

Synchronizing The Gospel of John with The Gospel of Paul

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Published 2017

Printed in USA 2017

All scripture quotations are taken from the New King
James unless otherwise noted.

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Preface

If you have rested the eternal destiny of your soul in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, in which He has taken your sin upon Himself, thus satisfying the justice of God in your behalf; if you, at one point in your life, believed in the once and for all offering of Christ for yourself, you have passed from death unto life. This book is written to defend the simplicity of that gospel message. Believing on Christ is easy; defending the simplicity of the invitation takes a lifetime of diligence. This book is just another volume in which I “earnestly contend for the faith which was once and for all delivered to the saints.” I hope you find that it strengthens your comprehension of the wonderful grace of God.

-Dan Lash, July 21, 2017

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my dear wife, Cindy, for editing my books. Without her editing, they would not be possible.

I would also like to thank Nick Borden, who donates his time, energy and all materials to the printing of these books. Once again, without his support, they would not be possible.

I would also like to thank the Father, who has imputed to me Christ's righteousness and, apparently, is keeping me on this earth for ministry despite my many flaws; the Son, who settled my sin debt, who has directed my paths, and who intercedes in my behalf; and the Holy Spirit, the Encourager of my soul, who brings to my remembrance and understanding the great truths of the Bible.

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The Purpose of This Book

The purpose of this book, as its title implies, is to synchronize the gospel accounts in the book of John with the gospel presentation of the Apostle Paul. For many years now, there has been a distinct divide in free grace circles about whose writings deserve to be given the most weight in determining exactly how we present the gospel. Some Bible teachers believe that the purpose for the Gospel of John is to serve as the sole evangelistic book of the New Testament. Many well-meaning publishers have published the Gospel of John only, believing its purpose in the New Testament canon is that of a gospel tract. Others, like me, see that Paul was the apostle commissioned by God to take the gospel to us Gentiles. At least fifteen times in the Scriptures, Paul is said to have been sent to the Gentiles to deliver to them the saving message of God; therefore, his writings should serve as the foundation of salvific truth for the Church.

As we shall demonstrate in this book, the interactions between the Lord and the Jews, as recorded in the book of John, were not evangelistic in intent. The purpose of the Lord's ministry among the Jews was not to again sow the

message of the coming Savior, which had already been sown in the Law and the Prophets. It was, rather, to gather unto Himself those who had responded in faith to that message. He was not going to sow again that which the Israelites were already to have known; He was now holding them accountable to it. So, even though the Gospel of John and the statements of Paul concerning the way of salvation do not contradict one another, one should not assume that the references to the way of salvation in John are complete. Time and time again, we see Jesus, through the enigmatic teaching of parables, being unclear in His teaching to the Jews.

There is not more than one plan of salvation recorded for us in the Scriptures. There is not one set of core truths to be believed to be saved recorded for us in the Gospel of John and another set of core principles to be believed to be saved recorded by Paul. In fact, I am persuaded that, in every dispensation, the content of gospel truth to be believed remains virtually the same: the God-man has died to settle the issue of my sin debt to the satisfaction of the Father, with that sacrifice serving the sole merit of an eternally right relationship with God -- a merit in which I rest the eternal destiny of my soul. In every dispensation, the saving message is the same: Christ has died for my

sins, according to the Scriptures. The purpose of this book is to demonstrate that the way of righteousness presented by Paul and the way of righteousness presented by John are one and the same.

Introduction:

Rethinking the Gospel of John

There are many in evangelical circles today that insist that the fourth gospel narrative in our New Testament serves as the sole source of evangelistic truth for the church. They seem to have forgotten that God chose another man, the Apostle Paul, to bring the gospel to us Gentiles. The problem with viewing the Gospel of John as the sole source of evangelistic truth is that it often does not present the complete gospel message; or, if it does, it does so in a rather cryptic fashion. For example, what did Jesus mean by stating that if you did not eat his flesh and drink his blood you did not have life? How was believing on Jesus like looking at a snake on a pole? These are statements, in supposed gospel contexts, which demand clarification.

The primary purpose of the Gospel of John is to serve as a bridge of understanding for Gentile consideration of just how Gentiles became candidates to serve as the ambassadors of God. How is one approaching the whole of the Bible to reconcile the idea of a Gentile assembly of

believers, apart from any affiliation with Israel, with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Kingdom centered in Jerusalem with Jewish saints evangelizing the world? How would we not view a Gentile church as an anti-biblical cult if we did not have the four Gospels and the book of Acts at the beginning of our New Testament? These historical books explain just how it came to pass that, in the Church age, God is using Gentile assemblies to accomplish His will on the earth. The four Gospels at the beginning of our New Testament, document in detail how the nation of Israel failed to embrace Christ as the Promised One of the Law and the Prophets. In addition, the Book of Acts documents for us how the Jewish Church failed to fully transition to grace.

The Gospel of John, more than any of the other Gospel accounts, records, for Gentile consumption, the failure of the Jewish people to embrace Christ. It documents for us the unbelief of the Jewish people and their unpreparedness for the arrival of Christ. The gospel of John is the unique book written for Gentile consumption to document how, because of the Jews' rejection of Christ, believing Gentiles are now the direct ambassadors of the grace of God apart from any Jewish affiliation.

John 1:11, 12: He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

A major problem with viewing the purpose of the Gospel of John as being the evangelistic book of the New Testament is that some of those alleged gospel narratives in the book of John are somewhat incomplete or cryptic in nature. How was it that everybody present at the Bread of Life Discourse took away from that message the outrageous idea that Jesus was promoting the cannibalism of His body?

John 6:53: Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.

Didn't Jesus know what they were thinking? If He did know, why did He not correct the misunderstanding on the spot? If John 6:47 makes the gospel crystal clear (a claim

made by those who believe that the fourth Gospel is evangelistic in scope), then why didn't anyone in His immediate audience understand it? Everybody, even His disciples, continually complained that nobody understood His teachings!

John 6:60: Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"

One would think that, if His teachings to his audience were evangelistic in intent, He would not be speaking things hard to understand.

The teachings of Jesus in John, as well as in the other synoptic Gospels, demanded that his Jewish audience draw upon gospel truth already dispensed in the Law and the Prophets. If His audience did not have a handle on that truth, He was not at all disposed to re-sow it! Jesus had not come to re-sow the reason for His coming; rather, He had come to gather into His Kingdom his sheep and to exclude those who had squandered the light to which they already had access. Time and time

again, we see His anger aroused against those should have recognized who He was and why He came, and who should have understood the salvific timetable of God.

John 3:10: Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

Contrast this approach to the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, was ministering to people to whom had not been previously committed any salvific truth. Therefore, we see Paul thoroughly explaining the way of salvation in a very patient manner:

1 Thessalonians 2:6, 7: Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children.

Likewise, the Lord Jesus, when He was dealing with those who had little light previously committed to them, dealt compassionately with them as well.

For example, we see that Jesus normally did not reveal His true identity to the Jews, who should have discovered it through the Law and the Prophets; however, to those with previous little light He revealed that fact openly. An instance of this is in His dealings with the backslidden woman at the well in John chapter 4. The woman at the well and her male associates were anticipating the arrival of Christ and held a correct perspective of Him. We know this because the woman at the well is the first one in her conversation with the Lord to bring up the idea of Messiah.

John 4:25, 26: The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."

Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am *He*."

Now, the only place in the Scriptures from which she could have developed a concept of the coming Messiah is the following context:

Daniel 9:24- 26: " Seventy weeks are determined

For your people and for your holy city,

To finish the transgression,

To make an end of sins,

To make reconciliation for iniquity,

To bring in everlasting righteousness,

To seal up vision and prophecy,

And to anoint the Most Holy.

"Know therefore and understand,

That from the going forth of the command

To restore and build Jerusalem

Until Messiah the Prince,

There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;

The street shall be built again, and the wall,

Even in troublesome times.

"And after the sixty-two weeks
Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;
And the people of the prince who is to come
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.
The end of it *shall be* with a flood,
And till the end of the war desolations are
determined.

Anybody whose concept of the coming Christ had been derived from the above context in Daniel most likely possessed a justifying faith. This context speaks of the Messiah being cut off as a substitute (but not for Himself) to make reconciliation for iniquity and to close the book on sins. Moreover, this Messiah was going to be anointed as the most Holy (inaugurated as King in Israel). Obviously, these Samaritans needed only a nudge to get back on track.

Jesus never, to a Jewish audience, came right out and revealed His true identity. He demanded that they figure it out from the light which had previously been dispensed (the Law and the Prophets.) However, in this

instance, the Lord freely shares His true identity with this Samaritan audience...and they really appreciated it!

John 4:39- 43: And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I *ever* did."

So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.

And many more believed because of His own word.

Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee.

Notice also, these Samaritans' concept of the Savior. He was not just the Savior of the Jews; but the Savior of the world also. This incident demonstrates that Jesus knew that there was a pocket of Samaritans who possessed a Messianic hope, so He went out of His way

to visit them. He very graciously dealt with them and stayed with them for two days. For people who had long been snubbed by the Israelites, they, nevertheless, were in possession of truth.

The reason we understand what Jesus meant when He said “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you,” is because we read the theology of the Apostle Paul back into the context; likewise, the reason we know what He meant by believing in the lifted up Son of Man, is because elsewhere in Scripture that terminology is explained. However, the people hearing these concepts for the first time from the lips of the Lord would not have understood them, unless they filtered those teachings through previously assimilated Old Testament truth.

Jesus very carefully parsed His teachings to bring about one of two realities:

1. Prepare for the Kingdom those who had already positively responded to truth, or

2. Bring to an end the opportunity to continue as the special people of God those who had squandered their light.

Jesus makes reference to this dual-purpose goal of His teaching in the following context:

Matthew 13:10-15: And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

"For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

"And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled,
which says:

'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,

And seeing you will see and not perceive;

For the hearts of this people have grown dull

Their ears are hard of hearing

And their eyes they have closed

*Lest they should see with their eyes and hear
with their ears*

*Lest they should understand with their hearts
and turn*

So that I should heal them.'

We can see, from the above context, that the goal of the earthly ministry of the Lord among the Israelites was not primarily evangelistic in scope. It was, rather, either to establish those who already had some basic gospel light into a more intimate relationship with God, or to bring to a close the opportunity to continue as the special people of God to those who had squandered their light. Jesus provided just enough information in His teachings so that

those who had some light could make the connection; while those who had spurned the light would be judged. Jesus, as He traveled through Israel, continued to reveal evidence of His true identity so that those who previously received the testimony of the Law and Prophets would recognize Him; while those who had neglected the same would not have a clue.

It is a failure to discern this teaching method of Jesus that leads many evangelicals to minimize the content of saving faith in John. Because of an insistence to view the gospel references of Jesus as sufficient to lead a person to a faith, they emerge from a study of John with a gospel presentation which looks nothing like that of Paul. Moreover, it is the insistence that the “believe” passages in the Gospel of John exist as complete gospel presentations which leads to the confusion as to the content of saving faith. It is only as we realize that the teaching of Jesus among the Jews was deliberately cryptic, that we can begin to synchronize the Gospel of John with the Gospel presentation of Paul.

Chapter One

Paul's gospel

So, what was the way of salvation according to the Apostle Paul? What were the dynamics of the New Birth as presented by the Apostle Paul?

Paul's gospel was, first and foremost, a proclamation of the universal response of God in regard to man's sin. Paul's gospel was the proclamation that the penalty of the sins of all people for all time had been accounted for and settled on the cross by the Lord Jesus. It was the proclamation of the justice of God having been satisfied in the sacrifice of Christ. The gospel which Paul, and those writing under his authority, taught was a proclamation of the value of the finished work of Christ for each and every person on the face of the earth. Several verses from Paul's epistles will make this abundantly clear:

1 Timothy 2:5, 6: For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,

2 Corinthians 5:18, 19: Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of

reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

1 Corinthians 1:23: but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

1 Corinthians 15:3, 4: For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

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.

Likewise, the author of Hebrews, who no doubt had received his authority to pen scripture through the Apostle Paul, proclaimed the finished work of Christ as the Father's once and for all solution to man's sin problem:

Hebrews 9:26: He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Hebrews 9:12: Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

The above and many other passages in Paul's epistles teach us that Christ has settled the sin issue for each and every person on the face of the earth. He satisfied, in our behalf, the righteous demands of the Father against our sins, until every requirement of divine justice was satisfied. Where there was tension in the Godhead over an unsettled sin debt, there is now a peace which Christ has made for all, through the blood of His cross. This is the gospel that Paul preached.

Paul's gospel was the offer of an imputed righteousness based solely upon the sin-releasing redemption which Christ accomplished on the cross. We are declared by God to be righteous, freely, because we have believed in the satisfactory payment which Christ made in our behalf.

Romans 3:24: being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

This righteousness is reckoned to us freely in response to an act of appropriating faith which embraces this

concept of an eternally right relationship with God based upon the merits Christ's offering of Himself for our sins:

Romans 5:17b: much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:1- 4: Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Paul also taught that it was this concept of an available, imputed righteousness, which had the power to illumine the conscience unto a saving knowledge of Christ:

Romans 1:16, 17: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for **IT** is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in **IT** the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (*Emphasis added.*)

From the above context, we can see that the concept which constitutes the core illuminating power of the gospel is that of an imputed righteousness free for the believing, based solely upon the merits of that which the Lord Jesus has accomplished in our behalf upon the cross. Without this message of “The Lord our Righteousness,” the divine illumination needed for a person to pass from death unto life **never occurs**.

Furthermore, many passages make it abundantly clear that that act, which a person commits, causing him to pass from death unto life, is to simply **believe**. A person passes from death unto life when he decides to rest the eternal destiny of his soul in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. When a person makes the message of the cross personal, by resting for himself in the cross-work of Christ, that believing sinner is declared by God to be righteous. Here are a few of the above-mentioned passages:

1 Corinthians 1:21- 23: For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

Acts 13:38, 39: "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;
"and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Ephesians 1:13, 14: In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

In Paul's gospel presentation, saving faith has two components: a component of illumination and a volitional component. The conscience of the yet to be converted individual is enabled to believe by the power of a properly articulated gospel message. When the conscience of an individual, who is hungering and thirsting for righteousness, hears the message that the righteousness he needs is reckoned to him as a gift, paid for by the sacrifice of Christ, and is persuaded of that fact, he is at that moment enabled to believe. If he exercises positive volition towards this message by believing it for himself, resting the eternal destiny of his soul on the sufficiency of Christ and Him crucified, he passes from death unto life.

Paul's evangelistic efforts are often described in terms of persuasion. Eleven times in the New Testament, Paul's evangelistic efforts are described as persuading people to cease occupation with the law of Moses; and, rather, view Christ's once and for all provision for sin as God's fulfillment of that foreshadowed in the law.

Acts 13:38- 43: "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is proclaimed to you the remission of sins;
"and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.
"Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:
"Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.' "

So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.
Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

Acts 17:2- 4: Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with

them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."

And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

Acts 28:23, 24: So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

From the above verses, we can see that Paul's goal in evangelism was to get people to believe that Jesus was the fulfillment of the law, concerning God's promise to provide a final solution to man's sin. If they believed the preaching of Paul and decided to rest in Christ as God's provision for their sin, they were saved.

According to Paul's teaching, the result of people believing the gospel was the New Birth. Unlike in the Old Testament, where people who believed the gospel were justified, but not yet born again; ever since the death and resurrection of Christ and His ascension to the Father,

people who believe are justified and immediately born again. This New Birth is a transferal by the Father of the believing sinner into association with Christ. When God the Father, the decreeing agent of the Godhead, perceives that a person has believed the gospel message, He declares that person to be righteous and then places that individual into Christ. This is the initial action of the Godhead, which triggers all the events which immediately transpire in the New Birth. Many verses in the Epistles of Paul demonstrate that God the Father initiates placing the believing sinner in Christ.

Colossians 1:12- 14: giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Ephesians 2:4- 7: But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding

riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Titus 3:4- 7: But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The gospel that Paul preached was not an exhortation for the sinner to pursue the forgiveness of his sins. The Gospel according to Paul was an announcement that Christ had already grappled with and settled the sin issue for the sinner. Paul's gospel was a proclamation of the remission of sins. Acts 13:38, literally translated from the Greek, is as follows:

Therefore let it be known, men, brethren, that through this One to you the remission of sins is proclaimed, even from all which you were not able to be justified in the Law of Moses, in Him all the believing are justified.

Paul's gospel was a proclamation of the remission of sins; that is, the consideration of man's sin is dismissed and no longer a factor in a person's being placed into a relationship with God. All sin had been imputed to Christ on the cross, and Christ settled that sin debt for all. The barrier between God's entering into a relationship with men is no longer their transgressions; the barrier is now their refusal to come to the light and contemplate the truth.

When a person is contemplating being placed into an eternally right relationship with God, the course of action which he needs to pursue is not to implore God to forgive his sins; it is, rather, to discover that God, in Christ, has already settled the sinner's sin debt and to rest in the sufficiency of that work for himself. For a person to implore God to forgive all of his sins, in light of God's sin-settling work of Christ, would be to have misapprehended the results of the finished work of Christ.

Luke 24:47: "and that repentance and remission of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Paul does not equate being born again with the forgiveness of sins. The operative term which distinguishes the saved from the unsaved is the term "justified." Being placed in an eternally right relationship with God is not a matter of softening the heart of God so that He will forgive your sins. Christ has, through the blood

of His cross, **already** satisfied the Father concerning the transgressions of the sinner. Being placed in an eternally right relationship with God is all about believing in what Christ has already accomplished on the cross. When the sinner rests in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, God the Father declares that sinner to be righteous (or justified, since they are the same word in the Greek).

According to Paul's gospel, the person who has believed the gospel of grace is born again. The new birth is, first and foremost, the placing within the believing sinner a new person made in the image of God.

Ephesians 4:24: and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

The miracle of the new birth is that it consists of a transferal of your eternal identity before God from an old man, which habitually offends God, to a new man, who is made in the image of God in true righteousness and holiness. Paul references this miracle in the following contexts:

Titus 3:5- 7: not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit is a reference to the negative and positive aspects of the new birth experience. In the washing of regeneration, the old man is eternally disassociated from our eternal identity before God. In the renewing of the Holy Spirit, a new person made in the image of God is placed in the core of our being. At that moment a divine reassociation of your eternal identity takes place. At the moment of faith, the eternal identity of the believer is removed from the old man and reassociated with the new man.

That new man is now the believer's eternal identity before God, as Paul said:

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

In other words, when a person believes, God creates a new person on the inside and then transfers that person's eternal identity to that new person.

Paul also references our disassociation from our old sin nature in the following verse:

Romans 6:6: knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

In other words, the old sin nature of the child of God has been severed from his eternal identity before God.

Paul also makes reference to this disassociation of our old man from our eternal identity in the following verse:

Colossians 2:11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

According to Paul's gospel, the person in his relationship with God is said to be operating in one of two spheres: those who have believed the gospel of grace are said to be in Christ; those who have not believed in grace are said to be in darkness, under the wrath of God and dead in trespasses and sins. Even though the sins of the unbeliever have been accounted for in the offering of Christ, the unbeliever is still alienated from the life of God and will spend eternity separated from God. Unlike the believer, the unbeliever does not have the capacity for

communion with God. The unbeliever is still married to his old sin nature as being his identity before God. While the one, having believed on Christ, now has a new person, made in the image of God, with the capacity to commune with God dwelling within; the person who has not believed in Christ has only a fallen frame of reference, which does not have the capacity for communion with God. The unbeliever is still dead to God, filtering all of life's decisions through the fallen frame of reference of the old man; and, if he is never born again, will pass into eternity in that state.

Much more could be said concerning the way of salvation according to the Apostle Paul. In this book, we are focusing only upon those core issues of the gospel, and on what happens when a person believes. The maintenance of the believer's walk with the Lord is the topic for another book at another time. The primary purpose of this chapter in this book is in preparation for synchronizing the gospel of John with the gospel according to Paul.

Chapter Two

Paul: The Apostle to the Gentiles

At least fifteen times in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul is declared to be the one man whom God has commissioned to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Here are just a few:

Ephesians 3:1: For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles –

Acts 22:21: "Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.' "

Romans 11:13: For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,

Romans 15:16: that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 1:16: to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,

Ephesians 3:8: To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should

preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

1 Timothy 2:7: for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle -- I am speaking the truth in Christ *and* not lying -- a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

2 Timothy 1:11: to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

Suffice it to say that the Scriptures teach that Paul was the Apostle chosen by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles. If this is the case, then it would be wise for us Gentiles to let his gospel presentation take precedence in our formulation of an effective gospel presentation.

Why did God wait until He did to choose Paul for this special task? Why wasn't Paul among the other eleven apostles chosen during the earthly ministry of Christ? It is most likely because the Jewish church was going to be more than a little reluctant to take the gospel to the Gentiles. God was giving the Jewish church first opportunity to take the gospel to the Gentiles, but they failed in that mission. The Church at Jerusalem was good at evangelizing Jews, but they were reluctant to take the gospel to the Gentiles. We can see this reluctance beginning midway through the book of Acts when God began opening the door of faith to the Gentiles.

For example, in Acts chapter 11, the Jerusalem church was more than a little upset when they first heard that Peter extended the offer to believe to the Gentiles.

Acts 11:1-3: Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

Now granted, as Peter continues his account of the conversion of the Cornelius household, the leadership of the Jewish church rejoiced. But the Church in Jerusalem keeps falling back into a pattern of resenting the idea of non-law (of Moses)-abiding Gentile churches.

For example, in Acts chapter 15, this ugly persecution of Paul's gospel rears its ugly head in Jerusalem.

Acts 15:1, 2: And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that

Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

Now if I were the Apostle Paul I would have probably had a less gracious response to the Judean heretics than Paul. I would have probably told them, "Hey! I am Paul; I am an Apostle! Case closed! Get back to Jerusalem!" (and would have included a few expletives!) But Paul, being more gracious than I, decides to travel 300 miles back to Jerusalem where we see problems with the Jerusalem church continuing to unravel.

Acts 15:4-20: And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses."

Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.

And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us,

that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

"So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us,

Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders "and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

"Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

God had worked through them among the Gentiles. And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men *and* brethren, listen to me: "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.

"And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

*After this I will return
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David,
which has fallen down;*

*I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will set it up;
So that the rest of mankind may seek the
LORD,
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My
name,
Says the LORD who does all these things.'*
"Known to God from eternity are all His works.
"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those
from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,
"but that we write to them to abstain from things
polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from*
things strangled, and *from* blood."

Praise the Lord for Peter who gets the gospel absolutely right (this time) in this passage and establishes for us one standard, uniform conversion experience for Jew and Gentile! Moreover, not only does Peter demonstrate that a person doesn't need to keep the law to be saved; he also shows us that one doesn't need it as a component of maturing in grace.

Notice that Peter also says, "why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" Peter says, in effect, "the law of Moses is not for Jew or Gentile any longer; let it go!" We also see a warning by Peter in this

verse: "Why are you testing God?" This is the first divine warning of God to the church at Jerusalem. It was the will of God that Jewish believers fully embrace non-law-keeping Gentile believers as first class saints and become non-law-occupied saints themselves. But, the Jewish Church was having none of it!

Notice also how James, after the testimony of Paul, is dismissive of Paul's testimony and pivots back to the testimony of Peter. What a slap in the face to Paul! Paul was an apostle and his testimony was every bit as valid as that of Peter!

Here is James' rather tepid conclusion to the matter in verse 19:

Acts 15:19, 20: "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,
"but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood."

This is not a response of somebody who wanted to be fully inclusive of Gentile believers, but that of a church leader still recognizing the church at Jerusalem as separate and superior over Gentile assemblies.

One must wonder how seriously Paul took this letter that the Jerusalem elders wrote to the Gentile believers. In I Corinthians chapters 8 and 10, we see Paul telling the saints that there is nothing wrong with getting cheap meat from the shambles that had been sacrificed to idols (contrary to the letter of the Jerusalem elders in Acts 15). “Just don’t let a weaker brother catch you doing it” was the only caveat from Paul.

We see elsewhere in the Scriptures trouble continuing to come from James’ church.

Galatians 2:11, 12: Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

Yes, James had become a problematic pastor. James, who wrote the book of James during the persecution of the church mentioned in Acts chapter 8, had, by Acts chapter 15, begun to compromise grace. By the time of Paul’s return visit to Jerusalem in Acts 21, James had completely compromised grace, with the entire church of Jerusalem observing a corrupt form of Christianity, in which they had held onto the law as a vehicle of sanctification. The church of Jerusalem had

become a primary source of persecution of Gentile churches. Listen to the troubling statement of James towards Paul and Paul's preaching of a "law-free" path to practical sanctification:

Acts 21:18-22: On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law;

"but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs.

"What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come."

In other words, "Paul, there are tens of thousands of Jewish believers here in Jerusalem who are still observing the law. You're in trouble here in Jerusalem over your law-free teaching." James and the other elders at the church of Jerusalem had failed to establish in Jerusalem a church which was based solely on a grace and truth model of sanctification. The church had become persecutory

towards Paul's message of grace as a means of living the Christian life. There was no way that the Lord was going to be able to use a Christian church based at Jerusalem to spread the gospel to the Gentiles. Not only had Israel, as a whole, failed to embrace grace; the CHURCH at Jerusalem failed to fully embrace it as well. Quite frankly, the Lord probably would not have used James to pen the epistle which bears his name, had He waited a few years later for James to pen it. Sadly, the evidence of Scripture is that, like King Solomon, James did not finish his race well.

The church, which had been persecuted at the beginning, had now become antagonistic towards grace-only observing Gentiles. God knew He was going to need a spokesman such as Paul, who was not afraid to go against the politics of his own nation to take the gospel to the Gentiles. What better person than Paul, whose 180-degree turn towards the Lord could have only been motivated by a genuine encounter with the Him?

1 Timothy 1:16: However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

Chapter Three

The Error of "Gospel of John Only" Adherents

The problem with viewing the Gospel of John as the sole source of evangelistic truth is that it leads to a minimalist gospel presentation, which omits from the gospel presentation the message of Christ, our Suffering Substitute. To leave out the message of the Suffering Substitute, as we shall see elsewhere in this book, redirects a person's faith away from something that Jesus has done for us and reduces the object of faith to an act of believing. Faith in an act of faith is faith in a work. This will be the result of insisting that the Gospel of John serve as the primary evangelistic book of the New Testament.

So, how do the "Gospel of John only" evangelists arrive at this position? How is it that they have come to their conclusion that John is the sole book of the New Testament written specifically for the purpose of evangelism? They arrive at it from a misinterpretation of context in John chapter 20.

John 20:30, 31: truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;

but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

(Emphasis added.)

Two things need to be pointed out concerning this context.

1. The "these" to which this verse refers is not the entire content of the Gospel of John, but the **miracles** referenced in the Gospel of John. In other words, this verse does not state that the purpose of the gospel of John is to serve as a blueprint for evangelism; rather, it states that the purpose of the **miracles cited in the context** is to lead a person to come to the proper conclusion concerning the identity of Christ; and that, once he has come to that conclusion, he, too, might have the life the Lord Jesus came to make available.

John 20:31 is not a statement on the purpose of the fourth Gospel; no, it is a statement on the purpose of

the miracles referenced in the context. This truth can be demonstrated by the fact that the demonstrative pronoun "these" in John 20:31 is a neuter, plural pronoun. This means that the "these" of verse 31 has, as its antecedent, the word "signs" of verse 30 and not the "book" of verse 30.

To the argument that the gospel of John alone should be the only book of the Bible that we rely upon for information on how to be saved, I could respond that the Apostle Paul alone should be the only apostle we rely on as a reliable source of salvific truth; since, at least fifteen times, the Scriptures state that he alone is the apostle to the Gentiles. Now, I don't believe in pitting one apostle against another (because all the writings are inspired Scripture), but seeking to derive salvific truth from just one book of the Bible is a practice not sanctioned by the Scriptures.

2. The word "believe" of which this verse speaks, as well as many of the occurrences of the word "believe" in the Gospel of John, is a persuasion concerning the identity of Christ; in other words, a persuasion that He is who He claims Himself to be. The syntax of the

above verse demands this understanding. "That you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" is a persuasion of His Messianic credentials, but not necessarily a reference to an exercise of saving faith. Many, if not most, of the uses of the word "believe" in the Gospel of John are not references to an initial exercise of saving faith; but, rather, an act of believing through which our faith advances in the right direction. It is quite possible for a person to be persuaded concerning the fact that the Lord Jesus is the eternal second Person of the Godhead manifest in flesh, and yet believe that the way to eternal life is by enthroning Him as Lord and Master. Such a person would obviously not be saved because he, in his heart, is still convinced that his own integrity and character is sufficient to gain for himself eternal life.

That not every act of believing in the Gospel of John resulted in passing from death unto life can be demonstrated by the apostles' multiple exercises of faith. I mean, how many times DID the apostles believe?

John 1:50: Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig

tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

John 2:11: This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

John 11:15: "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."

John 13:19: "Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am *He*."

John 16:31: Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe?"

John 20:8: Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed.

These verses should suffice in demonstrating that the acts of believing in the Gospel of John are not necessarily acts of saving faith; but, instead, are referring to being

brought to a deeper persuasion concerning the person of Christ. Most probably the apostles came to a justifying faith under the teaching of John the Baptist, if not before.

Every advancement in the believer's experience begins with an assimilation of divine perspective or, as the Bible calls it, an act of believing. Most of the believing that we are doing occurs after our initial coming to faith in Christ.

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.

Forward momentum in grace always begins with an internalization of divine perspective gleaned from the Scriptures. These acts are referred to as "believing." It should not, therefore, surprise us that, in John, we see the apostles exercising multiple acts of believing.

The question, which quite often arises, is which acts of faith referenced in the Gospel of John resulted in the apostles' justification before God? The truth of the matter is, they most likely arrived at a justifying faith sometime during their association with John the Baptist, if not before. The apostles were a gang of fishermen with limited

informal training in the Scriptures, who hung out with each other and somehow became associated with John the Baptist. We can tell they were most likely in possession of a justifying faith by their response to John's pointing out Jesus to them as the "Lamb of God."

John 1:35, 36: Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples.

And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

This initial introduction by John the Baptist of two of his disciples to Christ started a chain reaction in this whole merry band of fishing associates. The next thing we know, Andrew telling is telling Simon the following:

John 1:41: He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ).

The next day, Jesus and the group of believing fishermen go to Bethsaida, the hometown of Peter and

Andrew, and snag Philip. Philip, in turn, finds his brother Nathaniel and reports to him the following:

John 1:45: Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote -- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

So, taken collectively, here is the content of the apostles' faith concerning the identity of Jesus: He was the Lamb of God, Messiah, the one of whom Moses and the Prophets spoke, Jesus the Christ. Their collective testimony demonstrates that they were already in possession of a justifying faith before they were ever introduced to Jesus. Where and how this band of fishermen had arrived at these conclusions, we are not told. Suffice it to say, that they were already sheep waiting for their Savior. They had gained this correct view of the coming One from their occupation with Moses, Daniel and the Prophets. Undoubtedly, they had already come to a justifying faith **before** their face to face encounter with the Lord.

Another question which often arises in the Gospel accounts is the fact that, apparently, the apostles lost their perspective in grace.

John 20:9: For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

The minimalist gospel proponent says that, if the apostles did not understand the death and resurrection of Christ, then those truths must not be a necessary component of saving faith. We shall deal with that question in the next chapter of this book.

Chapter Four

Explaining the Unbelief of the Apostles

One of the points that the minimalist gospel proponents like to make is that, if Christ had to explain to the apostles that He was going to die and rise from the dead, then understanding that Jesus was going to die for our sins is not a necessary component of saving faith. However, as we saw in the previous chapter of this book, the evidence from Scripture is that the apostles had come to a justifying faith prior to their introduction to Jesus by John the Baptist.

The Gospel of John, as well as the rest of the gospel accounts, contains several unsettling statements on the content of saving faith. If, as the minimalist gospel proponents say, the eleven apostles were saved, and they didn't understand that Christ had to die, then apparently that knowledge is not required content to saving faith.

Let's look first of all at a statement in the gospel of John indicating that the apostles did not have a firm grasp

on the core components of the gospel message. In fact, let's look at the all of the synoptic gospels concerning this truth.

John 20:9: For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

Mark 8:31- 33: And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

He spoke this word openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Incidentally, I find it interesting in this rebuke of the Lord that He considers Peter to be speaking on the authority of Satan. Which raised another question: how could Peter, the leader of the apostles, be abiding in the

presence of Jesus and yet still be articulating the viewpoint of Satan by attempting to divert the Lord Jesus from His plan? This should give us a clue to the fact that the apostles, while in the presence of the Lord, were not at all assimilating truth.

Consider also this verse:

Mark 9:34: But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who *would be the greatest*.

What kind of argument would that be for mature believers to be having? The truth of the matter is, they were not walking according to the Spirit and truth; they were always manifesting the mindset of carnal men.

Luke 9:51-56: Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.

But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.

And when His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"

But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.

"For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save *them*." And they went to another village."

If the apostles were so often being motivated by their flesh, then should we be surprised that they were not retaining in their souls the core concepts they apparently understood under the teaching of John the Baptist? Even though they consistently did not have a clue, we have evidence that they had an Old Testament justifying faith when they were still under the influence of John the Baptist.

John 1:35- 49: Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples.

And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said,
"Behold the Lamb of God!"

The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?"

He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).

One of the two who heard John *speak*, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ).

And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).

The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me."

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote -- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Look at how many times we have evidence that these disciples of John the Baptist were already in possession of an Old Testament justifying faith. They were anticipating the arrival of the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the One of

whom Moses and the prophets wrote. They were looking for the Divine suffering substitute, the Messiah, who was to be cut off for their sins.

So what had happened to the divine perspective the apostles possessed prior to their introduction to Jesus? Apparently, they had allowed the truth to lapse in their lives, with the systemization of doctrine taking a back seat in the presence of the Lord Jesus, who loved them, but was, nonetheless, still teaching in parables.

Do the scriptures consider it a possibility that people who were once properly oriented to grace might let those truths slip? Consider the following verses:

2 Timothy 2:13: If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

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

The two above passages are written to people already in possession of the enablements of the Holy Spirit. How much more difficult would it be for a person to stay oriented to grace, if that person had only a quickened conscience, but did not possess the inwardly dwelling Holy Spirit as their resident teacher! The apostles had not yet received this enablement during the earthly ministry of Jesus.

So, we must all admit that the apostles did not retain their grasp on the core truths of the gospel message. However, it can be demonstrated that they had a preassociation with God the Father before He gave them to Christ to safeguard. The following passages demonstrate that the apostles had already been accounted righteous by the Father before He gave them to the Lord Jesus to become their Shepherd.

John 10:26- 29: "But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

"And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

"My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand."

A point of clarification about the giving of eternal life in this context: it is a mistake to equate the giving of eternal life in this context with justification by faith. Jesus had not come to evangelize his apostles so they could be declared righteous. He had come to add a component of eternal life to their existence before God. He had come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. The components of eternal life which were to be given were the divine enablements of the Holy Spirit received in the New Birth. Even though these apostles were already justified, they had not yet received the enablements of the New Birth because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

John 7:39: But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive;

for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.¹

That the apostles already had a relationship with the Father before coming to Christ can also be seen in the following context:

John 6:44, 45: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

"It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me."

Once again, the apostles had previously assimilated the truth from the Father before they had been introduced to Christ.

1

This subject is covered more fully in the chapter "Eternal Life."

In the final prayer of the Lord for His apostles, we can see that they were already the possession of the Father before the Father gave them to Christ.

John 17:6- 10: "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.

"Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You.

"For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.

"And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them."

Notice that these apostles, like the sheep mentioned elsewhere in the Gospels, were the previous possession of the Father before they ever became the possession of

Christ. This was a reality in their lives because of a previous occupation with the teachings of the Law and Prophets and the ministry of John the Baptist in their lives, as demonstrated from John chapter 1.

So, how is it that the apostles could so consistently not have a clue? Another of their limitations was that they did not yet possess the enablements of the Holy Spirit which was to enable the saints to assimilate truth and walk with the Lord to a greater capacity than the saints of previous dispensations. Jesus made reference to this limitation in the following verses:

John 16:7: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you."

John 16:12, 13: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now.

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak

on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

Here we can see that the Lord taught that the indwelling Holy Spirit and the other enablements of the New Birth were going to give the apostles a greater capacity to know the Lord than they were experiencing in the very presence of Jesus! The believer today has a greater capacity to know the Lord through the agency of the indwelling Holy Spirit than the twelve apostles had sitting across from Him in the upper room!

The consistently untransformed state of the apostles most likely served a greater evidentiary purpose in the plan of God. The apostles consistently had no clue during the earthly ministry of Jesus, in order that the Holy Spirit's immediate transformation of the apostles might be profound and conspicuous. The transformation of the character of the apostles, their grasp on Scripture and the power of their teaching after the day of Pentecost can be explained only by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. How did the apostles go from a bunch of cowardly, bickering, ignorant, untransformed fishermen to Spirit-filled theologians and prophets with an incredible

grasp on biblical truth in a moment of time? Only the supernatural transformational power of God can offer that explanation.

Acts 4:13: Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

The apostles had no previous rabbinic training, yet their grasp on Scripture, a grasp that they did not have the day before, defied all earthly explanation. Truly, as the Lord had promised, the Holy Spirit was speaking through them and guiding them into all truth.

Another reason that the Lord chose twelve ignorant fishermen to be His apostles is in order that the following prophecy might be fulfilled.

Isaiah 28:9-13: "Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message?"

Those *just* weaned from milk?

Those *just* drawn from the breasts?

For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept,

Line upon line, line upon line,

Here a little, there a little."

For with stammering lips and another tongue

He will speak to this people,

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.

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.

Look at the description of the initial condition of those chosen by the Lord to teach truth to Israel, "Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts?" This is not a description of an unbeliever. Jesus chose twelve baby sheep to be his apostles. He chose them as part of the total judgment, as outlined above, which was to befall Israel. If, when Christ showed up, Israel was found having neglected the systematic study of their Scriptures, these judgments would befall them.

Quite frankly, the above context is very prophetic concerning the judgment which was to befall Israel, if they were found in a state of ill preparedness when the Lord showed up. Notice the idea of "precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little there a little". This is the systematic contemplation of Scripture that the Lord demands of all his children. Systematic Bible study seeks to formulate sound doctrine through sound principles of interpretation drawing upon multiple contexts. The children of Israel had neglected to practice this systematic approach to Scripture; so, consequently, the nation of Israel missed the rest of salvation and the following refreshing of their land, which Jesus had come to bring about. They missed their

Messiah; and, instead, received the sign of the judgment which was about to fall upon them. Baby saints, speaking truth, people from other nations, speaking in other languages to Israelites the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11, I Cor. 14:21), were all signs of judgment upon the nation of Israel. They were all signs that, because of a failure to approach the Scriptures systematically, Israel had missed their boat. They failed to perceive the presence of Jesus in their midst; consequently, the first arrival of Jesus had become a time of judgment instead of a time of refreshing (Acts 3:19).

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

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

"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."

Chapter Five

The Source of Justifying Faith During the Time of Christ

How was the Jew, during the time of Christ, to have come to a justifying faith? Since the Lord was not starting on the ground floor, so to speak, with the Jewish people, how was a Jew living during the time of Christ to have come to a justifying faith? They were to have come to justifying faith through the Law and the Prophets. An occupation with the Law and the Prophets was to already have pointed them to the coming One. We can see this in the following instructions of the Lord in the Gospel of John:

John 5:32- 47: "There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true.

"You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.

"Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved.

"He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.

"But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish --

the very works that I do -- bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.

"And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.

"But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.

"But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

"I do not receive honor from men.

"But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you.

"I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.

"How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from the only God?

"Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you -- Moses, in whom you trust.

"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.

"But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

From the above passage, we see that Jesus fully anticipated that the Law and the Prophets should have been fully adequate to have already established a Jew in a relationship with God. In addition to Moses' testimony abiding in their hearts, John the Baptist had testified of Christ. In addition to that, the miracles of Jesus also demonstrated the identity of His person. The reason the Jewish people, as a whole, were unable to believe the words of Christ is because they spurned the light which had already been sown in their midst. The Father's word had never occupied their hearts and it was time for them to be judged for it. Sadly, it was time for the neglectful nation to be judged. This can be demonstrated by the following context.

Isaiah 28:11- 13: For with stammering lips and another tongue
He will speak to this people,
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.
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.

“Line upon line, Here a little, there a little” is a description of how the Lord expected the Israelites to be occupied with His word; He expected them to be systematically studying it! Such a systematic study in the Scriptures would have led the Israelite to a justifying faith. Those who failed to come to faith through a systematic occupation with the light that the Lord had already dispensed were destined to experience the judgment of the above context.

By the way, there were some saints in Israel who had been taught by the Father through this very approach to Scripture. The apostles are a perfect example of this. As we have already seen, the evidence is that the apostles had already been searching the Scriptures in such a study.

John 1:35- 45: Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples.

And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?"

He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).

One of the two who heard John *speak*, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ).

And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).

The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote -- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

This band of fishermen, through their systematic study of Scripture and instruction under John the Baptist, possessed a justifying faith anticipating the arrival of the Lamb of God -- the Messiah -- as spoken of by Moses and the Prophets. Unlike the vast majority of their countrymen, they had not spurned the light at their disposal. They were of the sheep who could hear the voice of the Lord. They

had heard and learned from the Father and, therefore, could come to Christ.

Here is an interesting and very sobering thought. The person who lived during the time of Christ was expected to have already come to faith in Christ through being occupied with the writing of the Law and the Prophets. This can also be demonstrated from the account of the rich man in hell in Luke 18. In this account we have an interesting conversation between Abraham and the rich man:

Luke 16:27- 31: "Then he (the rich man) said, 'I beg you therefore, father (Abraham), that you would send him (Lazarus) to my father's house, 'for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

"Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

"And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

"But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "

Here is why this is a sobering thought, the rich man's brothers were most likely headed for hell because of their failure to extract from the Old Testament soteriological truth. This is the degree to which God expects a person to be occupied with His word. God has dispensed truth and people are expected to be occupied with it in a systematic way.

That those who lived during the time of Christ were expected to have already come to faith in the Christ through precepts of the Old Testament can also be seen from this following statement of the Lord:

Luke 24:25- 27: Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

"Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Chapter Six

Eternal Life in the Gospel of John

One truth which needs to be revisited in the Gospel of John is the concept of eternal life. Eternal life is the capacity to commune with God. When a person experiences the new birth, the giving of the new man and the indwelling Holy Spirit creates a capacity for communion with God. When a person is born again, He receives a life which is eternal in duration because, at the core of his being, exists a person which possesses the everlasting righteousness of God.

We who believe in security are sometimes so motivated to find verses that support our belief that, in the process, we fail to comprehend what the Scriptures teach concerning the concept of eternal life. When we take every occurrence of the phrase “eternal life” to be a reference to eternity in heaven, with an emphasis on duration of that existence, we fail to comprehend the full meaning of this phrase in the Scriptures. In the majority of occurrences, the emphasis of the phrase “eternal life” is not the granting

of a positive eternal destiny; rather, it is the addition of the capacity for communion with God.

Let's first understand the truth behind this life which is eternal in its duration.

The Lord Jesus, in John 17:3, gives us the following definition of eternal life:

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

Likewise the Apostle John gives us a similar definition eternal life in I John 5:20:

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Eternal life is the capacity to commune with God. In the Garden of Eden, man forfeited this purpose for which he was created: to enjoy the communion of God. All men

since Adam are now brought into the world possessed only with a nature and a perspective that are incapable of communion with God (Romans 8:7.) God's ultimate goal in saving us is to bring us to the place where we can commune with the perspective of God.

Now, make no mistake about it; believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior does guarantee one's eternal well being. The following verses identify for us the duration of this gift of eternal life:

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

John 5:24: " Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

Believing upon Jesus as your Savior produces a life which is eternal in its duration because it bears the image

of God at the core of its being. When a person is born again, he is now in possession of a life which is eternal in duration, because the new man on the inside is made in the image of God in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24). This new man is now the believer's eternal identity before God. But, just because this person exists on the inside, it doesn't mean that this new person is always directing the ambitions of the believer. When a believer is operating by the power of a mind renewed in the Scriptures, he is experiencing eternal life.

A great deal of confusion can result in our interpretation of Scripture if, in every context, we focus only on the duration of eternal life and not on the purpose for that life. For example, in 1 Timothy 6:12, Paul exhorts Timothy to "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life". Does this suggest that maybe Timothy's security is not yet certain? If we define eternal life as eternity in heaven, then we might conclude from this text that Paul was calling Timothy's security into question. However, if "laying hold of eternal life" speaks of Timothy's consistently exercising his heart in communion with the will of God, then Paul's exhortation to "laying hold on eternal life" in no way challenges the doctrine of security.

Consider also Galatians 6:7-8:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

Once again, if we take this above occurrence of everlasting life to be a reference to eternal existence in heaven, then, according to this context, eternal existence in heaven is reaped as a result of sowing to the Spirit. And that would mean that a home in heaven is secured on the basis of the choices you make after you are saved. But, if eternal life in this context is experiencing communion with God through the knowledge of Christ, then that would be consistent with the meaning of this verse.

This approach to the concept of eternal life also better accommodates some of those passages in the writings of John, which, on the surface, present a challenge to grace teaching. For example:

1 John 3:14-17: We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death.

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Is this teaching us that it is impossible for a believer to hate his brother? No, not at all. Verse seventeen of this context is clearly an example of a believer hating another believer. In the Scriptures, hatred is not necessarily viewing another with disdain or wishing harm upon another. Hatred is often as passive as neglect, as demonstrated by this context. If eternal life in this context means eternity in heaven, then the person who fails to meet the needs of a brother in Christ needs to question whether or not he is on his way to heaven. If, however, we

understand eternal life to be communion with the perspective of God, then this context need not call into question a person's eternal destiny, rather, this passage calls into question a person's communion with the Father. The primary purpose of the epistle of I John is precisely this test of fellowship, a fellowship I John refers to as "eternal life."

Likewise, in the Gospel of John, not every reference to eternal life can be equated to a person's being granted an eternal right standing before God. Many places in the Gospel, we see eternal life being added to the experience of those who are already justified in the sight of God.

John 10:27- 29: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

"And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

"My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.

Notice these sheep, who are being given eternal life, are already the possession of the Father. The dispensational context of the Gospel of John is a unique time in the history of the saints. Its context occurs during a time when many people were already in possession of a justifying faith; and, therefore, were already secure in their relation to the Father. They had already come to a justifying faith in their lives because they had already hoped in the coming divine Suffering Substitute. However, they were not yet born again because the components of the New Birth were not yet available to the saints, as we see in the following context:

John 7:38, 38: "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The truth of the matter is that **no** justified saint, having believed before the death and resurrection of Christ, was, as yet, born again. God could not take full possession of

His saints because the price for their release from their sin debt had not yet been paid. Therefore, the Holy Spirit did not indwell the Old Testament saint; the Old Testament saint did not receive a new man; the Old Testament saint did not go into the presence of God when he died. So, quite often, the eternal life being anticipated in the book of John was the addition of the capacity for communion with God which the already justified Old Testament saint would receive.

The “sheep” of the Gospel of John are most likely people already in possession of a justifying faith, who needed to have added to their experience the enablements of the New Birth, so that they could experience more abundantly, communion with the Father and the Son.

John 10:27- 29: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

"And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

"My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand."

Here, the sheep were already the possession of the Father and were now transferred to Christ; who, as the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, was about to add to their experience eternal life; that is, the capacity to commune with God through the enablements of the New Birth. Christ had come to enable the saints to experience a more intimate communion with the Father and the Son through the enablements of the New Birth.

John 10:10b: " I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly."

John 17:2: "as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him."

Once again, we can see from the above verse that those who are receiving eternal life are those who are already the possession of the Father.

So how did these people become sheep? Let's look at two other passages in John which demonstrate that those coming to Christ were already in a relationship with the Father.

John 6:39: "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

John 6:44, 45: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

"It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

Notice verse 45: "everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me." In other words,

those who were coming to Christ had already been predisposed to recognize Christ through a previous relationship to the Father. They were already justified Old Testament saints. Likewise, those rejecting Christ had not been predisposed through Scripture to come to Christ.

John 5:37, 38: "And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.

"But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe."

In closing, certainly some of those Jews who came to Christ during His earthly ministry (such as Nicodemus) had not ever believed in a justifying way; but most of those whom He was seeking out already had. As we will see elsewhere in this book, it is a mistake to assume that the earthly ministry of Jesus among the Jews was primarily evangelistic in scope. Jesus had not come to His people to re-sow the good news; rather, He had come to prepare His sheep for the soon to appear Kingdom.

Chapter Seven

Parables and Rebukes

Most of the interactions of the Lord with the Jews recorded in the Gospel of John are not attempts at evangelism; they are rebukes culminating with an explanation as to why they are not saved and why they were not responding in a positive way. The answer is always that they do not have the prerequisite truth of God present in their souls. They had not been taught by the Father; and, therefore, they were not God's sheep. God was not their Father; they were of their father, the devil. Such are the explanations in John concerning why the Israelites were not coming to Christ.

The Lord always interacted with these people using truths which demanded prerequisite truth from the Law and the Prophets. We understand these interactions today, either because of the explanations later added by the Apostle John, or because we read the theology of Paul back into these enigmatic sayings. When the Lord was engaged in this teaching method, He usually did not stop and explain to these people what they were not understanding. Instead, He just kept rolling with the teaching, revealing more truths He expected them to be

able to process if they had the prerequisite information. If He were in our midst today, and someone accused Him of preaching over their heads, He would have told them to raise their heads!

When Jesus was teaching the Jews, there was always a consideration that some in Israel were to be judged. Part of this judgment involved the Lord's teaching the Israelites in parables. Parables were deliberately cryptic teachings from the Lord designed to produce one of two outcomes as outlined in Matthew 13.

Matthew 13:10-15: And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

"For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

"And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear
with *their* ears,
Lest they should understand with *their* hearts
and turn,
So that I should heal them.'

In other words, a primary focus of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus was to shut down the ability of the neglectful Israelite to continue into the Kingdom as an ambassador of God. The Israelite who had gleaned prior truth from the Law and the Prophets would gain additional truth from the parables. However, those Israelites who had neglected previously dispensed truth were to have what little light they still possessed taken away so as to shut them down from continuing as the ambassadors of God. So, He taught in such a way that the sheep--that is,

justified Old Testament saints--would comprehend who Christ was and what He was saying; while, at the same time, the Jew who had neglected truth would be judged, as we see in verse 12 of our above context.

"For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

The Lord's teaching among the Jewish people required prerequisite information. We see the Jews, and even the disciples, always complaining that nobody could understand what Jesus was saying. Jesus always addressed the Jewish people in parables, as we read in Mark 4:34:

But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

Jesus would often utter a cryptic rebuke to the Jews without any explanation of what He had just said.

John 2:19- 22: Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

"But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Notice that the explanation of this enigmatic rebuke was never revealed to the audience present that day, but was offered by John (verse 22) to us after the Resurrection of Christ. This is how it is with most such statements; those present did not understand them. However, we understand them because of later commentary provided by John or later truths we supply gleaned from other Scripture.

Throughout the Gospel of John, we see people complaining that Jesus was speaking in enigmatic teachings. On many occasions the audience of the Lord had more questions than they had answers. Even His disciples complained about it.

John 6:60: Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"

John 7:35: Then the Jews said among themselves, "Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?"

John 10:24: Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly"

Finally, when the Lord was in the upper room, alone with His eleven apostles, He dropped the enigmatic teaching:

John 16:25-29: "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; "for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

"I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father."

His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!"

Notice the response of His apostles in verse 29, "See, NOW you are speaking plainly and using no figure of speech!" In other words, "now we can understand You because You dropped the cryptic teaching!"

The famous Bread of Life Discourse is a perfect example of this cryptic teaching method of Jesus. The Bread of Life Discourse was an extended rebuke of those who had sought out the Lord for another free meal.

John 6:26-61: Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?"

"Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

"But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him

may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven."

And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves.

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

"It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

"Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

"I am the bread of life.

"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

"This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live

forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this *Man* give us *His* flesh to eat?"

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.

"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

"For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.

"This is the bread which came down from heaven -- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"

When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you?"

Even His disciples thought He was recommending cannibalism! Notice that as the discourse progresses, more and more people become confused concerning the Lord's statements. Jesus, in His omniscience, knew exactly how He was being perceived, how He was being misunderstood; but, He just pressed ahead anyway with a message he KNEW nobody comprehended. Why did He not explain more clearly what He meant by "eat My flesh and drink My blood?" It is because there was an element of judgment in His teachings. He was requiring those to whom had already been dispensed the Law and the Prophets to bring forward truths contained within themselves in order to discern His teachings.

By the way, the reason we understand exactly the points Jesus was making in the Bread of Life Discourse is because we carry the theology of the Apostle Paul BACK into the context. Most every time we celebrate communion in our churches, we speak of the broken body and shed blood of the Lord and then eat the bread and drink the juice. But the immediate audience of the Lord had none of that information, yet He did not stop and offer an explanation to His audience. One would think that, if the discourse was intended to be evangelistic, Jesus would have stopped and explained Himself. Quite frankly, the

Bread of Life Discourse is not an attempt at evangelism, but more of a rebuke towards Israelites who should have been acquainted with truth and who should have been anxious to glean more.

The Bread of Life Discourse was a rebuke of the motives of those Israelites who had initially engaged the Lord in conversation. They were interested only in another free meal. They were interested only in "bread and circuses." Consider again this verse:

John 6:29- 31: Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?"

"Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' "

What a smart aleck taunt of the Lord! "Hey, Lord! Here is what you could do to prove who You are! Conjure up for us some more food!" They didn't need another miracle; they saw the feeding of the five thousand the day before. They had come for more free fish sandwiches and were

trying to taunt Him into conjuring up some more. So it is in that context He gives the Bread of Life Discourse to these irreverent Jews. It is a more of a rebuke of the false motives of His audience than it is an attempt at evangelism. It was a rebuke from the Lord and an explanation as to why they weren't saved.

John 6:36: "But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.

In other words, they had witnessed the miracle the day before; but, instead of seeking truth, they were trying to get a free meal. This fleeting vision of those who were rejecting Christ is contrasted to those who were executing a saving gaze in the following verse:

John 6:40: "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

It is instructive to note that the word for "seen" in verse 36 and the word for "sees" in verse 40 are two different words. The seeing of verse 36 is a reference to the miracle they had seen the day before. The seeing in verse 40 is a reference to a perceiving gaze with that perception enabled by prerequisite Old Testament truth.

The prerequisite Old Testament truth, which His present audience did not possess, is referenced by the Lord a few verses later:

John 6:43- 45: Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

"It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

The entire response of the Jewish audience hearing the Bread of Life Discourse is one of mocking and derision. So, the Lord's response was warning and rebuke. When it was all over, His anger also carried over to His disciples.

John 6:61, 62: When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend **YOU**?
" *What* then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? (*Emphasis added.*)

When He had finally cooled off a bit from the rebellion of almost everybody within earshot of the message, He

acknowledged the futility of His exchange with that audience with the following conclusion:

John 6:65: And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

In other words "Disciples, this drives home the point: it is of no use preaching to people who have not received prior instruction from the Father."

Allow me to insert an interesting side note: the Apostle Paul did take the time to attempt to establish people in this prerequisite knowledge:

Acts 17:1-3: Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."

Okay, back to our original discussion: Many of those contexts of John which mention the concept of believing also contain this component of rebuke; for example, the famous John 3 passage starts out with a

very harsh rebuke from the Lord directed towards Nicodemus and, more specifically, the leadership of Israel.

John 3:1- 10: There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

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

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

You can almost hear the exasperation of the Lord's response in verse 10: "Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not KNOW these things?" The Lord was surprised that a leader of Israel could be so ill informed! This response of the Lord is hardly the gentle approach one would take towards a person who had no previous light. This guy, Nicodemus, was a teacher of Israel and had most likely contributed to the collective blindness of the nation of Israel concerning the identity of Jesus.

Notice also again verse 7:

Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

In other words, "Get that puzzled look off of your face! You're supposed to KNOW this!"

The rebuke continues in verse 11:

John 3:11: "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you (plural) do not receive Our witness. *(Parentheses added.)*

It is most instructive to note that the phrase "you do not receive our witness" is a plural "you," indicating that Jesus is not just addressing Nicodemus, singularly; but also the leadership of Israel whom Nicodemus was representing, collectively. He is exasperated with them. He is saying, "If you all believe that I am from God, then why aren't you responding positively to what I say?"

John 3:13: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

In other words, Jesus is saying, "None of you traveled up to heaven to get this message, but the Son of Man came down from heaven to deliver this message; Who, by the way, is still in such communion with God that He is still in heaven. So you ought to be listening to Me!"

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

Notice verse fourteen begins with the conjunction "and" which means that there is no break in the discourse here. The Lord is still in the middle of His exasperated rebuke. So, now He starts talking about the bronze serpent in the Wilderness.

All that had to be done with the serpent on the pole in the wilderness to be saved from certain death was to **gaze** upon it. Likewise, all that needs to be done for the Jew to be saved was to **gaze** upon the Son of Man in comprehending faith.

It may be instructive that Jesus also makes mentions of this saving gaze in the following verse:

John 6:40: "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

It is also instructive to note that the word "sees" here is the Greek word θεωρέω which speaks of more than a glancing look. It speaks of a perceiving, comprehending gaze. It is the Greek word from which we get the word "theater." In a theater, the observer is surrounded with perceptive experience. The Jews were supposed to be able to, with the prerequisite knowledge of the Law and the Prophets, gaze upon the person of Jesus and perceive that He was the Savior. However, they could not; because

they did not have the prerequisite truth abiding upon their hearts as Jesus would say in John chapter 5:

John 5:37, 38: "And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.

"and ye do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

The leadership of Israel was not able to exercise this saving gaze because they did not have the prerequisite frame of reference required for such a gaze to lead to faith. Back to John 3:

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

I think it is worth noting here that Jesus includes the world in the gospel invitation here, as if to remind Nicodemus, the representative of the Jewish leadership, of their responsibility to evangelize the world with this truth. But how were they going to evangelize the world with this truth when they themselves were not getting it?

Jesus ends this conversation with Nicodemus with a closing warning concerning avoiding the light.

John 3:19- 21: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

"For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

"But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

Light spurned is the basis of condemnation before God. When you know God has sent you light, and you, for whatever evil reason, seek to avoid that light, that is the reason you will be condemned. The Jewish leadership perceived that Jesus was from God; nevertheless, for a variety of their own evil reasons, they were avoiding Him.

We can also see a component of rebuke in the following interaction of the Lord with the leadership of Israel. Notice once again, that one of our favorite gospel verses occurs right in the middle of this context.

John 5:20: "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel."

Notice the end of this verse, "that you may marvel." Marveling is not the desired response to revealed truth. Marveling is what uninformed people do. People marvel because they have no prerequisite knowledge of the situation. Marveling is fleeting amazement. The desired response of the Lord is memorializing the experience for a later, more thorough consideration, like Mary's in the following passage:

Luke 2:18: And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.
But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart.

Do not miss the contrast here between marveling and memorializing the incident for later systemization. Marveling is what the uninitiated masses do; observing, remembering and investigating are what informed people do. Marveling is what people do when watching a magician do tricks. And marveling is what people did who watched the miracles of Christ, for their entertainment value, with no further personal investigation. "That you may marvel," in John 5:20, is a rebuke from the Lord for their lack of discernment and faith.

The rebuke continues:

John 5:21- 29: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.

"For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son,

"that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.

"For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,

"and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice

"and come forth -- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

(Emphasis added.)

Notice verse 28 of our context, "Do not marvel at this!" In other words, "You'd better not let this concept escape your comprehension! The day is coming when I will be judging you!"

Once again, the whole thrust of this context is not evangelistic in scope. While it is true that we have some wonderful truths concerning salvation in this context; while it is true that one of the most important statements on security occur in verse 24 of this context, the overall tone here is one of rebuke and warning. Many of the messages the Lord delivered in the Gospel of John were not evangelistic in intent; indeed, they were an explanation as to why those in his audience were not saved. They were rebukes. The Lord, in these passages, references fundamental concepts of the gospel without fully developing them; because the prerequisite truth necessary to grasp His teachings was to have **already** been assimilated by his audience through prior occupation with the Law and the Prophets.

For example, in John 3:14-16, we see several core gospel truths referenced but not explained. Quite frankly,

we understand the message because we bring to the context truth gleaned from other passages of Scripture.

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

What was the significance of the "lifted up" son of Man? Jesus did not take the time to explain that to Nicodemus here. However, John explains it later in his epistle in the following context:

John 12:32, 33: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself."
This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

Jesus told Nicodemus that the way to life is by comprehending the purpose for which the Son of Man was to be lifted up. We see this core gospel truth referenced here, but not developed.

Also in verse 16, what does it mean that God "gave" his only begotten Son? We understand John 3:16 and the concept of God's giving His Son because we bring to this verse truth from elsewhere in the Bible:

1 John 4:9, 10: In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

However, without our bringing into these contexts additional light from elsewhere in the Scriptures, they cannot alone be used to communicate the content of saving faith. Once again, we see the content of saving faith referenced but not developed.

The same can be said for the Bread of Life Discourse:

John 6:52, 53: The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this *Man* give us *His* flesh to eat?"

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.

Again, we see the Lord referencing, but not developing, core concepts of saving faith. The Lord, in this passage, is referencing the fact that a personal assimilation of the value of His sufferings is an indispensable component of saving faith; however, He never explains it. As we see in the above exchange, the Jews thought Jesus was commending cannibalism to them; and He, in His response to the Jews, never seeks to clarify that point! Why? It is because the motivation of the Lord in this exchange with the Jews is one of rebuke for their lack of prerequisite knowledge.

Consider also the following passage in John:

John 12:32- 36: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself."

This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how *can* You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"

Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.

"While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.

Here, the Lord does not take the time to answer his audience's question. He does not explain to them who He was and why He had to die. He basically says to them, "You don't have a whole lot more time to figure it out. You had better get serious about the light!" The Lord had not come to re-sow the message of the coming salvation as revealed in the Law and the Prophets; He had come to call to account the people to whom that message had already been delivered.

If we continue to read in John chapter 12, we come to another very unsettling passage:

John 12:37- 40: But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"

Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with *their* eyes, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."

Several things need to be pointed out about the above context.

1. In order to believe, the Israelite needs prerequisite Old Testament truth. It is interesting to note that the passage being quoted in verse 38 is Isaiah 53, a chapter of Isaiah which alone contains 30 prophecies concerning the person and work of Christ. So, the nation of Israel had no excuse for not recognizing Christ.

2. The unsettling statement in verse 40 of the Lord blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts is concerning Israel collectively and not Jews individually. If you continue reading in the context to verse 42 you will see it reported that "Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him..." After 3 years of seeking for faith in Israel, the Lord had not found enough with which to

constitute a contingency of Jewish believers with which to establish the Kingdom; therefore, the decision was made to bring to an end Israel's ability to continue as the people of God. It was time to judge their nation. Israel, at this time, would not be healed, but judged. He turned off the lights of the nation so that Israelites could no longer continue under the blessing of God. Paul explains this to us in the following context:

2 Corinthians 3:14- 16: But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

This veiling of the mind of the Israelite was not to prevent them from personally coming to faith in Christ, but to collectively prevent the nation of Israel from continuing as the people of God.

Before leaving this chapter, the following observation needs to be made. The reason we understand many of the statements made by the Lord is not because we, as

Gentiles, are bringing ahead knowledge from the Law and the Prophets; we are, in fact, reading the theology of the Apostle Paul, and other New Testament writers, back into the some of those difficult statements of Christ. We are synchronizing the writings of Paul to the writings of Christ. The book of John cannot stand on its own as the sole source of salvific truth for us. Because the Lord was requiring the Israelites to come to His teachings with prerequisite truth, we too need to come to His teachings with prerequisite truth; only, instead of coming from the Law and the Prophets, our prerequisite truth is being supplied by Peter, Paul, Luke and John.

Chapter Eight

Reapplying a Kingdom Framework To the Gospel of John

We all know that John wrote his gospel account avoiding, as much as possible, a Kingdom framework. However, the Lord is preaching to Jews; and we know, in the other three gospel narratives, the Kingdom framework is fully intact in His preaching. So what would happen if we were to overlay a Jewish Kingdom framework back onto the teaching of the Lord in the fourth gospel? The results are worth considering.

So what do I mean by a Kingdom framework? Well, from the perspective of a Jew living during the time of Christ, salvation was not a citizenship in heaven (as for the church age believer) but a place in the earthly Kingdom. The ultimate salvation for the Jew living during the time of Christ was to survive - or, better yet, bypass altogether - the trials of the Great Tribulation and arrive in the earthly Kingdom in a flesh and blood body. Many Jewish saints would perish in the Great Tribulation and enter the earthly Kingdom in a resurrected body. Jewish saints who died in the past would be resurrected into the

Kingdom as well. The ultimate salvation for the Jew was to survive the Great Tribulation and be one of those saints initially entering the Kingdom in a flesh and blood body.

For example, Jesus told Nicodemus in John chapter 3 the following:

John 3:3: Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

If the Kingdom of God here is the earthly Kingdom, most likely Jesus is telling Nicodemus that, before he would be allowed to enter that earthly Kingdom, he must be enabled to do so by experiencing a new birth. This new birth would be the divine enablement he would need to be able to become and remain a citizen in that Kingdom.

Ezekiel 36:26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.²⁸ "Then you shall dwell in the land

that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

Without experiencing this new birth, it would not be possible for him to enter into and experience the blessings of this Kingdom. Moreover, if he did not experience the new birth, he would perish outside the Kingdom, maybe during the Great Tribulation, and never experience the everlasting life which will be the experience of all those participating in the Kingdom.

In addition, those bypassing the Great Tribulation - or surviving it - and entering the Kingdom would be participating in the agrarian economy of that Kingdom (Ezekiel 36), free from the fear of the surrounding nations (Joel 3:17), without the need to dwell in walled cities (Ezekiel 38:11), but, rather, freely passing in and out of their cities to tend to their green pastures (Isaiah 49:9). One has to wonder if that is what was on the Lord's mind when he uttered the following words:

John 10:9: "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

However, having introduced this idea of the framework of the coming Kingdom, we must not forget that the invitation to believe in John was for all the world. "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16). Or, as the believing Samaritans exclaimed, "we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." (John 4:42).

John deliberately avoids the Kingdom framework because, unlike the other gospel narratives, his invitation is for the entire world. It was his desire to lead his readers to the conclusion that Jesus is the Christ. John's desire was not to split dispensational hairs; his desire was to introduce to the Lord Jesus those who have not yet considered Him.

Final thoughts

The main motive for me in writing this book is the motive for many of my books: maintaining the purity and potency of the grace-only gospel. The minimalist gospel advocates, who insist on leaving the message of the cross out of their gospel presentation, view the Gospel of John as their stronghold of justification for doing so. Their view of the Saviorhood of Christ is something other than "Christ, our Suffering Substitute." In the final analysis, their faith is in an act of faith and not in the sin-settling sacrifice of Christ.

Without prerequisite truth, a person cannot exercise saving faith. There must be an illumination of the conscience concerning the all-sufficient sufferings of Christ before a person can choose to believe in Christ. The Jews were not able to come to Christ because there was not abiding in their hearts prerequisite truth assimilated through the Law and the Prophets. They could watch the miracles of Christ and be amazed, but the lights were not turning on in their souls. Old Testament saints had received that prerequisite gospel light through the teachings of the Law and the Prophets. People believing in the New Testament received their prerequisite illumination through the preaching of the gospel. The

preaching of the cross is the power of God unto salvation because it results in the illumination of the conscience, enabling the sinner to believe and be saved.

Proponents of the minimalist gospel position insist that people can be saved without experiencing the illuminating power of the gospel. Their faith is in an act of believing. They don't believe we are saved by believing in our Divine Substitute; they believe we are saved by believing a promise. That promise is that Jesus will save us if we believe that He will save us. So they are resting in their act of believing and not in Christ's sin-settling sacrifice.

The Gospel of John references, but does not develop, the core concepts of the gospel message. For example, in the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus says that, except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. However, Jesus, in that context never develops what that means. We can infer from the context that saving faith must appropriate the value of Christ's sin-settling work. Likewise, in John 3, Jesus says that one needs to believe on the "lifted up" Son of Man, whom God "gave" to the world. While WE know what Jesus meant, because we read the theology of Paul and John into that context, it is doubtful that Nicodemus got it. We get it

because we read the theology of other writers back into those contexts. Jews were to “get it” by bringing the teachings of the Law and the Prophets forward into those contexts. Without that prerequisite illumination, saying “believe in Jesus” is an inadequate communication of the gospel.

A person can believe in Jesus for a lot of things. He can believe in Jesus for healing, protection, well-being, prosperity, etc.; but unless a person’s faith embraces Jesus as the One who settled their sin debt and made their peace with God through the blood of His cross, he has not yet understood the Saviorhood of Christ. Synchronizing the Gospel of John with the Gospel of Paul brings a person to that understanding.

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