. Reproduction starts @ home. **Ephesians 5:23-28**