

**TRUTH-FREE
CHRISTIANITY:
THE COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIAN CULTURE
WHICH HAS SEIZED OUR AGE**

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Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law.

PREFACE

As I get older, I am noticing how so very few people there are today who are actually interested in Bible study. This book discusses the counterfeit Christian culture which has displaced the traditional church service that almost every church held 30 years ago.

Pulpits have been replaced by clear acrylic podiums; church organs have been replaced by Marshall amps; where there was once a baptistry, there is now a drum kit; and, where the mourner's bench once was, there are now monitor speakers and recessed flood lights.

Pews have been replaced with mosh pits. Instead of the lights being on during the church service, lights are turned down so that the light show and pyrotechnics behind the stage can have maximum appeal.

Pastors no longer wear a suit, shirt and tie; now they wear boot cut jeans, untucked shirts, Chukka boots and sport that closely-groomed facial beard which characterizes most self-absorbed men, that is, if he is a man.

The typical church service today looks more like a rock concert than a gathering of truth-seeking saints.

Quite frankly, I think I would rather just go to a real rock concert. At least, at the real rock concert, I would not be pretending to participate in genuine worship.

Maybe I am just showing my age, but I don't think so.

DAN LASH MAY 2023

INTRODUCTION

There is a culture of obstinance in America today which refuses to submit to a word of God based model of salvation, sanctification or a relationship with God in general. Those who embrace this culture insist that it is possible to have a relationship with God without a functional relationship in His word. However, this relationship has no authority beyond the imagination of their own self-deceived hearts. In fact, their idea of a relationship with God, for the most part, is with a god which serves no other purpose than a genie in a bottle that they can rub via their prayer life when things are not going their way.

This is the “relationship with God” of a counterfeit Christian culture, an imagined relationship with God, which listens for that still small voice in the garden instead of discerning the will of God through rightly discerned Bible teaching.

This relationship of the imagination has so permeated our society today that those of us who still practice a Biblically informed God experience are relegated to the status of the unreasonable. We are maligned because, after all, “God doesn’t expect us all to be theologians.” People no longer bring their Bibles to church because, after all, “Nobody can expect us to make any sense of that book; that’s just for the theologians.”

Generation after generation of people throughout history have experienced destruction in their lives because they too, like this present generation of Bible knowledge rejecters, thought that they could shun the knowledge of God and still survive.

In the history of His dealings with men, God has always required that people pay attention to His divinely sanctioned sources of information about Himself. Men, in their depravity, have always resisted this sort of relationship, demanding instead that they fashion a god after the imagination of their own hearts.

The history of the world is replete with nations of people who are no more because they, too, refused a Scripture directed relationship with God. They, too, were people who refused to humble themselves to “thus saith the Lord.”

Here are a few passages which demonstrate the ruin of people who imagined that they could have a relationship with God without exercising their minds in His word.

Hosea 4:6: My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being priest for Me;
Because you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.

The nation of Israel rejected a Bible doctrine based model of a relationship with God. When Christ arrived on the scene, they did not have the prerequisite knowledge of God abiding in their hearts that would have enabled them to recognize Christ and the signs of their times. Therefore, their nation was destroyed. THEY were no longer going to be the priestly nation of the Lord, commissioned by Him to bear HIS knowledge to the ends of the earth. Because they rejected a knowledge based relationship with the Lord, they had disqualified themselves for that purpose for which He was keeping them around; so, their nation was

destroyed and the priestly responsibilities of Israel were forfeited to the church.

Luke 19:41- 44: Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it,

⁴² saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

⁴³ "For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side,

⁴⁴ "and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Because the Israelites had neglected their Scriptures, they had a false view of Christ, and did not recognize Him when He arrived on the scene. They did not recognize the time of their visitation, that is, the person of Christ and the time when He was in their midst.

So the Lord predicts Israel's destruction. This destruction took place under Rome around 70 AD. The cause of this 70 AD judgment is further spelled out in the following context:

Isaiah 28:10-13: For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept,

Line upon line, line upon line,

Here a little, there a little."

¹¹ For with stammering lips and another tongue

He will speak to this people,

¹² To whom He said, "This *is* the rest *with which*

You may cause the weary to rest,"
And, "This *is* the refreshing";
Yet they would not hear.
¹³ But the word of the LORD was to them,
"Precept upon precept, precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little,"
That they might go and fall backward, and be broken
And snared and caught.

The above passage is one of the most complete prophecies in the Old Testament on the reason for the destruction of Israel. Notice two things in this context:

1. The degree to which and the way in which the people of Israel were to be occupied in His word, and
2. The impact of their failure to do so.

The degree to which God expected His people to consider His word was, "line upon line... precept upon precept... here a little, there a little." That is, they were to have been exercising their minds in systematic theology. This is what God expects of ALL of his children: working the word of God in their hearts until it all fits into one unified message. The child of God is to be comparing Scripture with Scripture in his own heart until he develops one unified picture and understanding of the God of the Bible and, in the process, he has God's priorities duplicated into his life as his own priorities.

As we also see in the above passage, Israel's failure to do so resulted in the brokenness and ensnarement of their nation, abandoned by God to the prosecutorial nations of the world, until, at last, they met their final demise (that is, until the Lord returns.)

This tragic end came about because Israel also thought they could be established in a relationship before God without exercising a relationship in His word.

The author of Hebrews likewise warns us that this same God is the One to whom we, today, are responsible. He expects us to investigate the truths of His Scriptures, that we might escape the same fate as previous generations, who thought they, too, could have a relationship with God without a functional relationship in His word.

Hebrews 2:1-3: Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

² For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,

³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*,

The Scriptures teach us that, to whom much is given, much shall be required. The Scriptures also teach us that, to each successive dispensation of saints, a greater enablement to know God had been dispensed than that which the previous dispensation had received.

Since the death and resurrection of Christ has occurred, God now immediately places a new man in the believer's heart and introduces the Holy Spirit into his heart as that new man's resident Teacher. Thus, the church age saint has more resources to know God than believers in any previous dispensation. With greater resources comes greater responsibility to take advantage of those resources. With those greater resources also comes greater consequence to disobedience.

Hebrews 10:28, 29: Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Those who name the name of Christ, but reject a working relationship in His Scriptures, must have a counterfeit source of revelation. That source of information is usually in the form of the imagined voice of God which they believe resides in their heart. When the teachings of Scripture are not properly leading those who want a relationship with God, the source that such people usually turn to is the source of their own depraved, self-deceiving hearts. This has been the case throughout the history of God's dealings with people.

The prophet Jeremiah frequently warns us about the deception of attempting to enshrine the internal witness of one's heart as the voice of the living God, imagining that His truth originates from dreams, prayers, or visions.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Jeremiah 23:25-36: I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.

- ²⁶ How long shall *this* be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, *they are* prophets of the deceit of their own heart;
- ²⁷ Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal.
- ²⁸ The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD.
- ²⁹ *Is* not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer *that* breaketh the rock in pieces?
- ³⁰ Therefore, behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour.
- ³¹ Behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.
- ³² Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.
- ³³ And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What *is* the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD.
- ³⁴ And *as for* the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house.
- ³⁵ Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, and every one to his brother, What hath the LORD answered? and, What hath the LORD spoken?
- ³⁶ And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more: for every man's word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God.

Churches in America today have become worship centers where people are focused on that which is going on within, instead of focusing on that which God has instructed from outside of themselves. People all across America today are raising their hands in worship services where they chant, over and over, lyrics of their empty promises, of their shallow commitments to God, until they “experience the presence of Jesus”

Then, after forty-five minutes of that, they hear a twenty-minute sermonette which is anything but systematic Bible teaching.

Truly, Paul’s warning to Timothy about the latter day condition of the church has arrived!

2 Timothy 4:1-4: I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:

² Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season.

Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

⁴ and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

I am frequently asked by people who live elsewhere, “Where can I find a grace-oriented Bible teaching church in my area?” My answer, sadly, usually is, “I don’t know.” The truth of the matter is, there are not many of us left. Those who name the name of Christ are leaving them. Do you know why? It is because of the truth we see taught in the above verse. Look at it again.

“They will not endure sound doctrine”

Enduring sound doctrine is the process of God through which He leads people to maturity. It involves a personal exercise of one's conscience in the truths of Scripture, leading to a genuine transformation of that person's mind so that God's thoughts become his thoughts, God's affections become his affections, and God's priorities become his priorities.

This transformation centers upon a habit of being consistently occupied in sound doctrine and patient with its transformative power in your life. And, quite frankly, most people refuse God the time in their life to participate in such a process. People today are too busy pursuing the lusts of their own hearts. They are too busy pursuing their entertainment schedule, their selfish ambitions, their misplaced priorities and, in the process, have rejected a doctrine based model of practical sanctification. This is so prevalent today that churches that still teach the Bible are relegated to “crackpot” status. “Oh don't go to THAT church, they are a bunch of Bible thumpers. Come to our church, it's a cool church. We put those cool-church crosses on the rear windows of our cars!”

And so, rather than submit to a process which demands they tear away their hearts from the affections of the world, they hire preachers who will preach to them in such a way so as to not challenge them to be engaged in the only process which can transform a saint: the assimilation of doctrine and passing of tests. Such hireling preachers never challenge them to do that.

In this way, the counterfeit Christian culture, according to their own lusts, heap unto themselves teachers.

By hiring a hireling, people can continue to pursue the lusts of their own hearts and never be challenged as to the counterfeit Christian experience in which they are involved. They can still be made to “feel” spiritual through internally focused “worship music,” but never make any real advancements in grace. They will go through their entire lives never having led a soul to Christ, never having brought conviction to the conscience of an unsaved person. Because of their refusal to be patient with sound doctrine, they never experience genuine transformation; nor do they ever export the fruit of righteousness into the lives of others.

Because they have “itching ears,” they seek out a preacher who will not challenge them by preaching what they need to hear; but will, rather, preach to them what they want to hear.

As Isaiah warned his audience:

Isaiah 30:9, 10: That this *is* a rebellious people, Lying children, Children *who* will not hear the law of the LORD;
¹⁰ Who say to the seers, "Do not see," And to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits.

If your relationship with God does not involve a relationship in His word, personal investigation of or personal agonizing over the truths of Scripture, it is a counterfeit which may leave you on the wrong side of eternity.

-Dan Lash, May 2023

1

TRUTH-FREE BELIEVING:

Counterfeit Christianity must have an exercise of faith. Since faith is often mentioned in the Scriptures as the link between man and God, then all those who name the name of Christ have some concept of faith.

Counterfeit Christian culture's view of faith is almost always a meritorious commodity of the heart. It is, quite often, blind trust in God, believing that He will answer our prayers if we simply pray and believe hard enough that He will. If we will just hold out faith long enough, believing Him for a miracle, then God will grant the desire of our heart.

People with this view of faith will, quite often, suffer an unrecoverable disillusion when their exercise of faith is not answered in the affirmative. When people are desperate for an answer to prayer, and they are trying to "believe God for their miracle," and that miracle does not then transpire, they often become forever disillusioned concerning the reality of God.

Let us, first of all, define what true faith is: Faith is having a handle on divine perspective. If you have been around my ministry for any amount of time, you have, no doubt, heard this definition.

Biblical faith is simply having a handle on divine perspective. That is, it is seeing things the way that God sees things and resting accordingly on that truth. This perspective is gleaned from diligent and systematic Bible study. A person whose faith is NOT grounded upon biblical truths has a faith which is grounded upon presumption.

The goal of God in His relationship with men is to build up people in their faith. That is, to build up people so that they share His outlook in their lives.

The accomplishment of this goal of God begins with an act of faith, a faith which embraces Christ's sin settling sacrifice as that, and that alone, which merits a person's relationship with God. This act of faith is referred to as saving faith.

Saving faith is a faith which properly views the fundamentals of God's plan of salvation from His perspective. The source of this faith is identified for us in the following verse:

Romans 10:17: So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Literally translated, this reads, "so faith comes from hearing and the hearing by means of the spoken by God." According to this verse, faith arises in a receptive conscience which gives the word of God's grace a hearing.

Saving faith is not a commodity that a person produces at will; it arises as the supernatural Spirit of God creates understanding in the human conscience through the supernatural word of God.

So, faith arises in a receptive conscience which will hear a particular message in the word of God. That message is the gospel of grace. More on that later.

Before the gospel can be believed, the conscience of the sinner must first become receptive to its consideration. This receptivity is created as the person, who has not yet believed the gospel, observes the fruit of righteousness being manifested by the person who has believed in a saving way. Paul speaks about this reality in the following context:

2 Corinthians 4:2: But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

One of the main sources of influence which creates receptivity in a person who has not yet believed is the instantaneous transformation of spiritual interest in the heart of the former unbeliever. One thing that an unsaved person cannot explain away is the new-found joy and peace and enlightenment of the newborn babe in Christ. It is an instant transformation of disposition and affections that the unsaved cannot explain away. Paul also speaks of the evangelistic power of this transformation in the following context:

1 Thessalonians 1:5-9: For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

⁶ And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

⁸ For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.

⁹ For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

The Thessalonians had become examples of vibrant, excited Christians who were causing others in the regions around Thessalonica to be motivated to investigate the gospel and believe. According to the above passage, people in Achaia and Macedonia were being impacted by the excitement of these newborn believers in Christ.

A study of the region in question reveals that Thessalonica was about 150 miles away from Achaia. Think about the power of that testimony: without telephones, radio, television or the internet, the people of Achaia, which was 150 miles from Thessalonica, had heard about the immediate change of affections in many believers in that city.

Paul did not need to produce introductory letters or explain large volumes of doctrine to these people. The gospel of grace had produced an exciting display of joy and peace in the hearts of the Thessalonians; and Macedonia and Achaia had obviously heard about it. The people in those two regions were anxious to hear what matter of truth it was that caused this instantaneous transformation of temperament in the believing citizens of Thessalonica.

Understand this: the most powerful inducement for an unbeliever to decide to give the gospel a hearing is the excitement of a newly saved saint.

2 Corinthians 3:2, 3: You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;
³ clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart.

Once again, we can see here that it is the excitement of the life that the gospel has produced that can propel others to give the gospel a hearing. Consider also the following passage:

1 Corinthians 14:23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are* unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: ²⁵ And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

In the above example, the confusion which occurs in the typical charismatic worship service today does not create an informed conviction; but, rather, fear concerning the sanity of those who are participating in such a worship event. However, when the word of God is spoken and the truths of Scripture are rejoicing believers' hearts, the Holy Spirit is participating in that conviction. He is creating conviction in the hearts of those who have not yet believed the gospel of grace by the manifestation of His fruit in the lives of those who have believed.

Madhouse religion, such as is manifested in many worship services today, doesn't attract people to the gospel of grace; it scares them off! It is a manifestation of confusion, of which no rational person wants a part. However, joy and peace filled believers speaking forth grace truths is compelling, and brings a powerful conviction upon the unbeliever, that he needs what the child of God has.

The most powerful witness to the authenticity of Scripture, and its power over a person's life, is the excitement of the newly born again child of God, whose affections have been immediately transformed by the Spirit of God. Moreover, it is the regenerative power of the word of the truth which accomplishes this immediate transformation.

Without Bible truth, believing is impossible!

When such evidence is presented in the presence of unbelievers, they are made to fear the consequences of not having what their newly saved acquaintance has. This fear creates uneasiness concerning his current unsaved state and, hopefully, an incentive to give the gospel of grace a hearing.

It takes gospel truth to bring a person into a relationship with God.

2 Corinthians 4:3, 4: but even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,
⁴ whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

According to the above passage, people are not saved because the light of the glorious gospel of Christ has not illumined their minds to the point of saving faith.

In addition, we can see, from the verses below, it takes gospel truth from the Scriptures to enable a person to believe and be born again.

1 Peter 1:23: having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

James 1:18: Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

There exists today, in the counterfeit Christianity that has gripped our culture, a desire for a conversion experience without the illumination of the conscience by the supernatural power of the saving gospel message.

People want the new birth without having been brought forth by the word of His truth.

James 1:18: Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Christian testimony creates receptivity to the gospel message in the mind of the lost. When the unsaved witness the temperament transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the believer, the Holy Spirit takes that testimony and creates fear in the one who is not established in grace. This creates receptivity to the gospel message. But, along with that receptivity, the gospel message from the word of God must be heard and understood.

The need for salvation is also brought to light as the unsaved honestly comes to grips with his lack of personal righteousness. This recognition also creates uneasiness concerning his ill preparedness to meet God, especially when confronted by the fruit of righteousness present in the life of the believers he knows.

This combination creates a candidate ripe for the new birth; if this candidate will give the truth of the gospel of grace a hearing, he can be saved.

Unfortunately for many hungry souls today, the counterfeit Christian culture in which they find themselves also has a counterfeit method to a genuine conversion experience: A truth-free conversion experience.

What do all of the following salvation methods have in common?

Ask Jesus to save you.
Ask Jesus to come into your heart.
Repent of your sins.
Surrender to the Lordship of Christ.
Trust Jesus to save you.
Commit your life to Jesus.
Invite Jesus into your life.
Confess Christ.
Make Christ the Lord of your life.
Gave my life to Christ.

What do all of these man-made clichés have in common?

None of these salvation formulas are ever employed in the Bible. None of these man-made clichés are ever employed in Scripture to lead a person to Christ.

These are all man-made responses to God which people believe will establish them in a relationship with God: responses which do not involve hearing and believing the word of the Gospel. They are all things that people can DO to try to be saved, apart from hearing and believing the gospel. They are all counterfeit conversion formulas which produce counterfeit conversion experiences.

One tool that the devil has developed to allow people to go through life, religious but unconverted, are man-made clichés such as the ones referenced above. Requests to “ask Jesus into your heart,” “surrender to Christ,” or “ask for forgiveness” are just a few of the many man-made clichés which people believe they can act out, apart from experiencing the illuminating power of the gospel, upon which they believe they can hang the eternal destinies of their souls. They are things that people can DO, instead of hearing and believing a message concerning something that the Lord Jesus has already DONE concerning their sins.

In considering the event which causes people to pass from death unto life, there is no substitute for the illuminating power of the gospel impacting a receptive human conscience to enable a person to believe. No man-made clichéd response will ever substitute for such an event in a person’s life.

The Scriptures teach that we pass from death unto life when we first hear and then believe the gospel. The gospel message

centers upon the good news of the blood of Christ as that which can establish a person in a right relationship with God. The gospel invitation is an invitation to receive a gift of righteousness, bought and paid for through the shed blood of Christ for our sins, which is able to commend us to God in an everlasting way.

To be saved, a person needs to comprehend that the righteousness needed to be established in an eternally right relationship with God is received as a gift: a gift for which the Lord Jesus died in order that it might be freely bestowed upon the one who believes.

A person is saved when he is persuaded, through examination of the promises of Scripture, that righteousness, as a free gift, is available through the sin settling sacrifice of Christ, free for the believing.

The saving response to the gospel message of Christ, and Him crucified, is an assurance that the blood of Christ is totally sufficient to establish a person in an eternally right relationship with God, leading to a decision; that is, an act of faith in which the person rests the eternal destiny of his soul on the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice as that which can eternally commend him to the Father.

However, a person cannot believe in that of which he is not certain. Moreover, it is the sinner's contemplation of those gospel truths as presented, primarily, in the teaching of Paul, which leads a person to that persuasion.

Once again, it is as Paul stated in Romans 10:17, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

The sinner does not need to have a PHD in theology to be saved. He does, however, need to HEAR the word of the gospel and then believe. Moreover, he cannot believe until he has heard.

Here is another distortion of the Gospel:

There are many today in the counterfeit Christian Culture who attempt to say that the gospel is, "BELIEVE."

The gospel message revolves around the message of the cross as being that work of Christ which is the source of God's gift of righteousness. The saving response to the gospel message is to first understand it, be assured of its truth, and then believe it for oneself.

However, the gospel message is not, itself, "believe"

"Believe" is not the gospel; it is the saving response to the gospel. The difference is this: A person cannot exercise saving faith towards a message which he has not yet understood, a message unto which he has not yet been persuaded. Such an attempt would be just another man-made response of truth-free believing.

The truth is that Jesus has satisfied the divine justice of God against the sinner's sin. Jesus has made the sinner's peace through the blood of His cross. The finished work of Christ has forever settled the insurmountable obstacle of the sinner's sin, such that now the sinner is free to, for himself, rest in that sacrifice as that which merits an everlastingly right standing before the Father.

When a person is persuaded that this is God's plan of salvation, and will believe it for himself, God declares him to be forever righteous.

Being saved takes an understanding concerning one truth of the Bible, and that truth is how the sacrifice of Christ can result in your eternally right standing before the Father. However, without that knowledge of the truth there is no new birth. There is no such thing as truth-free believing.

2

Truth-free Christian Living

Let's continue to talk about the phenomenon which has gripped American Churches today: the concept of truth-free Christianity, the desire, of those who want a relationship with God, to despise a relationship with His word.

In our previous chapter on this issue, we talked about the truth-free born again experience which has permeated Christendom.

In this chapter, we will focus on the truth-free deception of the practical Christian experience, or trying to make sense of what is going on in one's life without a Biblical frame of reference reigning in one's soul.

Truth-free, day-by-day Christian living is all about trial avoidance. When a trial comes our way, we seek to avoid it, through prayer, without, first of all, seeking to discern what may be the purpose for the trial.

In James chapter 5, we have an example of a believer who is seeking to recover from an illness.

James 5:14, 15: Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

The purpose for calling for the elders of the church is for them to discern the reason for the trial. If you want to know why you are going through a trial, ask a mature believer in your church (that is, if you REALLY want to know)!

There is a reason why this verse reads, “let him call for the elders of the church.” There are many times when an elders would like to stick his nose in your business, or browbeat some poor, immature believer who is floundering terribly in this world; but there is a limit to the extent that they can exhort someone. Scripture tells us that elders are not your lords.

As Peter told elders in I Peter chapter 1,

1 Peter 5:1-3: The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

If you really want to know why you are going through hell on earth, ask a mature believer who is in possession of practical

Bible truth. He knows. But he also knows not to rebuke a stupid man.

Proverbs 9:7: He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked *man getteth* himself a blot (a bruise).

God wants the trials of the believer to lead him to His word. The purpose of trials is to cause assimilation of Bible doctrine to become the top priority in the believer's life.

So, how long will the trial continue? As long as it takes for the child of God to become oriented in Bible truth.

Trials are for the purpose of the clearing away the superfluous cares of this world so that the Holy Spirit can successfully implant the word of God within the heart of the child of God. How long will troubles last? As long as consistent prioritization of hearing Bible teaching is not a high priority in one's life.

1 Peter 5:10: But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

Just how does God perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you?

John 17:17: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

Matthew 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

1 Peter 1:6, 7: In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Trials are all about the purification of your perspective until it mirrors God's divine perspective. Once again, what is faith? It is having a handle on divine perspective.

So what does the truth-free counterfeit Christian perspective crowd do with trials? They despise them. They fire off their prayer requests on Facebook, "Oh pray for me, that the Lord would remove this trial! My loved one is sick!

Well, maybe if they, and their household, were consistently pursuing grace truth, they would not need the suffering. After all, our context says "IF NEED BE" you have been grieved by various trials.

Trying to "pray away" your trials is, in fact, despising the chastening of the Lord:

Hebrews 12:5-13: And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,

¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Notice the steady state of those who have been disciplined, and have properly responded to, the chastening of the Lord (verse 11): The peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Look again at verse 12, “strengthen the hands that hang down and the feeble knees”.

The discipline of the Lord can be so severe that it impacts your physical health. “Strengthen the hands that fall down and the feeble knees” is a reference to the physical illness and mental depression which can overtake the child of God who refuses to respond to the chastening of the Lord.

“Make straight paths for your feet.” What does that mean? It means to take out of the way the obstacles which are keeping you from coming to the Lord and learning at His feet.

Truth Free Prayer Requests

Very closely related to truth-free Christian living is truth-free prayer.

There are many things that people think can be solved by prayer, but are actually solved by another means.

Truth-free prayer is praying contrary to the will of God. The aim of the prayers of the truth-starved person is usually the removal of trials, side-stepping of personal responsibility, or the fulfillment of unsanctified desires.

The wise response to a trial would be a prayer which invites the Lord to leave the trial in place until it produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness in your life, as we see in the following verse:

Hebrews 12:11: Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God is not a genie in a bottle, to be rubbed when we want something. If you are seeking to use your prayer life as your pathway to spiritual adultery, don't expect much.

James 4:1-5: Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members?

² You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

⁴ Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

Notice the reason for unanswered prayer in verse 3, "that you may consume it upon your own pleasures." God is not your pimp. He is not going enable your finances so that you can go whoring after toys to consume upon your own pleasures.

A Christian's pleasure and joy is to revolve around advancing God's will in his personal life and sphere of influence. That is to be the believer's source of joy.

A primary purpose of prayer is to bring to pass the circumstances which need to be in place, in order that those things which please the Lord can be brought into the realm of possibility. Prayer ignites the sovereignty of God in your sphere of influence for the purpose of the ministry of reconciliation.

Prayer needs to be for the right motive, which, again, is to ignite the sovereignty of God in the believer's sphere of influence for the purpose of ministry; not for the purpose of getting what we want, but that a higher good might be attained in our sphere.

It is not always the will of God that a person is healed; but it is always the will of God that hearts are softened to hear and respond to the word of God, in order that they might be saved. That is the highest good our prayers can achieve.

The highest good that can be accomplished for God is exhorting people to contemplate His life-giving truth, at whatever stage they are in their life journey. Sometimes, for that to happen, suffering is necessary to break up hard hearts in order to create fertile ground that will receive the life-giving seed of the word of God. Then, after that word has germinated, more suffering may be necessary to keep the superfluous cares of the world from choking out the word of God, in order that the weeds of worldly care do not stunt the believer's growth.

So, don't try to pray that suffering out of your sphere of influence. You do not know whose heart is being prepared by your trial!

That is why prayer to remove suffering is usually ill-advised. That trial is, most likely, serving a much larger and greater purpose.

Our prayers need to be informed by the word God abiding in our hearts. When that is the case, we have every reason to believe that our prayers will be answered.

John 15:7: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

In other words, if you are in communion with God, and His word is abiding in your heart, your prayers will already be sanctified and according to His will. It will not be truth-free prayer.

When His words are abiding in you, you will be more likely asking according to His will and not just for your personal wants.

Another abuse of prayer is attempting to discern the will of God for your life through prayer.

The will of God for your life is not determined through a two-way prayer life with God. Those who attempt to discern the will of God in this way are opening themselves up to the self-deception of their own lusts.

As we have we previously talked about in this book, our hearts are not a trustworthy source of direction.

Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,
And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”

We do not discern the will of God by listening to a voice from within; discernment comes by heeding the TRUTH of the word of God, apart from the deception of our untrustworthy hearts.

Psalms 119:9: How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

Romans 12:2: And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

When God’s truth is reigning in your heart, you will not be constantly wondering what is the will of God; you will already know it, because His divine perspective (a purified faith), His truth, will be ALREADY abiding upon your heart.

Jude 1:20, 21: But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,
²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Building yourself up on your most holy divine perspective (faith), will result in praying according to the will of the Holy Spirit.

Divine perspective (faith) needs to be constantly renewed in the believer.

Here is another thing that the faithful are not to attempt to accomplish through prayer: raising their kids.

Don't try to pawn off on God that which He has already commanded you to do. Don't try to pull "a Hannah" with God concerning your kids and commit your responsibility to the Lord, while you live an untransformed life before them. "Oh, I don't know what happened to my kids! I prayed for them every day!"

God has committed children to parents, and expects them to have the discernment, temperament and financial means to raise them.

Proverbs 22:6: Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it.

Ephesians 6:4: And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Another truth about prayer that we need to properly understand is that needs are not met solely through prayer, but are mostly the result of sanctified priorities.

Here is that verse which appears at least once a week in my sermons:

Matthew 6:31-33: "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

³² "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

³³ "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Look at the sanctified priorities in verse 33.

God is not going to enable His child to fulfill unsanctified priorities in his life. If divine perspective does not go very deep in your soul, expect your finances to be tight.

God supplies abundance to the household whose goals center around accomplishing His will. This is so that such a household will have the financial resources to conduct personal ministry.

2 Corinthians 9:8: And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work.

Literally, the last half of this verse reads, "that you may have more than enough for every good work."

Truth-bathed priorities of the heart impact the financial well-being of the saint. It certainly does not hurt to pray about finances, but the pressure will not be off until the Lord can trust you with abundance.

Psalm 1:1-3: Blessed *is* the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
² But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
³ He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.

3

UNESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH: The Spiritual Results of Truth-free Christianity

Let's, first of all, talk about what a biblical experience with the Lord is supposed to look like, and about the mental deliberations which are to occur in the genuine child of God.

Now, I know that I will lose half of you on this first statement, because you despise Bible teaching, but the Scriptures teach us that Christianity is a cognitive reality. That is, God has given man intellect that he might exercise that intellect towards His word, in the pursuit of the knowledge of God. He has also provided to the seeking man with pastors and teachers to get him started in his own journey in the word of God.

Ephesians 4:11-16: And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ --

¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Young seeking child of God, if you have, at your disposal, a gifted teacher, somebody who can help you to make sense of the word of God, you need to swallow your pride and take advantage of his spiritual gift.

Unfortunately for me, my first teachers had already gone to be with the Lord. Fortunately for me, they had written some pretty sound commentaries and theological reference works that pointed me in the direction of being established in the faith. Nineteenth century theologian Charles Hodge, as well as Lewis Sperry Chafer, H.A Ironside, and William R Newell were some of those men who had gone on before, but left writings behind, that helped me to become established in the faith.

Like the Ethiopian treasurer, we all need, or needed, teachers to point us in the right direction:

Acts 8:26-32: Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert.

²⁷ So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,

²⁸ was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

³⁰ So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

So, seeking one, swallow your pride and seek out a teacher who will help to establish you in the grace of God. As He did for the Ethiopian eunuch, God will send your hungry soul a Bible teacher to help you out, if you will give the teacher an honest hearing.

Unfortunately, the person who is already established in a counterfeit Christian culture, who is already in some sort of conspicuous or leadership capacity, will rarely give a grace Bible teacher a hearing. They are like Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night because he was too proud to admit that he needed direction. Thus, some people will be forever trapped in this counterfeit Christian culture, simply because they have already been elevated to a conspicuous status in their assembly. "Hey, I am already a worship leader in my church. How embarrassing it would be for ME to need help!"

Here is another verse on being established in the faith.

Colossians 2:1-5: For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh

² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and **attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,**

³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

⁴ Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.

⁵ For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. (*Emphasis added.*)

“All the riches of the full assurance of understanding”

When Bible teaching makes all of the pieces of the puzzle fit, what results is a powerfully rich faith experience, continually abiding upon a person’s heart: The full assurance of understanding.

By the way, the mystery of God, in the above passage, is not some reference to some mystical knowledge concerning God. In New Testament vocabulary, “the mystery of God” is the knowledge concerning God’s roll-out of His plan of salvation to the gentiles which had not yet been firmly established in the Old Testament.

Those truths were hidden and not yet revealed, because it had not yet been determined whether the appearance of the earthly Kingdom of Christ was going to occur soon after his death and resurrection, or be punctuated by the church age. Because God had made a genuine invitation to Israel for a soon to appear Kingdom, if Israel had received their Savior, the roll-out of the plan of salvation to the gentiles would have been more in line with

what we see in the Old Testament. However, a soon to appear Kingdom did not occur as we see in the following context:

Luke 13:34-35: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen *gathers* her brood under *her* wings, but you were not willing!

³⁵ "See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until *the time* comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! "

If that appearance had been decreed to have taken place soon after the resurrection of Christ, then the roll-out of the plan of salvation to the Gentiles would have occurred differently. However, because the soon to appear Kingdom did not occur, God chose the Gentiles to become His ambassadors in Israel's place, fully experiencing His salvation. In that case, the church, and not Israel, was to become His sacred assembly.

This is idea behind the teaching concerning the mystery of God. It has to do with the roll-out of the plan of salvation to the gentiles which had not yet been determined in the Old Testament.

Let's jump back now into the lesson at hand: how the child of God is to be truly established in the faith.

Colossians 2:6-8: As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

⁷ rooted and built up in Him and, established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

⁸ Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

“Established in the faith” means being rooted in God’s perspective as gleaned from His word. A believer who is established in the faith will not be easily shaken when he is challenged with a false perspective on the gospel.

Below is another verse, literally translated, on being established in the faith:

Ephesians 3:17-19: that Christ may dwell in your hearts through the faith in love rooted and grounded,
¹⁸ that may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height –
¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

“Being filled with all the fullness of God” means having one’s character matured in the direction of Christ’s likeness by means of a consistent occupation with the fundamentals of grace.

Truth-free Christianity does not focus on Bible truth as that which grounds a person in a walk with the Lord. Rather, truth-free Christianity is focused on signs, wonders, fleeces, miracles, dreams and all sorts of experiences as a means to attempt to discern the will and ways of God.

And believe me, the truth-free Christian has lots and lots of experiences upon which they try to hang their faith.

The worship service of truth-free Christians is a parading out of one supernatural experience after another: a sort of one-upmanship of who can parade out the biggest miracle of the week. Their “worship” consists of miracle after miracle, followed by ten choruses of “Our God Is an Awesome God,” then another song inviting Jesus into their midst so that they can “experience His presence” (whatever that feels like.) After forty-five minutes of swapping testimonies, swaying to the music and chanting twenty choruses of their favorite worship song, church is dismissed.

Sound familiar? If it doesn't then you have not recently attended a protestant church in America.

This is the counterfeit Christian Culture which has now gripped America.

Bible teaching has been replaced by public testimonies.

Traditional hymns that express sound Bible doctrine have been replaced with repetitive chants designed to elevate people to a heightened state of emotional consciousness, until they believe that they are “experiencing the presence of Jesus.”

I do not need to be manipulated by repetitive choruses in order to “experience the presence of Jesus.” He is already living on the inside of me, through the Person of the Holy Spirit. I mean, how much closer can HE get than already dwelling on the inside???

As we again read in again Ephesians:

Ephesians 3:17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through the faith in love rooted and grounded.

The Scriptures teach that a focus on Biblical truth results in joy and peace in our life. We have no need to somehow seek out and mystically “experience the presence of Jesus”

Romans 15:13: Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You do not know to what spirit you are exposing yourself when your focus is the worship service of the counterfeit Christian culture; but, I can tell you, having talked to a few people who are totally steeped in this counterfeit culture, it is not a spirit that I would want.

Music in the counterfeit Christian culture is no longer an opportunity to reflect on cardinal Christian truths; it is now a rock and roll performance at the front of the church, during which most of the baby boomers in the pew are wondering, “Hey, I wonder if they could do ‘China Grove’ just like the Doobies?”

I was visiting one of these churches several years ago because they were going to have a guest speaker I wished to hear. I got there a quite a bit early, and the worship band was playing “Stairway to Heaven” by Led Zeppelin. I wished that I had brought my alto recorder so that I could have performed the recorder solo at the intro.

By the way, I am not trying to tell you what music you should or should not listen to. That is between you and the Holy Spirit to inform your conscience. At church, however, I think music should teach Bible truth, not metaphysical truth. Music at church should

teach truth, not attempt to manipulate the person in the pew into an altered state of consciousness.

When the church service of the counterfeit Christian culture it is all over, people leave the church, not at all established in sound Bible teaching. Instead, they are even more hardened against it, imagining that what they have just experienced is true worship and feeling indignant towards teachers, like me, who insist that a genuine encounter with God is more than repetitive chants and raised hands swaying to music. They leave church not being able to connect the dots of even the most basic of Biblical truths, and despising teachers who suggest that such a skill is their duty.

The truth-free lifestyle of truth-free Christianity creates emotionally-crippled people. Emotionally crippled, I say, because they are never able to come to the absolute assurance of salvation.

Rather than coming to assurance, they repress their doubts and compare themselves to the others in the church, just hoping for the best. They are never challenged within their fellowship because they are all experiencing the same anxieties.

Just hoping for the best outcome, in light of eternity is not good enough. Hell is hot and eternity is forever and you have only one life, while your heart is still beating, to discover the saving knowledge of God. People who seek to be involved with the Lord, but do not seek that path via a Biblically informed pathway, are usually unstable people.

I quite often attempt to engage such people with regards to assurance. If I ask a person point blank about why they believe

they are going to heaven, and they offer me a non-biblical answer, like a man made response, they really start getting nervous and fearful and desperately seek to get out of the conversation. Then they try to avoid me.

If a conversation about the Bible with another person makes you afraid, you need to be afraid, because you are not established in the faith, rooted and grounded in love. You are, rather, being caught up, Sunday after Sunday, in the experience of your worship service and never getting established in gospel truth.

In the truth-free counterfeit Christian culture, if a person is seriously trying to pursue that means of a relationship with God, he is opening himself up for all sorts of evil influences in his (or her) life. His relationship with the Lord is not gauged by an analysis of Biblical truth but, instead, about the signs and lying wonders that are occurring around him. And believe me, the more a person pursues that sort of knowledge, the more “signs and lying wonders” he will see.

Even though signs and wonders were once used by God to establish the authority of Christ and His apostles, since the canon of Scripture is now complete, it is the great counterfeiter who, from that point forward, is now using these tactics:

2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10: The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,
¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

Matthew 7:21-23: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven

²² " Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders (miracles) in Your name?'

²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' "

Notice the contrast between verses 1 and 6 of the following context.

1 Timothy 4:1-6: Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

³ forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

⁴ For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving;

⁵ for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

⁶ If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

Notice the contrast in the above passage between doctrines of demons and words of faith and good doctrine which Paul states that Timothy has carefully followed.

The truth-free Christian is looking in the wrong place for a stable Christian life.

The more entrenched a person becomes in signs and wonders theology, the more spooky they become, and the spookier they behave and look.

They pay attention to their dreams. They see strange lights. So and so died and, at that precise moment, something unusual happened. “I believe in flying saucers and space aliens, don’t you?” “I love listening to Art Bell and ‘Coast to Coast AM’.”

The more a person continues in the signs and wonders mode of the Christian life, the spookier their reality becomes, and the more quickly they descend into the realm of the occult.

The more someone gives heed to the signs and wonders mentality of trying to ascertain the realities of God, the more the powers of darkness feeds his superstitions.

Superstition leads to being drawn in, more and more, from a counterfeit Christian culture into the darkness of the occult itself. Understand this: the devil loves imprecision. This is because imprecision concerning the truth is the stepping stone between truth and deception, between light and darkness, and between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of demons.

I have met lots of people who find fault with my teaching because I am sometimes a bit “stilted” in my presentation. It seems so because I’m trying to communicate the grace of God with precision. If you are not a child of God, you will be annoyed by the precision. However, if you are a seeker of truth, the precision will eventually deliver you from the imprecision of the counterfeit Christian culture.

The devil loves imprecision expressed in the name of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 11:4: For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted -- you may well put up with it!

Notice there IS “another Jesus,” a different spirit and a different gospel out there today.

Truth-free Christianity embraces the name of “Jesus,” (usually pronounced “JEEEEEE-ZAS”). But, it is another “Jesus,” and a different spirit and a different gospel message for the plan of salvation. It’s never the “Lord Jesus”. It simply “JEEEEEZAS”: The Jesus of the counterfeit Christian Culture: The Jesus of imprecision.

The counterfeit Christian culture preaches a false gospel which leads to a wrong spirit, which leads to the counterfeit Christian experience of the signs- and wonders-focused spooky person. Worst of all, it leads its practitioners to the wrong side of eternity.

The truth-free Christian has a frustratingly imprecise answer for the desperate need of a person’s soul. The truth-free Christian usually tells people that what they need is “Jesus;” and, moreover, this “Jesus” can be received by some other means than the Biblically defined means of hearing, understanding and believing the gospel.

The truth-free Christian culture’s plan of salvation is, “Surrender to Christ,” or “Make Christ the Lord of your life,” or

“Pray the sinner’s prayer,” or “Invite Jesus into your life” (Or whatever Greg Laurie’s gospel presentation of the month is). All man-made responses, avoiding the only event which can result in a genuine conversion experience: hearing, comprehending and believing the gospel of the sin settling sacrifice of Christ in which He, and His finished work, has already provided access to a relationship with the Father, based upon His finished work, free for the believing.

However the reception of that gift requires hearing and contemplating the gospel of grace and embracing its truth for one’s eternal life.

Unfortunately for the person caught up in the counterfeit Christian culture, that culture has so negatively biased a person against any Bible teaching, that he won’t give a Bible-based, simple gospel message a hearing. Even the simple gospel message constitutes too much doctrine for him.

In reality, the truth-free Christian doesn’t need the truth-free “Jesus” of the counterfeit Christian culture. He actually needs a new person on the inside, coupled with the Holy Spirit, called alongside this new man, to teach him rightly discerned Bible truth. The combination of these three things, when consistently attended to by the child of God, will produce the stability that the believer wants and needs.

The participant in the truth-free Christian culture eventually becomes guided by the powers of darkness.

One disturbing thing that Cindy and I have recently noticed, while doing some of our book giveaways at Bible conferences, is that it is very common for the devil to send one of his truth-free

Christianity practitioners to our booth, in an attempt to jeopardize our conversation, just before a genuine seeker of truth shows up. It happens all of the time. The devil sends us somebody he uses to jeopardize our time, with account after account of signs and wonders, while a genuine seeker for truth is picking up and considering one of our books on assurance.

I think that this may be one reason why the Lord sent His workers out two by two: so that one person can stay engaged with the devil's decoy while the other deals with the sincere seeker of truth.

I can't tell you how many times Cindy and I have been hopelessly locked in conversation with a truth-free Christian practitioner, listening to all the signs and wonders that are going on in his life, when a genuine truth seeker comes along. Cindy deliberately keeps the devil's distracter occupied, to free me to pivot away so that I may deal with the genuine truth seeker.

Don't fall for the devil's counterfeit Christian culture which has found its way into our churches today. Repent of your obstinacy towards Bible teaching before it is eternally too late.

4

TRUTH FREE CHRISTIANITY BY PROXY

It can probably be said that this phenomenon is actually nothing new. World history is replete with people who desire to seek a relationship with God without having a personal, consistent reflection in the word of God. The masses of the religious have always desired to pay somebody else to practice their religion for them. Many of the great cathedrals of the world were funded by people whose participation in their faith was by proxy, paying money for a priest to exercise the elements of their religion in a language that they did not even understand.

Paying somebody else to exercise the tenets of one's faith is certainly nothing new. The masses have always wanted a religion in which they could rely on somebody else to do their necessary mental contemplation which God commands every one of his children to exercise. "That's for the theologians," is a saying which reflects slothfulness towards the word of God, which attitude is not warranted in the Scripture.

It seems the greater the guilt complex a religious leader can lay on those who pay others to worship God for them, the greater the offering.

"As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from Purgatory springs".

The Scriptures teach that every child of God is to possess, in his spirit, the same content of faith. This faith is to serve as his functional frame of reference, against which to evaluate all of the challenges and decisions of this life. This faith is to equip and enable every child of God for the ministry of reconciliation and discipleship of others in his sphere influence.

That this is the case can be seen in the following context:

Ephesians 4:11-13: And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,
¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,
¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

The only difference between the pastor/teacher and the lay person is that the pastor/teacher labors in word and doctrine, in order that he is able to effectively communicate the knowledge he possesses, so that the lay person may assimilate that knowledge, and then defend it before others, as his own.

We can see this truth in verse 13: “Till we come to the unity of the faith.” This means that the pastor/teacher and the lay person are both to possess the identical truth with the same divine perspective of God reigning upon their hearts.

But, notice something else about the context in verse 12:

“For the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry.”

Verse 12 literally reads, “for the equipping of the saints, unto the word of the ministry, unto the edification of the body of Christ.”

Verse 12 spells out two things that each and every person in the pew is supposed to be able to do:

3. The work of the ministry. This is a reference to the ministry of reconciliation: that is, the work of leading sinners from being alienated in their minds from God unto the place where they have heard and believed the gospel and are now reconciled in their minds to God, experiencing the joy and peace of being in a Father/son relationship with God.
4. For the edification, or building up, of the body of Christ. This speaks of the work in the believer which needs to be done after someone has initially believed in Christ, establishing them in grace and the full assurance of understanding.

But here is the most important thing I want you to notice about verse 12: WHO is to be doing the work of the ministry.

“For the equipping of the SAINTS for the work of the ministry.”

The rank and file child of God is to be doing the work of the ministry of reconciliation, and the work of building up the body of Christ, just as the pastor is to do it. Each believer is to possess the same knowledge of the truth that the pastor possesses, and to become skilled in the ministry.

When somebody is hurting in the church, it should not be the job only of the pastor to come along side that person.

1 Corinthians 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Moreover, when somebody is stumbling spiritually, it should not be the job of the pastor alone to try to restore him.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

In no place in Scripture do we see that only the ministerial staff should be involved in looking out for others:

Hebrews 3:13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

The primary job of the pastor is spelled out in the following verse.

1 Timothy 5:17: Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

The pastor is to teach and look out for the overall spiritual health of the assembly. He is to watch for, and protect the congregation from, false doctrine that might creep into the congregation. But the pastor is not to serve as the proxy minister for others. That is, he is not to perform the work of the ministry

and edify the saints alone, which work God has called each and every member of the body of Christ to do.

Up until the year 2019, I always held down a full time job while pastoring a church. I let the congregation know that I expected them, alongside me, to do the hospital visitation, the nursing home visitation, and calling on others. They almost always were more than happy to step up to the plate.

So the NON-pastor/teacher should not be practicing his religion by proxy; that is, he should not be paying others to exercise their minds in truth, be renewed in that truth and help lead others in that truth. The child of God is not authorized to spend the week pursuing his own selfish pleasures and then wonder why the pastor is not growing the church.

Many pastors today also want to exercise their spiritual duties by proxy. They also refuse to put forth the necessary mental exertion in the word of God. They, too, want a truth-free Christian experience by proxy. They, too, want to pay somebody else to put forth the due diligence that God has called them to exercise in the sacred Scriptures.

God has called the faithful pastor to labor in word and teaching, not in opinions of other men.

1 Timothy 5:17: Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Many pastors and teachers are too busy trying to keep people in the pews to do the necessary work of doing their own labor in the word of God: to allow the Holy Spirit to show THEM

great and awesome truths from the word of God. So, Sunday after Sunday, they simply regurgitate somebody else's spiritual lunch. They have to rely upon the latest work of their favorite Calvinist because they are not exercising any original discernment in Scripture. As a result, they, too, become a proxy of somebody else's Bible study.

I am amazed at how often someone asks me if I have bought the latest book by one of the "super heroes" of the faith. I have never bought or gleaned my theology out of one of those trendy Christian books.

I, for one, do not want to feed on the regurgitated remains of somebody else's spiritual lunch. I, for myself, want to mine the depths of the riches of the Word of God and gain those daily fresh perspectives and insights that the Holy Spirit gives us as we mine God's word. I want to, myself, experience the blessings of the following verse:

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.

One of the byproducts of systematic Bible study is supposed to be that you do not close your mind before your system of belief is mature. Somebody who is getting their truth straight from diligent Bible study is not afraid to consider and weigh the opinions of others in light of the teaching of Scripture. A person who is securely founded in the grace of God is not afraid to discern and discuss the teachings of others at the risk of feeling threatened. A pastor who is feeding on Scripture himself is going to be comfortable and not feel threatened by such a discussion.

However, the pastor whose beliefs have been derived from the opinions of other men, that is, the proxy teacher, is afraid to consider the beliefs of others because, if he WERE to engage in a conversation with another pastor or truth seeker concerning his beliefs, that conversation might reveal the shallowness of his grasp on the truth. So, instead of being willing to discuss truth, the proxy led pastor often becomes persecutorial and cliquish towards those with whom he does not agree, forming his own echo chamber of fellowship with those in his clique, in which they dare not to stray from the straight and narrow path of the particular denomination.

The Bible defines such cliquish behavior as carnal. Oh, don't get me wrong; Christians are to be careful not to embrace false doctrine. But much of the persecution that goes on in pastors' fellowships is not REALLY about false doctrine avoidance; it is about the fear of being exposed a parrot, who can only duplicate the beliefs of their particular denomination.

1 Corinthians 3:3, 4: for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

You can insert the name of your denomination's "hero of the faith" in verse four. Notice that Paul calls the practice of settling to be conformed to the faith of another man "carnality." It is carnality because a believer is supposed to be taught by the Holy Spirit from the word of God. When the Holy Spirit is involved in a person's growth, there will also be kindness and graciousness towards one another. But, when growth is based upon the

opinions of another man, there will be intimidation and fear when straying from the talking points of one's favorite spiritual guru.

I am amazed at the number of times I am shut down when I try to discuss Bible truth with another pastor. They are afraid of the conversation. The reason for their fear is that, unfortunately, they spend so much time focused on keeping the church full, that they do not have time to do their personal due diligence in their own Bible study.

There are a whole lot of Christian leaders today who will not take the time to mine the word of God for themselves, so they settle for the opinions of other men.

Matthew 15:9: “ ‘And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ “

They just want to believe what their “heroes of the faith” believe and thus avoid their own personal Bible study. They are parroting the knowledge of their teachers, teachers who are parroting the knowledge of the saints of hundreds of years past and afraid to step out on their own to do their own serious original mining of the wealth of the word of God. It is as if nobody believes the Holy Spirit is still able to lead believers in their own interpretation of Scripture. It is teaching by proxy another man's spiritual lunch.

From my own experience in pastoring, I have learned that we need to allow the Holy Spirit to lead people. If a person is hungry for the truth, is mining for himself the truths of the word of God, and does not have an ulterior motive for his activities, the Holy Spirit will lead him in the right direction. It is the people who are not motivated by a desire to know the truth, more than they

know their own denominational teachings, who will not arrive at the right conclusions.

Many of the “isms” that people believe today are nothing more than an immature belief structure; in other words, a belief structure which an entire denomination has adopted, before the founder of that denomination could grow to spiritual maturity; and, perhaps, he died before he was able to discover his error. As a result, the entire denomination is stuck in somebody else’s immature belief structure; and, therefore, disrespectful toward those who DO want to mine the word of God for more truth.

The genuinely humble seeker of truth, who is born again and indwelt by the Spirit of God, should be headed in the right direction. Moreover, if he is not and he is challenged by a person whom the Lord leads into his life who has the truth, he will experience a genuine Holy Spirit shake up of his faith. Hopefully, he is not already too invested in the error of his favorite denomination, so that he can move away from the error and experience the liberty of the truth, that truth that will set him free.

John 8:31, 32: Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed;

³² And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Many pastors are hesitant to teach a truth that they have discovered, if they know their sect will reject it. They know that, if they do, they might lose their position as pastor of the church.

So, they play it safe and stick to the belief system of the hierarchy of their movement. This way, they don't run the risk of being excommunicated from their movement, and from their job.

If the truth be told, the real reason there is very little fresh truth being discovered from Scripture today is because those, trying to make a living off of full time Christian service, do not dare depart from the "old paths" if they hope to see another "new paycheck" this week in their mail box.

I mean, the independent, fundamental Baptists are anything but independent. Buddy, if you step out line in any of their traditions, your church will be split in 60 days and YOU will be out of a job!

This is not a good position in which to be before the Lord. The pastor/teacher needs to be free to be taught by the Holy Spirit in his own original studies and not allow himself to be intimidated by his denomination to toe the line of that group.

5

MERITORIOUS BELIEVING: PART 1

Meritorious believing is trying to get your way with God through the power of your faith. It is the belief that just believing hard enough will make it happen. It is a belief that a person's faith is the key to unlocking the power of God. "Claim your miracle!"

Let's take a look at a couple of verses from which this belief is derived and then assign these teachings to their proper context.

If this is indeed the case, that we can "out faith" the will of God and, by our faith, produce miracles, then this must be taught somewhere in Scripture.

But, if this understanding is true, then such a belief would fly in the face of other Scriptures which teach that our prayers have to be according to the will of God in order for them to be answered.

Here are three passages which would demonstrate the point that prayers have to be in accordance with the will of God in order to be answered.

James 4:2, 3: You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Notice here, why some prayers are not answered. Prayers that are selfish and for the purpose of getting THINGS we want will not be answered, because such things would enable a person to find joy in something other than partnering with God in ministry.

James 1:5-8: If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Wisdom in the Scriptures is God enabled interpersonal skills.

One problem with the audience of James is that many of them wanted the favor of the Lord for the wrong reasons. They wanted things to consume on their own pleasures; they wanted manipulative power over others. One such power some were seeking was the ability to manipulate others to get their way. James talks about that in the above context.

If you are asking for wisdom in order to manipulate people to your own self-promoting ends, you are in the ministry for the wrong reason. God is not going to give you the skill to deceive others into a relationship so that you can consume them for your

own lusts. Don't go to church to recruit Amway representatives into your pyramid scheme.

Asking in doubt is praying for something for the questionable, ulterior motive of gaining power over other people. We know that God wants people to be brought into a closer relationship with Himself through the fruit of righteousness being manifested in our lives. We also know that the Lord doesn't want you to take advantage of the saints to your own greedy or power seeking ends.

I remember, years ago, somebody asking me the lead question that pyramid scheme recruiters are taught to ask. He asked me, "Dan would you like to make more money?" My response was, "No. The Lord is taking care of my needs just fine, I don't need more money." That kind of set him back. I then told him that a pastor of a church should not have a financial motive in dealing with people. People should not have to wonder if I am interested in them for their souls or for a commission check in a pyramid scheme.

Here is another verse about faith and getting prayers answered.

John 15:7: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

Notice also that the above verse does not teach that, if we simply believe hard enough, we will get what we pray for. We have to be in fellowship with God and have His perspective abiding in our hearts when we approach God in order to get our prayers answered.

You would be amazed at how the Lord answers your prayers when those prayers are motivated by unselfish desires and are for the purpose of bringing others closer in their relationship with God, even if they are not going to your church.

Let's now look at three verses that people quote to claim this power of faith, and then seek to understand these promises in their proper context.

Matthew 17:20: So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

Matthew 21:21: So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done

Mark 11:21-26: And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

²² So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God.

²³ "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

²⁴ "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

²⁵ " And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

²⁶ "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Okay, so what do these three contexts all mention? They mention the removing of mountains into the sea by speaking that event, by faith, into a reality.

Before I go any further, let me say this: These verses all have their ultimate fulfillment in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. They are instructions for the Israelite and his participation in, what was to be the soon to appear Kingdom. The Lord Jesus Himself was the initial manifestation of that kingdom and, before it was over, was going to have a profound impact on the entire topography of Israel, of which these three verses have just made mention.

The Old Testament actually predicts this is going happen; that is, the mountains of Israel are going to be uprooted and cast into the sea. The topography of Israel is going to be transformed to make it more inhabitable, more productive for its citizens and more area will be utilized to accommodate all the saints which will be gathered into it. The topography of Israel will also be transformed to make Jerusalem the center of world government.

Here are a few passages which demonstrate that this is the case:

Isaiah 40:3, 4: The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the LORD;

Make straight in the desert
A highway for our God.
⁴ Every valley shall be exalted
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough places smooth;”

Notice here that every mountain will be brought low, and every rough place will be made smooth. A highway will traverse the former barren lands of Israel to accommodate Mount Zion as the center of world government.

By the way, this is what John the Baptist was preaching: how that the coming kingdom was going appear and how the topographical changes were going to occur with that appearing:

Luke 3:4-6: as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make His paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough ways smooth;

⁶ And all flesh shall see the salvation of God

In these prophecies, we see that every mountain will be brought low. The topography of Israel is going to be altered for the coming Kingdom. Mount Zion will be so elevated above the hills of the earth that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God,” that is, the glory of His Kingdom.

Here is another Old Testament prophecy concerning this reality of topographical transformation of Israel:

Ezekiel 36:8-13: "But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they are about to come.

9 "For indeed I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown.

10 "I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt.

11 "I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bear young; I will make you inhabited as in former times, and do better for you than at your beginnings. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.

12 "Yes, I will cause men to walk on you, My people Israel; they shall take possession of you, and you shall be their inheritance; no more shall you bereave them of children."

The mountains will no longer be dangerous for children because the treacherous, rocky mountain peaks of Israel will be transformed into rolling meadows.

Pay close attention also to the following prophecy concerning the expansion of the land of promise in every direction from its present day boundaries. This passage is talking about the regathering of Israel and the expansion of the land to accommodate them.

Zechariah 10:10-12: I will also bring them back from the land of Egypt,
And gather them from Assyria.
I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon,
Until no [more room] is found for them.

¹¹ He shall pass through the sea with affliction,
And strike the waves of the sea:
All the depths of the River shall dry up.
Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought down,
And the scepter of Egypt shall depart.
¹² "So I will strengthen them in the LORD,
And they shall walk up and down in His name,"
Says the LORD.

Notice that the Lord expands the borders of Israel in every direction, even into the Mediterranean Sea. He shall pass through the sea with affliction and strike the waves of the sea.

The following verse is a millennial Psalm; that is, a Psalm which has its fulfillment during the millennial reign of Christ. Notice that the Psalm starts out with the very presence of God (Christ) in a time of trouble. This Psalm concerns the initial days of the Millennium, when the transformation of the topography of Israel is occurring.

Psalm 46:1-3: God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
² Therefore we will not fear,
Even though the earth be removed,
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the
sea;
³ [Though] its waters roar [and] be troubled,
[Though] the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah

Understand that John the Baptist and Jesus are teaching in the context of the soon to appear Kingdom, and Jesus, in fact, is the Kingdom in seed form. It does not take a whole lot of speculation to understand that the Lord may actually assign some

of His saints in the Kingdom the task of assisting in excavating the land of promise with their very words.

So we can see, at the initiation of the Kingdom, it will be the will of God that the topography of Israel be transformed, and it may be that a Jewish saint will be assigned the task of speaking that into reality. If that is the case, then these three mountain moving contexts in Matthew and Mark make a whole lot more sense.

Let's read two of them again:

Mark 11:23: "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

Matthew 17:20: So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

By the way, Jesus is the initial manifestation of the Kingdom, the mustard seed of the Kingdom.

Matthew 13:31, 32: Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,
³² "which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."

To have the faith of a mustard seed is to share the perspective of Jesus at the beginning of the Millennium and to know how the topography of Israel is to be altered. The mustard seed participant, in beginning of the Millennial Kingdom, will know exactly what he should be doing in that day.

So, what did Jesus have in mind when He told his audience the day would come when they could move mountains? It had to do with the Kingdom which the Lord Jesus had come to this earth to establish, if His people had received Him. Plan A for the Lord Jesus, when He came to this earth, was to establish His kingdom on earth. One of the things that Old Testament Scripture records for us concerning that kingdom is the drastic change in the topography of the land of Israel. Scripture records for us that the mountainous terrain of Israel will be smoothed out when the Lord Jesus one day sets up His Kingdom in Israel. In fact, Almighty God will transplant those mountains into the Mediterranean Sea in order to expand the borders of Israel in every direction. The Scriptures also teach that the Lord Jesus will allow faithful Jewish saints to help Him call the shots in His earthly kingdom. So, there is coming a day on this earth when Jewish saints will, with the power of God, excavate their promised land by their very words.

These mountain moving promises of the Lord Jesus were not some platitudinous sayings of how we ought to be able to handle those seemingly insurmountable obstacles in our lives, if only our faith would simply be strong enough. No, one day, faithful Israelites will literally help the Lord excavate the land of promise to make room for all those faithful Jewish saints which will be coming into the Kingdom. You see, then, that some of those hard sayings of Jesus are not really so hard to understand if

we will just take them at face value, and look elsewhere in the Scriptures for their explanation.

It will not be, in that day, a hard thing to believe that a mountain could be moved; not if the saint, in that day, understands, that it IS the will of God.

We should not be trying to pray the trials of God out of our lives. We should invite the Lord to leave them right where they are until they produce a deeper comprehension and appreciation for the plan of God for our lives. The child of God needs to humble himself under his trials, allowing them to produce the fruit which God desires in their life.

1 Peter 5:6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

By the way, the Kingdom plans of the Lord were abandoned during the last week of the earthly ministry of Jesus because of the ill preparedness of the Israelites.

Matthew 23:33-39: "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?

³⁴ "Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city,

³⁵ "that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

³⁶ "Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

³⁷ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

³⁸ "See! Your house is left to you desolate;

³⁹ "for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' "

The Kingdom plans of Christ for Israel were put on hold and the priestly responsibilities of the Jewish nation were to be passed on to another group, which today we know as the church.

Matthew 21:42-44: Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

'The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief cornerstone.

This was the LORD's doing,

And it is marvelous in our eyes'?

⁴³ " Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

⁴⁴ **"And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."**

6

MERITORIOUS BELIEVING PART 2

Let's now talk about another error that many make concerning the idea that our faith can "merit," in the here and now, certain favors from God:

"Believe Jesus for your Miracle."

There are many preachers today in Christendom who teach that we must "believe Jesus for our miracle." If we believe hard enough, we'll have it; or, if we just send in our "faith seed," we will get our miracle.

The Lord's interaction with the Canaanite women, in Matthew 15:22-28, is sometimes used as a passage to demonstrate that a persistent faith will automatically result in what we want.

Matthew 15:22-28: And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."

²³ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us."

²⁴ But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

²⁵ Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"

²⁶ But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs."

²⁷ And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

²⁸ Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great *is* your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

What is going on here? This is a non-Jewish saint who was not going to take "no" for an answer. It is obvious that she is a saint by her initial address of Jesus as Lord and Son of David.

Jesus did not answer her a word, initially, because the proper protocol at the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus was that He was on a Jewish sheep recovery mission, not a gentile salvation or a gentile saint blessing mission. So, He initially refused to help her, but eventually engaged her in conversation.

"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of Israel".

This was according to the salvific timetable of God: to the Jew first and also to the Greek. But this gentile believing saint was having none of THAT excuse! So she kept pressing Him according to her accurate knowledge of the salvific timetable of God, which reveals that she understood the salvation of God; and so the conversation continues.

"Lord, help me!"

In verse 25, she indignantly exclaims, "LORD, HELP ME!" as if to say, YOU KNOW WHO I AM; how dare you not answer my request! She knew the Lord and the Lord knew her.

I always love it when a child of God, full of divine perspective, comes to the throne of grace like this. The Bible tells us that we are to come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and help in a time of need.

So the Lord continues to engage this woman:

"It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs."

And here, the woman's answer demonstrates that she has an advanced knowledge of the soteriological timetable of God, concerning the blessings of the roll-out of the plan of salvation to the Gentiles, under Old Testament plan A.

"Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

So what does this answer demonstrate that the Canaanite woman understood? She understood that the Jews got first crack at the bountiful feast, which is the salvation of God; but, if they are sloppy with their handling of the grace of God, and drop the ball on it -- a "meat" ball, if you will -- the gentile dogs get a crack at it.

She understood the following verse:

Isaiah 49:6: Indeed He says,
'It is too small a thing that You (Christ) should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,

And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

Jesus could no longer resist. He says,

“Oh woman, great is your faith!”

By the way, her great faith was not a belief that “faith” could win the day. It was not, “If I believe hard enough, I will get what I want.”

Her faith was great because it was an informed faith, informed with previously assimilated Bible truth. She had a handle on the prophetic timetable of God and the order in which His salvation was to be rolled out to the world.

“Even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table” was to say, “Lord, You know and I KNOW that my turn, as a gentile saint, is coming; it might as well be now! Why CAN’T it be now?”

So, the Lord grants the request of one if His justified gentile saints.

The woman’s request was granted, not because of the power of her faith, but because of the sound, strong reasoned logic behind her argument with the Lord. She was, in her prayer, coming to the Lord as instructed in the following verse.

Isaiah 41:21: "Present your case," says the LORD. "Bring forth your strong reasons," says the King of Jacob.

“Oh woman, great is your faith” was NOT to say that it was the woman’s persistent, meritorious believing which delivered her daughter. It was the woman’s handle on the salvific timetable of the roll-out of salvation to the gentiles, which she had gleaned from the Old Testament, which was the powerful component of her interaction with the Lord. She called Jesus “Lord.” She called Him “Son of David.” She believed in the mercy which the Son of David would accomplish. She understood that salvation was also for the gentiles and she understood from the Scriptures that the Jews got first crack at this salvation thing. She had a great handle on God’s salvific perspective, as gleaned from previously assimilated Bible truth. She was belligerently persistent. She addressed Him in the vocative Greek case, “LORD, HELP ME!” She knew the Lord and was DETERMINED to force Him to abandon His official “Jews only” protocol in this instance.

To make a long story short, she won the debate.

SHE WON THE DEBATE!

Verse 28, again, says,

Matthew 15:28: Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Sometimes we have not because we ask not.

If you want to get your prayers answered, it is not the power of your faith that can sway the decision in your favor; it is, rather, whether your request is in agreement with the will of God. Does your request bring with it a strong Biblical reason why the Lord should answer your request? Does your request share God’s

goals concerning that which He desires to accomplish in this world?

"Bring forth your strong reasons,"

Sometimes, when somebody is sick or dying and people ask me to pray for them to recover, my problem is this: I cannot give the Father a "strong reason" to answer that prayer.

Understand this: extending the life of somebody who has never expressed, and is not likely to express, a desire to have a Biblically defined relationship with the Father is not really something that I can pray for, unless there is a chance that such a person, on his or her deathbed, is going to become positively disposed to hear and believe the message of God's grace.

Everyone will die; family members will all experience sorrow over a death; hopefully, that sorrow will produce the humbling of an obstinate will in some of those family members, which might create a window of opportunity to hear the word of the gospel and believe.

However, if a person's life has been characterized by life-long personal pleasure seeking, self-indulgence and a general hedonistic lifestyle, then, as far as God and His priorities are concerned, the best thing that He may be able to get out of that life is a good funeral sermon, provided that the officiant at that funeral is not one of these truth-starved ear-ticklers whom the funeral home hires because his or her sermons never offend anyone.

Understand the priority of God in the souls of men: His priority is to bring people to a place where they will hear, comprehend and believe the message of His saving grace. This message, once believed, causes people to enter into a Father-son relationship with God. From that starting point, He desires that people mature in that sonship unto the place where that son or daughter is enjoying a full, abundant, Bible-truth directed fellowship with Himself, being filled with the fruits of righteousness and partnering with Him in the ministry of reconciliation for the souls of others. This is the relationship that interests God: a relationship which will be celebrated into eternity.

If a person is not somewhere on the pathway of becoming engaged with God in such a relationship, I cannot honestly go to God in prayer and ask Him to keep that dying person around; I cannot give God a “strong reason” to do so.

When I go to God in prayer, I present to God a “strong reason” to answer that prayer. If you are a newly saved person who is growing and glowing for the Lord and impacting others for His grace, and you suddenly fall ill and are in danger of dying, I CAN give the Lord a strong reason to keep you around.

Here is an example of faith; that is, a handle on His perspective, which will sway the heart of God:

Exodus 32:7-14: And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*.

⁸ "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' "

⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people!

¹⁰ "Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

¹¹ Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

¹² "Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.

¹³ "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.' "

¹⁴ So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

Another passage which is sometimes used to teach that our prayers will be answered, if we will simply just hold out in our faith and are persistent, is the parable of the persistent widow:

Luke 18:1-8: Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

² saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.

³ "Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.'

⁴ "And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man,

⁵ 'yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' "

⁶ Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said.

⁷ "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?

⁸ "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

This above context does not teach that the Lord is going to soon answer the vengeful prayer of one of His saints. The very context mitigates against such an interpretation.

Notice that verse 7 says, "though he bears long with them." That means that the answer to the saint's prayer for justice against an adversary is going to be delayed. However, when the justice finally does fall, it will happen quickly.

An important key to being able to rightly understand this passage is the word "quickly." This word often causes confusion with our Bible interpretation. At first glance, our initial understanding of this parable is that it is a promise by the Lord to quickly answer our prayer for extracting justice on our adversary. This is because we misunderstand the meaning of the word "quickly" in this verse.

We need to, in Scripture, distinguish between the idea of "soon" as opposed to "quickly." There are several Greek words which look almost identical in the Greek, and are translated similarly; but the two have a subtle difference

"Soon" means "not too far from the present time."

“Quickly” means “an event will transpire rapidly once that event has begun.”

The Greek words under consideration here are all stemmed off of the root “ταχ,” from which we get our word “tachometer.” A tachometer measures speed or rate.

In the underlying Greek of the Scriptures, there are several different words that are used to reference speed:

ταχύς, εἶα υ, “quick, swift” appears to be a reference to the rate at which something is going to transpire, once it begins.

It is used in the following context to refer to the speed at which the events at the second coming of Christ are going to transpire, once they have begun.

Revelation 3:11: “Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

The other word, similar, but having a slight difference in meaning, references how soon an event is going to occur:

ταχέως adv. “at once, soon, hastily,” is a reference to how far into the future something is going to occur.

Galatians 1:6: I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,

“Quickly,” however, does not mean “not far from the present;” rather it is a reference to how rapidly events will transpire once they begin.

When the Lord says that an event is going to transpire quickly, the exhortation is that you had better be ready before the event begins to transpire because, once it has begun, you are not going to be able to change the outcome of the event as it impacts you. Once the judgment begins, there will be no way to escape. The preparations for the judgment needed to have taken place before the judgment began.

God's justice will fall on the persecutors of His saints quickly, but it may not fall soon. One of the reasons for the persecution of the saints is that the depth of the Godly character of the saint might shine through during a time of persecution.

2 Thessalonians 1:9: so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,
⁵ *which is* manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;
⁶ since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,
⁷ and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,
⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.
⁹ These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

Here, we see that vengeance will be extracted by God upon our persecutors when Christ returns. That is not to say that He cannot reap it sooner, but that the child of God is not warranted to

spend his earthly sojourning with a spirit full of vengeful thoughts and prayers. The blessing which he experiences from the Lord should more than offset any ill treatment that he receives from the men of this world.

Let's look again at the last verse of the parable of the persistent widow:

Luke 18:8: "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Luke 18:8: λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ποιήσει τὴν ἐκδίκησιν αὐτῶν ἐν τάχει πλὴν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐλθὼν ἄρα εὕρησει τὴν πίστιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς

Literally in the Greek, this verse reads as follows:

"I say to you that the future accomplishment of justice for them will be quick.
Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes shall he find faith upon the earth?"

In other words, when Christ returns, will there be anybody who is patiently waiting on God to extract justice for them, or are they going to be trying to seek it themselves?

So, what is the parable of the persistent widow teaching? It is teaching that the Lord is going to eventually answer your prayer for justice, but don't let the delay in extracted justice upon your adversaries prevent you from praying for things that are definitely the will of God.

He will extract His justice on those who unjustly treat his saints and, when He does, that justice will fall quickly (speedily).

The parable of the persistent widow is not a promise that vindictive prayers are going to be answered in a timely fashion.

If the persistent widow is one of the Lord's own, He will one day extract justice for her. However, the throne of grace is not to be turned into a throne at which to seek personal vengeance. Saints are not to seek personal vengeance; rather, they are to be so bountifully experiencing the blessings of grace in their lives, that they will barely notice the persecutions of their adversaries.

7

THE FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD

Since the Scriptures mention that there is a faith which pleases God, we would do well to look at the characteristics of that faith.

Here is the verse in Scripture which talks about a faith that pleases God.

Hebrews 11:6: But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The first thing that must be stated about this verse is that it cannot be talking about justifying faith. We are not saved because we have somehow worked up a faith in our hearts which “pleases” God.

Such a formula would be salvation by works; that is, salvation based upon working up a sense of faith within our souls and somehow imagining that such a faith were a commodity which we could exchange for eternal life.

There are actually many people who have such a view of saving faith. This view suggests that saving faith is a commodity of the soul which one must cultivate and exchange for eternal life.

Proponents of this view focus all of their energies on trying to work up a sense of faith within their souls, thinking that their salvation depends on such faith.

In fact, those whose saving faith is not the result of hearing and understanding the gospel of grace are practicing exactly that. To such people, their faith IS the object of saving faith. Their faith is in their act of believing, instead of being in the sin-settling sacrifice of Christ, in which God calls people to rest.

Biblically speaking, saving faith arises in the heart of the person hungering and thirsting for righteousness when he gives the gospel message a hearing in his conscience. This hearing of the life-giving seed of the gospel of grace illumines the conscience up to the point of saving faith. The conscience, thus illumined by the power of the gospel of grace, is, at that point, able to exercise an act of personal receptivity towards that gospel message, a receptivity in which the person, thus illumined, decides to rest the eternal destiny of his person upon the facts presented in the gospel.

The gospel message is the good news of Christ having interceded for us sinners on the cross; which intercession can be the basis of an eternally right relationship with God. We, by faith, can stand justified before God, not because of the force of our faith; but, rather, by the peace that Jesus has already made concerning our sin, through the blood of His cross.

Colossians 1:20: and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Where there was once tension with God, concerning the unsettled sin debt of mankind, there now peace, the peace of the satisfied justice of God which Jesus accomplished for us. The gospel proclamation is the message of a satisfaction of the divine justice of God concerning the sinner's sin, a satisfaction in which we can safely rest the eternal destinies of our souls. To decide to rest the eternal destiny of one's soul in that sin-settling sacrifice of Christ, is to commit an act of saving faith.

While, certainly, such a faith transaction is pleasing to God, it is not our faith which has pleased God unto the point of salvation. It is Christ and His sin-settling sacrifice for us which has made our peace with God.

Ephesians 2:17, 18: And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

What truly pleases the Lord, with reference to our standing before the Father, is not the strength of our faith; it is Christ's sacrifice made for us.

Isaiah 53:10, 11: Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

¹¹ He shall see the travail of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

The person who is struggling with the assurance of salvation needs to simply expose his conscience to a proper articulation of

the gospel of grace, until the Holy Spirit of God takes that message and illumines his conscience to the point of being able to exercise saving faith in the facts of that gospel message.

Let's talk now about the faith spelled out in the context of Hebrews chapter 11. It is not saving faith, but a faith which will one day be rewarded, a faith in which only those who are already saved can function. This is a faith which pleases God.

Understand this: saving faith looks back to the cross; living faith looks forward to the reward.

Hebrews chapter 11 is not talking about saving faith, but about living faith.

The faith spoken of in Hebrews 11 is a God-pleasing faith and a rewarded faith.

Hebrews 11:6: But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Likewise, in verse 26 of Hebrews 11, it is stated that the motive behind Moses' obedience in Egypt is that he looked for the reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26: By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,
²⁵ choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,
²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

If it was this faith - the faith which was to be one day rewarded - that was the basis of justification, then justification is based upon a meritorious faith. This faith of Moses was not a faith which received righteousness as a gift; it was faith which waited for a future reward for saying, "No" to a self-indulgent lifestyle; and considered that doing the will of God, in the midst of God's enslaved people, was a greater reward than all of the money in the world. (To which, by the way, Moses was entitled as the adopted grandson of Pharaoh.)

The faith which pleases is full of the divine perspective of the Lord, and acts upon that perspective, even at the expense of all of the world's creature comforts.

Hebrews 11:17-19: By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*,
¹⁸ of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called,"
¹⁹ concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Abraham's act of obedience was not the point in his life where he was declared to be righteous. The event of offering Isaac upon the altar didn't happen until Genesis chapter 22. The account of Abraham's justification is cited for us in Genesis, chapters 12 and 15.

But God was pleased with Abraham, who was going to obey Him and slay his only son, because he believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead. As pleased as God was with the obedience of Abraham in Genesis 22, that was not the point at which Abraham was justified. Even though his faith recorded in

Genesis 22 merited great reward, it was not that act which merited his righteousness before the Lord.

We are not justified by a meritorious faith, neither are we justified because we possess a courageous or enduring faith. We are justified because we possess faith in a meritorious object, that object being the person of Christ on the cross and His finished work which He accomplished on that cross.

The acts of faith recorded in Hebrews chapter 11 are responses to tests of faith, which would more appropriately fall under the category of rewards.

The entire chapter of Hebrews 11 serves as a basis for the exhortation in the following passage:

Hebrews 12:1, 2: Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This is an exhortation to have an enduring faith, looking unto Jesus who wants to finish our faith. Let us run with endurance that race which is set before us!

Once again, this cannot be a reference to saving faith. Saving faith is a one-time event which results in a person, once and for all, passing from death unto life. It is not a faith in which

one must endure to be saved. A one-time act of saving faith produces an irreversible, everlasting relationship with God.

Racing towards what end? For rewards and promotion in the age to come. The race that is set before us is to mature to the greatest degree possible and to have the greatest impact possible for Him during our brief sojourning upon this earth.

Verse 3 of the above context speaks of not becoming discouraged.

Hebrews 12:3: For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

Once again, we know that this context is not talking about a justifying faith because justification happens in a moment of time. However, the faith being talked about here is a faith in which a person needs to endure and remain, in the midst of persecution.

The final verses in Hebrews chapter 10, which introduce Hebrews chapter 11, likewise speak of an enduring faith, which is to be rewarded:

Hebrews 10:32-39: But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:

³³ partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

³⁴ for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you

have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

³⁵ Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

³⁷ "For yet a little while, *And* He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

³⁸ Now the just shall live by faith; But if *anyone* draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

³⁹ But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Let's discuss the meaning of the above context.

Verse 32: "after you were illuminated"

Illumination is in reference to our saving faith. That is, when our consciences were illuminated by the gospel, we believed and were saved. From that initial joy of our salvation, we were able to endure persecutions.

Verse 35: "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward."

Once again, this verse is not talking about the once and for all initial act of saving faith, a faith which looks to the cross. No, it is talking about a continued act of enduring faith, which looks forward to the Judgment Seat of Christ, at which time rewards and everlasting distinction will be assigned to the faithful and enduring child of God.

Verse 38: “Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

This is, again, not talking about saving faith but living faith. The child of God, who becomes sluggish in his occupation with grace truths, will experience a loss of forward momentum in grace. Such a pause in momentum does not please the Lord and could, if the child persists, result in the divine discipline of the child of God. If this divine discipline does not produce a return to forward momentum in grace, it will continue to produce more and more hardship: hardship which could have a ruinous end for the obstinate child of God.

However, the author of Hebrews states that he believes those in his audience will not progress to that degree of discipline, but rather will be restored and deliver themselves from such ruin.

Verse 39: “But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”

Verses 38 and 39 are not a threat of a forfeiture of eternal life, (that is impossible for the child of God). This is, indeed, a warning of hardship and destruction which can enter the child of God’s life, if he does not return to the pathway of blessing and upward momentum in grace.

From the above considerations, it is safe to assume that the examples of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 are not examples of justifying faith; rather, they are examples of enduring faith, faith which the Lord will one day reward.

The faith that pleases God is informed with Bible doctrine.

Faith is not a gritting of one's teeth and hoping in God without any Bible reason to hold out such a hope. It is not, "I am going to believe God for my miracle." The faith which pleases God is a Biblically informed faith, a faith which understands the promises of God and sets its hope on that accordingly.

1 Peter 1:13-15: Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest you hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
¹⁴ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;
¹⁵ but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct,

Notice that this exhortation begins with "gird up the loins of your mind." This means "to set aside the mind candy of this world and get ready for consistent reflection on Bible truth."

"And rest your hope fully on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The child of God is here exhorted to set his hope fully on the rewards of the age to come, and to not set his hope upon the creature comforts with which he can surround himself in this world.

Understand that the child of God who says, "No" to this world and allows himself, through truth and trials, to overcome the former lusts of his ignorance, and to be transformed into the

image of Christ, will become a person of eternal distinction in the age to come.

This distinction will consist of greater governmental responsibilities, with greater access to the center of the heavenly administration in the age to come.

The rewards in the age to come primary revolve around coregency with Christ, which coregency involves greater access to the center of the heavenly administration than that of the child of God who was not watchful in his earthly department. This can be seen in the following passages:

2 Timothy 2:11, 12: *This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.*

¹² If we endure, We shall also reign with *Him*. If we deny *Him*, He also will deny us.

Romans 8:17: and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Revelation 2:26, 27: "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations –

²⁷ 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' – as I also have received from My Father;

Zechariah 3:2-7: And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! *Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?*"

³ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.

⁴ Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

⁵ And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.

⁶ Then the Angel of the LORD admonished Joshua, saying,

⁷ "Thus says the LORD of hosts:

'If you will walk in My ways,
And if you will keep My command,
Then you shall also judge My house,
And likewise have charge of My courts;
I will give you places to walk
Among these who stand here.' "

The blessing on Joshua here is not given because he has been enrobed in the righteousness of Christ. This is a blessing which is over and above that.

Look again at verse 7. This blessing is obedience to God after salvation.

Notice also one of the primary characteristics of that blessing: "A place to walk among these who stand here."

The primary reward for obedience is access to the center of the heavenly administration for purposes of participating in the government in the age to come.

This can also be seen in the following verse:

Psalm 65:4: Blessed is the man You choose,
And cause to approach You,
That he may dwell in Your courts.
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house,
Of Your holy temple.

In my younger days, I once had a Calvinist pull this verse on me as proof of unconditional election. He thought the verse was teaching that, if you are saved, it is because God chose you and caused you to come to Him to be saved.

However that is not what the above verse is teaching. It is not talking about the gift of salvation but about the privilege of being invited to have one's dwelling place in the center of the heavenly administration. This will be the experience of every person who, in addition to being saved, continued to allow his affections to be dominated by Bible truths, to the point that he gets to rule and reign with Christ from the center of the heavenly administration.

This is the reward upon which the faithful have always set their hope:

Matthew 19:27, 28: Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"

²⁸ So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

8

FAITH TO BE HEALED

As we have been stating in this book, truth-free Christianity is an attempt to be established in a relationship with the Lord while, at the same time, despising a relationship in His word.

The non-truth engaged pursuer of God, who imagines that a relationship with God is bound up in a weekly, charismatic, emotional experience, views faith as a meritorious commodity to be exercised in order to get his way with God.

Hebrews 11:1 defines living faith, that is, the faith which looks forward to the reward, as follows.

Hebrews 11:1: Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Literally, “faith is the supporting substructure of the supernatural unseen.” Faith has an undergirding substructure of objective evidence concerning the veracity of the things of God which must be constantly renewed in our minds, truths which need to be maintained in order that our faith may remain strong.

Faith is not exercised apart from Bible truth; rather, faith is exercised and renewed by a continued occupation with Biblical truth. Faith is not the product of human imagination; it is, rather, a

commodity generated by the Spirit of God, as a person occupies his mind in the word of God.

Romans 10:17: So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Here is another manifestation of the myth of meritorious faith:

“If your faith is strong enough, then God is going to answer your prayer and heal your sickness.”

One of the main verses in Scripture that has been used to support this belief is found in Acts 14:9:

Acts 14:9, 10: *This* man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed,
¹⁰ said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

Unfortunately, “faith to be healed,” in verse 9, is mistranslated in most of the versions of the Bible today.

First of all, let’s examine the context of this verse:

Acts 14:1-11: Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.
² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.

³ Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

⁴ But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

⁵ And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them,

⁶ they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.

⁷ And they were preaching the gospel there.

⁸ And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

⁹ *This* man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed,

¹⁰ said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

¹¹ Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"

Most translations of our English Bibles translate verse 9 in this passage incorrectly. They all translate it as, "faith to be healed" when, very clearly, the word translated "healed" in our English Bibles is actually the word "saved".

It is the Greek word σωζω which has, as its most common translation, "saved" or "delivered"

"Faith to be saved." Why did most every translation translate this "faith to be healed"?

By the way, Young's Literal Translation gets it right. This translation is based upon the Textus Receptus and the Majority Text. In fact, there are no Greek textual variants in this verse

Here is the verse in question in Young's Literal Translation, just so you know I am not making this up:

Acts 14:9, 10: this one was hearing Paul speaking, who, having steadfastly beheld him, and having seen that he hath faith to be saved,

¹⁰ said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

The crippled man had faith to be saved; he had come to faith in Christ through the preaching of the gospel. The context states that Paul was preaching the gospel. This man, through the non-verbal cues which Paul had observed, had made it obvious in Paul's sight that he had come to faith in Christ. He had faith to be saved. So, God decided, through Paul, to bestow a blessing on His newborn child; and, in addition to saving him, He immediately transformed him into a walking, advertising billboard to the supernatural grace of God.

It should not surprise us that God would decide to favor one of His own.

Faith to be saved is not a faith that believes that you will be saved if you believe hard enough. In this context, it was God's perception that the crippled man was, now, one of His own that caused Him to make the decision to bestow an additional blessing on him.

By the way, there already existed two words for “heal” in the Greek of the New Testament. Luke, as Paul’s physician, was very familiar with them both. However, he did not use either of these words in Acts 14:9.

The first of those words which Luke did not use here, but could have, was “ἰαομαι”. It was used twelve times in Scripture by the prophet Luke.

Here are three of those contexts:

Luke 22:50, 51: And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

⁵¹ But Jesus answered and said, "Permit even this." And He touched his ear and healed (ἰαομαι) him.

Acts 3:11: Now as the lame man who was healed (ἰαομαι) held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed

Acts 28:8: And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed (ἰαομαι) him.

The second word for “heal” that Luke was familiar with, which he could have used in Acts 14:9 but did not, was the word “θεραπεύω”.

It is the word from which we get the English word “therapeutics”. Luke used that word 18 times in the New Testament. Here is one:

Acts 28:9: So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed (θεραπεύω).

If Luke had wanted to refer to the crippled man at Listeria as having faith to be “healed,” he could have used either of those words, with which he was already familiar, in that context as well.

But, because our translators, for some reason, chose to translate this verse “faith to be healed” instead of “faith to be saved,” we have people all over the world wondering whether they have enough faith, or whether their faith is strong enough for them to be “healed.”

Here is another verse concerning faith and healing which is also misunderstood.

James 5:15: And the prayer of faith will save the sick.

Let’s look at the broader context of this passage in greater detail:

James 5:14-20: Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

¹⁶ Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

¹⁹ Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,

²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

The passage must be considered in its entire context, which concerns a church member who is sick. This person questions why he is sick. He calls for the elders, who are the members of the assembly with the most discernment. These elders collectively seek to discern whether the sickness might be sin-related. If it is sin-related, and the sin is confessed, healing can be the result.

Understand this: the purpose for calling for the elders of the church is in order that they can collectively exercise discernment to see whether a sickness may be a form of divine discipline.

This context, when taken in its entirety, relates an account of the restoration of an erring child of God back to physical health, through the discernment of the elders of the church and the confession of sin of the erring one.

There are examples in Scripture where physical sickness is the result of sin in the church community.

We can see this in the following context.

1 Corinthians 11:28-32: But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

²⁹ For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

³⁰ For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

In this context, Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers to be more considerate of one another at the communion supper. A few verses before this, we see that the behavior of wealthy saints was shaming the poorer people in the assembly, to the point that they could be overcome with the ostentation of the wealthy.

1 Corinthians 11:20-22: Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

²¹ For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*.

The result of this thoughtlessness towards their fellow believers was sickness and death occurring in the assembly.

³⁰ For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

From this entire context in I Corinthians, we can see that sickness can be a judgment for a failure to judge ourselves.

This is also the case with our context in James chapter 5. Let's return there now.

Now, understand that the book of James is the oldest epistle of the New Testament, so old that it was probably written during a time in the early church when, or even before, the apostolic sign gifts were in operation. Many conservative theologians I know would say that this passage fits in that context. However, I see no indication that this particular passage involves the utilization of the Apostolic sign gifts.

This verse is talking about sin in the church which has led to individual sickness which, if gotten right, can lead to the restoration of physical health.

“The prayer of faith will heal the sick.” That is, the prayer of divine perspective will heal the sick.

The purpose for calling for the elders of the church is in order that they can collectively exercise discernment to whether a sickness may be discipline. An elder of the church is not going to agree to participate in this ritual if he discerns that the person has not made his sin right. If it is discipline, and the transgressor genuinely confesses his sin and is restored to fellowship, it is no longer required. In this case, a prayer of divine perspective from a righteous person, who is fully in tune with the plan of God, (a person who brings forth his “strong reasons” for his prayer to be answered) may obtain healing for the ailing one.

Isaiah 41:21: "Present your case," says the LORD. "Bring forth your strong reasons," says the King of Jacob.

What better way to pray for a healing than for a righteous man to fervently bring forth strong reasons to answer his prayer!

James 5:16: Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

James sums up the restoration to physical health of the erring child of God in the following verses of our context:

James 5:19, 21: Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,
²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Now, of course, there is some sickness which is not caused by personal transgressions but simply by the natural result of living in the world.

Do I believe that everyone who has gotten COVID 19 is got it because he sinned? Of course not. Do I believe that every 80 year old who has died of pneumonia did so because of sin in their life? Of course not! Sometimes, sickness is simply a part of life; but sometimes it can be discipline from God. If the latter is the case, the elders of the church are to come together and discern if there might be a transgression in the sick person's life. If they are guilty, but confess and get their sin right, the Lord can restore their health.

But, sometimes, sickness is just a part of life.

Paul did not always heal the sick people with which he worked. The following verses demonstrate that this is the case:

2 Timothy 4:20: Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick.

Paul's leaving Trophimus sick in Miletus demonstrates that the Apostles could not, or else did not, exercise the gift of healing at will. After all, why did Paul not heal Trophimus and take him with him? It is most likely because the Apostles were not able to exercise this gift at will.

Philippians 2:25-30: Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need;

²⁶ since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

²⁷ For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

²⁸ Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.

²⁹ Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem;

³⁰ because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

Above is another example of where Paul did not, at will, exercise his powers of healing. Epaphroditus, according to this passage, almost died of his sickness!

The following verses would suggest that Paul, even early on, when he was amongst the Galatian believers, was already probably almost legally blind. However, God chose not to heal even Paul of his physical limitation.

Galatians 6:11: See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!

Galatians 4:15: What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.

The following verse would also suggest that Paul had some sort of speech impediment:

2 Corinthians 10:10 "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."

We know that the Lord chose not to heal Paul of these physical infirmities. In fact, in another context, we see that Paul begged God to take away his physical infirmity, his "thorn in the flesh."

2 Corinthians 12:7-10: And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

⁹ And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly

I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Now, we are not told what this “thorn in the flesh” was. But whatever it was, it kept Paul humble. The thorn in the flesh was given to Paul, according to this verse, because of “the abundance of revelations.” In other words, God did not want Paul to become filled with pride, as we all can so easily become when we see the Lord using us.

What the child of God may need today is not faith to be healed; but rather faith to remain sick. The Lord may use the sickness and pending death of one of His own to break the stubbornness of an unbelieving, rebellious onlooker.

The reasons whether Lord may or may not heal a person reside in the divine deliberations of the Father and vary from one sickness to the next.

With every person, with every sickness, there is a divine calculation with the Father which may involve a multitude of considerations concerning what may best accomplish His will, most of which we are probably not aware. With the Apostle Paul, it was the possibility of preventing him from becoming arrogant. With another faithful saint, it may be the possibility that an obstinate loved one, for whom the saint has been praying, might have his stubbornness broken and be made receptive through his observation of the saint's suffering.

God is always considering the dynamics of any given circumstance, and what divine response from Him might have the greatest impact towards His highest goal, which is bringing many sons and daughters to glory. The environment and the circumstances which can result in the greatest impact to that end are at the top of His consideration.

What is not at the top of God's list of priorities is enabling persons to continue in their non-seeking state, oblivious to the call of the Heavenly Father upon their everlasting soul. If a person has exhibited a lifelong pattern of truth avoidance, the greatest impact for eternity that might be extracted from his life is that another receptive soul may hear a good funeral sermon.

9

HOW MUCH TRUTH IS ENOUGH TRUTH?

How much truth is enough truth to be saved? It takes whatever is needed in order to overcome the threshold of unbelief and to enable the hearer to commit an act of saving faith, which embraces Christ as the One who has made his peace with God through the blood of His cross.

In order for someone to be saved, it takes whatever amount of truth that allows that particular individual's conscience to understand the all sufficient nature of the sacrifice of Christ as that which has made his peace with God, thus enabling him to receive that sacrifice as the basis of his everlasting standing before God.

It's not really a question of amount of truth.

Nor does the evangelist necessarily proclaim an identical message from one person to the next.

Many gospel presentations we see in Scripture are quite often filling in what is missing in a person's understanding concerning his ability to come to faith in Christ.

Moreover, the missing bit of information, quite often, varies from one person to the next.

For example, during the time of the book of Acts, there were many God-seeking gentiles who viewed salvation as something that they, as gentiles, would eventually be able to enjoy. However, they did not consider it yet to be "their time" in the plan

of God to experience all the blessings of the salvation of God. They understood that Jesus had died for the sins of the world; but they did not consider the invitation to believe to be for them at that time. For them, the missing component was that the invitation to fully experience the salvation of God had just opened up for them.

We can see this in at least two instances in Scripture where the missing piece of information needed to believe was the universality of the invitation to believe, regardless of whether the individual was a Jew or a gentile.

Acts 10:43, 44: "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

Let's go back a few verses, to read the context before Peter made this statement.

Acts 10:34-37: Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.

⁵ "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

³⁶ "The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ -- He is Lord of all --

³⁷ "that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:

Notice how Peter begins his proclamation to the household of Cornelius. He does not need to develop in their consciences the core facts of the gospel. Look again at verses 36 and 37:

³⁶ The word which God sent to the children of Israel,
preaching peace through Jesus Christ -- He is Lord of all --
³⁷ "that word you know.

Now, stop and hear what Peter just said. He basically said, "I don't need to teach you about the peace that Jesus made through the blood of His cross; you already know that truth."

From the very beginning of his proclamation to the Cornelius household, the thrust of his message is on the universality of the invitation. Look again at verses 34 and 35:

³⁴ Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.

³⁵ "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

Peter's evangelistic message to the Cornelius household focused on the universality of the invitation. It was an understanding that the invitation to the gentiles was that they could NOW believe. Their grasp on this missing information caused them immediately (while Peter was still speaking) to commit an act of appropriating faith, which personally embraced the salvation of God as their own.

We can see the same situation in Paul's preaching at Antioch in Pisidia in Acts chapter 13.

Acts 13:45-48: But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles

⁴⁷ "For so the Lord has commanded us:

'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

⁴⁸ Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

The week before this event, Paul had proclaimed a very thorough and complete message concerning the sufferings of Christ, through which He had accomplished the remission of sins, but it had not yet connected with some of the gentiles in the audience. They had understood that Christ had accomplished the once and for all, remission of sins through the blood of His cross, but they did not yet understand that they, as gentiles, were being invited to NOW partake of the fullness of God's salvation. Therefore, on the next Sabbath, Paul drove home the truth of the universality of the gospel invitation. Let's read the passage again:

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.

⁴⁷ "For so the Lord has commanded us:

'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

⁴⁸ Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

The faith of these gentiles had already been “set in order,” (which is a better translation of the word “ordained or appointed” here in this verse.) Their faith had been set in order; all the facts of the gospel were clear to them. Paul had set their faith in order and they were now ripe to personally exercise an act of appropriating faith towards the facts of the gospel. When those, whose faith had been previously set in order, heard of the universality of the invitation, they believed and were saved.

Unlike like the gentiles of the early church, there are many people today who understand the universality of the invitation; but their consciences have not yet been illumined by the core components of the gospel message. They know that salvation is all about believing; but their consciences have not yet been prepared to hear the gospel of grace. This necessary preparation of the heart of the unsaved is not necessarily identical from one person to the next. Certainly, the end goal of our gospel preaching is to get people to abandon their own good works, as that which can commend them to God, and to embrace the perfect sacrifice of Christ, as that work which has made their peace with God. However, each person is at a unique place in his life, a place where only God understand the barriers which are preventing him from committing an act of saving faith.

This is one reason why it is important for the child of God to hold a great deal of truth in his soul, because the more that God’s Bible truth has transformed a person’s soul, the more apt the Lord is going to be able to use him to reach a particular person.

How much knowledge does God expect His children to possess? All that we possibly can!

I guess the question we should ask is this, why would God reveal to his apostles and prophets truth that we do not need? Of that which God has revealed, the Scriptures state that it all thoroughly furnishes us for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16, 17: All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

If, through the content of Scripture, we are thoroughly furnished unto every good work, why would we want to partner with the Lord only partially equipped for the job? We should want to be thoroughly, and not just partially, equipped for the job committed to us.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Notice, in the above verse, that part of being approved is “rightly dividing” the word of truth. The Greek word here, “ὀρθοτομέω” means “to cut straight.”

Scripture needs to be rightly divided into dispensational teachings, distinguishing between Law and grace; between Israel, the Church and the Kingdom; and between the Jewish assembly and the Christian church. These are all distinctions which need to be observed in our Biblical understanding so that we do not shame ourselves by attempting to teach wrongly discerned truths.

The importance of being thoroughly acquainted with Scripture can also be demonstrated by the following verse:

Matthew 5:19 "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The key to understanding the above verse is the word "break." It is a very common Greek verb, the verb *λυω*. It simply means "to loose." In this context, it would be best understood as "to dismiss as insignificant," thus, "Whoever therefore dismisses as insignificant one of the least of these commandments."

Those today who say that "doctrine" does not matter, needs to carefully consider what the Lord is actually saying in this verse; if it were not important, He would not have caused it to be penned by an apostle or a prophet.

While not all Scripture has direct application to the church, and while the church is commanded to not take up the Law of Moses, all Scripture is profitable for doctrine.

So, how much Bible truth does God expect his people to possess?

Consider the following:

Luke 24:25-38: Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

²⁶ "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

²⁷ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

²⁸ Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther.

We can see, from the above context, that the Lord fully expected a disciple's grasp on Scripture to have been such that the truth, which He had just spoken, should have already been common knowledge.

What is interesting about this passage is that the Lord expected His disciples to have gleaned enough truth from the Old Testament to have put together in their hearts the need for Christ to have first suffered, then rose from the dead and then entered into His Kingdom.

Let me ask you this: Could you have done that from a consideration of the Old Testament? Jesus had that expectation of His audience.

The Lord expected the Jews, from the content of Old Testament Scriptures, to have been able to discern the person and work of Christ and the timing of His return.

Consider also the following context.

Luke 19:41-44: Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it,

⁴² saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes

⁴³ "For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side,

⁴⁴ "and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Jerusalem was overthrown by Rome in the first century AD because Israel collectively did not have enough knowledge of their Scriptures abiding in their hearts in order to have perceived the saving plan of God, as the signs of that plan were unfolding in their midst.

They had missed the saving visitation of God because they had not paid attention to the voices of the prophets, which had been read to them every week in their synagogues.

Acts 13:27: "For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*."

The destruction of their nation occurred because they did not possess enough truth from the Old Testament for them to have recognized Jesus for who He was when He came.

By the way, God STILL expects people to possess that much truth in their souls concerning the salvation of God.

Hebrews 2:2, 3: For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,

³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*,

Partnering with the Lord in ministry involves making room in your soul for His truth to transform your perspective:

1 Peter 3:15, 16: But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

¹⁶ Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

We are partnering with God and the Holy Spirit. Our goal that we be used by the Lord to remove whatever barriers there are in the unsaved person's conscience which may be an impediment to his coming to faith:

2 Corinthians 10:4, 5: For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

That impediment varies from one person to another. For some, it may be that nobody has ever communicated to a person academic evidence which supports the Bible as the word of God.

Sometimes, that impediment may be a misperception of Christianity, caused by left-leaning news outlets.

At other times, that barrier may be nothing more than a failure to ever encounter a genuine, fruit of the Spirit-filled, fruit of righteousness-manifesting child of God. When the word of God has transformed the child of God into a grace- and truth-manifesting saint, a very powerful impact on the consciences of those, having yet to believe in grace, is possible.

2 Corinthians 4:2-4: But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God

³ But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

⁴ whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

One problem that exists today, amongst those who name the name of Christ, is that they themselves do not have enough grace truth reigning in their hearts to influence another person in the direction of grace.

Those, whose faith is emotion-driven, instead of grace Bible truth-driven, will be tossed to and fro in their experience. Their life experience will be one of emotional and spiritual bipolarism.

Ephesians 4:11-16: And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,
¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,
¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;
¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,
¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ --
¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

“Tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” is a reference to the destructiveness of emotion-based Christianity.

The problem with assurance by experience is this: How do you know the experience is of God? How do you know that sign or perceived miracle is from God? Ever since the closing of the canon of Scripture, it is the devil’s crowd who has been laying claim to miracles as a sign of their spirituality.

Matthew 7:22, 23: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders (miracles) in Your name?'

²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Only grace-oriented Bible teaching is able to establish a child of God so that they are no longer emotional cripples, bipolar shipwrecks, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.

Why do children of God who are not established in grace become emotional shipwrecks? Because they have a conscience with a heightened sense of urgency concerning eternal truths; but are not sure upon which side of eternity they are going to land. In short, they believe there is a heaven and hell; but, because they are not rooted in grace, they are not yet sure which place will be their final destiny.

As a result, they are on a constant, desperate search for assurance; they are grasping at straws. They are throwing out fleeces, relying on perceived personal experiences from God. Moreover, because such signs are not grounded in truth, such people are always on the edge of emotional instability instead of grounded in grace truths.

This unsettled question concerning their final destiny is the source of their mental instability, an instability which can only be settled by a "know so" salvation: by a Bible truth-grounded, Holy Spirit-witnessed certainty. Tragically, there is very little of that in the counterfeit Christian culture which today has overrun our churches.

But, when the child of God is grounded in and operating in grace truths, the Holy Spirit, who dwells within, will supply that believer with joy and peace.

Romans 15:13: Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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