



Paul's Gospel



Paul's Gospel
Salvation
The Holy Spirit
The Bride

A Collection Of Lessons
by
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Paul's Gospel

(Part 1)

Paul's writings contain spiritual truths which are not expressed elsewhere in the scripture. If this were not so, the Holy Spirit would not have inspired him to write. What Paul wrote was not simply an outgrowth or a further expression of old truths. He was given a new revelation expressly for the Church of this age. Since this is true, if we do not believe that Paul had any such special revelation, or do not grasp its significance, we will miss God's full purpose for the Church.

Israel, wandering in the wilderness, missed the will of God. He promised to give them the land of Canaan, but they did not believe Him. Rather than looking forward with anticipation to what He promised, they looked backward, desiring to return to the Egyptian enslavement from which God had delivered them. (Ex. 16:3) Few took the time to consider God's promises to them; they thought only of their own desires and the hardships they faced. Although God fed them, led them and kept them clothed during their wanderings, they died under judgment there in the wilderness, having failed to receive God's word. (Num. 14:22-23, 28-33)

The Church today is, for the most part, wandering in a wilderness, confused by ignorance and unbelief. Many look backward to the commandments of Moses, desiring an earthly covenant rather than rejoicing in their heavenly calling. (Col. 3:1-2; II Cor. 4:18) Others look back with longing to the earthly ministry of Jesus, instead of desiring what God has offered to us in this age. God has redeemed us for a specific, heavenly, eternal purpose,

yet many of God's beloved people leave this life without laying hold of His purpose in any practical sense. That He graciously leads them and meets their material needs (perhaps miraculously, as He did for rebellious Israel) does not alter the facts.

It was given to Paul to reveal God's purpose to and for the Church age and to show us how to enter into that purpose. Read Colossians 1:25. The Greek word there translated "fulfill" means to fill up, or to complete. Did Paul realize that He was writing scripture? Unquestionably. He had been given truth to dispense--the completing, fulfilling revelation for the Church. Without the truth God inspired Paul to write, the Bible would not be complete.

He did not get this fresh truth from other men. "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:11-12)

Paul's career was distinctive in this respect from the time of his conversion. He had heard of the gospel of Christ from men, of course. He heard Stephen's testimony before Stephen was stoned. (Acts 7:54-8:1) He probably heard more as he persecuted the Church and imprisoned believers. But when it came time for Saul, who would be called Paul, to be taught the reality of Christ, the task was not entrusted to a follower of Christ; the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to Paul and turned him to the truth.

This pattern of direct revelation did not change. In II Corinthians 12:1-4, Paul told of an experience which he could not properly describe. He "knew a man in Christ" who was caught up into the spiritual heavens. (This was "the new man" in him, as in Col. 3:10 and elsewhere. It is God's way of describing the life of Christ in the believer.)

Paul had neither words nor authority to express all that was shown to him. The revelation of truth he received, then and at other times, was so great that God took special measures to keep him from becoming spiritually proud. (II Cor. 12:6-9) In Ephesians 3:3, Paul again made it clear that the "mystery" truths of this age were made known to him by revelation, and not by human teaching. In that same chapter, he plainly stated that these truths were not made known in other ages, but were hidden in God from the beginning of the world.

The revelation given to Paul was not directly revealed to others, but only through him. This is not unusual in God's workings. Moses alone received the law and the pattern for the tabernacle. Others learned from him; others learned from them. Apparently, God directly revealed the coming of the flood only to Noah. Those who perished in that flood died because they did not believe Noah had a word from God. Oftentimes, God showed truths and future events to the great prophets, things of which no one else knew. So it was with Paul.

In that same, third chapter of Ephesians, however, Paul said that the mystery was "now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." Notice that "apostles and prophets" are plural. New truth was revealed to all the apostles. Jesus began the process during His prophetic ministry, before His crucifixion. He continued it as he unfolded the Old Testament scriptures after His resurrection, explaining to the disciples many things which even the writers of those scriptures had not comprehended. (I Pet. 1:10-12; Luke 24:27) Also, some prophets, though not possessing the apostolic office, received revelations of truth which had not been known or understood before. (That this process is finished concerning doctrinal truth for this age is manifest. Paul did "fulfill," or complete the word of God.)

Does this mean that Paul was just one of many

who were caught up into the heavens and given an open revelation of the fullness of Church age truths and purposes? By no means.

In both Romans 2:16 and 16:25, Paul spoke of what he called "my gospel." This does not mean he preached Paul rather than Christ. In Romans 1:1 and following, he spoke of "the gospel of God," which concerns His Son Jesus Christ, and unto which Paul the apostle was separated. In Romans 1:9, he spoke again of "the gospel of His Son," in which he, Paul, served. "My gospel" means that Paul had a special message, a gospel (or good news) which had been given directly and only to him to announce. In the two passages cited above, he indicated that both judgment and the establishing of believers would be in accordance with his gospel--strong words, inspired by the Holy Spirit. He did not exalt himself in any human sense, but he magnified his office, a place of ministry and authority given by the Lord, and exercised in submission to Christ.

This brings us to a further step in understanding the official place God gave to Paul. "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." (Rom. 11:13) Paul's ministry, and therefore his revelation, was given a specific direction or aim. He was the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles.

The Church of Jesus Christ has been largely a Gentile phenomenon. Read in Acts 28:25-28 what Paul said to the Jews at Rome, after the Lord apparently showed him that a final rejection had occurred. He ended with, "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." Israel, as a nation, had lost all spiritual perception. After speaking in Romans nine of the great heaviness and continual sorrow he bore over the unbelief of his national

kinsman, the Jews, Paul spoke in chapter eleven of how that people (in the national sense) had stumbled spiritually and had been cut off. He said further, "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." Israel's national rejection of Jesus Christ is only temporary, just "until," but it exists. This gives the Gentiles a central role in God's purpose for this age.

This does not imply that the Jews are shut out as individuals, of course. It is only as a nation that they have been set aside for a time, because on the national level, when they rejected Christ, they rejected God's purpose for their nation. Read Rom. 11:1-5; Gal. 3:26-29; and Col. 3:11. There are still many Israelites, according to the flesh, among the elect. In the Church, God makes no distinction between them and the Gentiles, who are presently more prominent. Yet, inasmuch as Paul had the message for the Gentiles, he had the message for the Church age. This is an unusual time, the time of Gentile opportunity (Eph. 2:11-13), the time when God is doing a new thing, the time for which new revelations of truth were needed.

Understand, then, that Paul's revelation, as recorded by the Holy Spirit in his writings, differs and is distinct in its purpose from any other portion of scripture. He was the apostle to the Gentiles and, alone among the New Testament writers, he had a message so different that the Spirit led him to call it "my gospel."

In Acts 15, it is recorded that a council was held to decide whether the believing Gentiles should be subject to the law of Moses. (God had already made the decision for both Jew and Gentile, but men had not yet accepted it--nor have all believers done so today.) Most Christian Jews of that day still observed the law. In Galatians 2:7-9, Paul described a part of the findings of that council. "They saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto

me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter.... He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles....James, Cephas," or Peter, "and John....gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision."

That great assemblage of believers and apostles publicly acknowledged that Paul had a special calling which was separate in character from their own. This was not just a dividing up of territory so as not to be in competition. It was a recognition on their part that Paul had a different message, that their ministry was to Israel, whereas his was to the nations. It was not really a decision but rather an acceptance of God's evident purpose for Paul's ministry.

"But," one might ask, "how can we say that Peter's ministry was not to the Gentiles, when it was he who first preached Christ to them?" (See Acts 10:9-11:18) We not only can, but we must say this, because the Bible says it. A man who preaches occasionally is not necessarily called to a full time ministry in the word. As a pastor, I do have such a calling. Yet when I happen to minister the word outside my home Church, I am well aware that I am not called to those places in the usual sense of the word, nor may I exercise full pastoral authority there. Peter sometimes preached to Gentiles, and Paul preached to Jews when he had an opportunity, yet both realized that the occasional exceptions did not change their respective callings.

Consider what this means in regard to scripture. Peter, James, and John, mentioned specifically by Paul as having had a part in the Jerusalem council, and having agreed with its conclusions, are prominent New Testament

writers. Is it coincidence that we have such a clear testimony of their belief that their ministries were not to the Church at large, but rather to Israel? No. God knew that we would need this witness. He wants us to understand that their writings have a generally Israelitish perspective, and that He ordained another man to record His message for the Church. Peter and James both make this fairly clear in their opening greetings. (Jas. 1:1; I Pet. 1:1) It is not so obvious at first that John's writings are different in character, purpose, and direction from the those of Paul, but Galatians 2:7-9 leaves no doubt. These writers did not record God's plan for the Church.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable...." (II Tim. 3:16) We can learn from all of the scriptures--Old Testament, New Testament, Israelitish, or Church-age. We prosper on the varied spiritual diet afforded by the word of God. Yet to rightly divide God's word (II Tim. 2:15) we must recognize that God has drawn a visible line of difference between Paul's revelation and the writings of all others in scripture. We would do about as well (or poorly) to argue with God's decision to separate Israel from all other nations as to argue with His decision to distinguish Paul's gospel from all other scripture. We may not at first understand it, either in its purpose or in just what makes it different, but if God has said it is different, we should at least believe Him while we wait for more understanding to come.

Paul's gospel deals with the needs and calling of the Church in a way that even those books we call the four gospels do not. Many popular editions of the Bible have the words of Jesus Christ printed in red. We can have no real objection to this practice, but we should understand that the Bible does not teach that these are the most important words it contains. The whole Bible is the word of God. Those words marked in red can have no more

authority than that. No less, certainly, but no more either. They do not stand above the rest of scripture.

Moreover, Jesus made it clear that his earthly ministry as a prophet and teacher was aimed at a very small section of humanity. "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 15:24) He came to die for all men; He preached to Israel.

Paul gave the authoritative, Spirit inspired, Church age view on this. "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers." (Rom. 15:8) Not a minister to the Church as such, but to the circumcision--to Israel. Although we certainly recognize that some principles and truths are not limited to particular ages or people, God has made it clear that some teachings do have these limitations. Jesus did not aim His earthly instructions at the Church or the Gentiles. He directed His labors, according to the will of His Father, toward Israel, and preached the kingdom, not the Church. He was not specifically revealing God's purpose for the Church of this age, but God's purpose for Israel.

May we take anything in the Bible, regardless of its context or to whom it was written, and apply it directly to ourselves? How many, many teachings, taken from the Old Testament and the "gospel of the circumcision," having no confirmation or Church age authority from the gospel of Paul, are presented to God's people as if they were for us today! Can this be right? Surely not. The Bible teaches that God gave the special message for this age through Paul. Other scripture is profitable to us, but was not given to reveal the details and particulars of His purpose for the Church.

Instead, the Church must view all scripture from the perspective of Paul's gospel. If a purpose of God is not

revealed or confirmed by Paul as being a part of what God wants for us, then we must take care lest we find at the end that we have sought for things which God has set apart for another people in another age. This is not a matter of human opinion, but of divine revelation.

Paul's Gospel

(Part 2)

What are the teachings which make up Paul's gospel? Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul produced more scripture than any other New Testament writer--fourteen books in all. This is the record of his gospel. If what God showed him could be expressed in a few pages, he would not have needed to write so much. Simply put, it is not possible to present every detail of his message in this one, short piece of writing. That is the function of the scripture; it is there that God's message must be learned. No teaching, written or oral, can replace your own diligence in searching and meditating on God's word. The best that can be done here is to hint at the wealth of truth revealed through Paul, in hopes of stirring your desire to look into these things.

Paul told the Corinthians, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." (II Cor. 4:3) I believe that Paul's gospel, the revelation of God's purpose for the Church of this age, is available and understandable to every saved person. This does not mean that all believers will look into it, nor does it mean that it is always easy to understand. Peter spoke of Paul's writings, saying, "In which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest," (twist, turn around,

and reverse in meaning), "as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (II Pet. 3:16) Some will misinterpret this revelation which God gave to Paul, injuring themselves spiritually. According to Peter, however, the unstable will distort all scripture, not just Paul's epistles.

One of the first things to learn about Paul's writings is that through them, God alters our view of the rest of the Bible. Much of our understanding of the deeper, Old Testament truths comes from Paul's gospel. It is not an overstatement to say that this also holds true for the New Testament. Many difficult passages of the Bible would remain hidden mysteries without the explanations God gave through Paul.

For example, God showed Paul His purpose in giving the Old Testament law. "Moreover the law entered that the offense," or sin, "might abound." (Rom. 5:20) Law came, in other words, not to help people learn to be better, but so that sin might increase! Who, apart from God's making such an explicit statement, would believe that this was His intent? The law was given so "that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." (Rom. 7:13) The law did not remove sin; it only revealed it. Paul taught that the law was holy, just, and good, but he also said it was "weak through the flesh." (Rom. 7:12, 8:3) The law could not improve humanity, because the nature of the flesh makes it impossible for us to obey the law's commandments. Instead, it increases sin, as people rebel against the law or hypocritically pretend to keep it.

This view of Moses' law is gained only from Paul's writings. He wrote further, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." (Gal. 3:24) Once the utter hopelessness of our being justified by our own works is revealed, the law's job is done. It has no hold on us. This teaching is

duplicated nowhere else in scripture, though in its light we now see throughout the Bible that we are free from the law. Read Romans 10:4, Galatians 3:11-12, and I Timothy 1:8-11. Those passages give even more insight into the law, an entirely new viewpoint, found only in "the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to [Paul's] trust."

Consider also the salvation of the Gentiles, and our degree of spiritual opportunity. Peter was the first to see that Christ did not bring just a new and better covenant for Israel, with the Gentiles still on the outside fringes. After God showed him a vision concerning this, Peter said, "God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean," speaking, of course, of saved people. (Acts 10:28) Yet Peter never wrote anything concerning God's purpose for the Gentiles of this age.

Paul alone, having had a separate revelation, wrote that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs in the gospel with the Jews; that all who trust in Christ are one body of people, whether Jew or Gentile; that in Christ "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision." (Eph. 2:16, 3:6; Col. 3:11) Most saved Jews at that time still viewed saved Gentiles as being merely "not unclean," -- that is, saved, but separate - and not equal. It was for this reason that they withdrew themselves from the believing Gentiles at Antioch. (Gal. 2:11-14) Even Peter and Barnabas were carried away with that hypocrisy, although they knew better. Paul found it necessary to withstand Peter and those of the circumcision who sought to make a spiritual division between Jew and Gentile.

His explanation of our new life, Christ in us, and us in Christ, shatters every fleshly distinction. (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:13-15) Spiritually, we neither gain nor lose by being Jew or Gentile; American Indian, white, or black; U. S. or Russian citizen. We are all equally acceptable to

God if Christ is in our hearts. This does not cancel his covenant with Abraham. All who trust in Christ are of Abraham's seed, and can trace their spiritual lineage back to father Abraham. (Gal. 3:16, 29, Rom. 4:16-17)

This leads us to the heart of Paul's revelation. "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col. 1:26-27) From here we look at John 3:3-7, and know the new birth is the entering of Christ into our hearts. Without this new, Christ-in-you revelation, the new birth would be as much a riddle to us as it was to Nicodemus. Read also John 17:23. Who would believe Jesus meant that he would literally enter into us, if the Spirit had not moved Paul to affirm it as true?

Paul's gospel is not just new light on old scriptures, however. God used Paul to unfold something which He has offered specifically, and only, to us in this age. Again, the mystery now revealed to us is, "Christ in you. the hope of glory." He has offered us a special glory. It is to be received by faith, by a sure knowledge of Christ dwelling in our hearts. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:17) In ages past, it was not possible to believe God for this glory, because He had said nothing about it. Paul said it was a new revelation, hidden from earlier generations. This does not take away from the worthy men and women of old, but it does add something to us, if we will receive it.

"The hope of glory"--not a present glory, but a glory to come! It is to this that we are invited. This hope-of-glory message pushes our gaze forward from short-sighted concerns for this life and this world, to the

heavens and the ages to come. "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:6-7) His purpose is not to show the exceeding riches of his grace now, but in the future.

Notice that the passage quoted above tells us that we are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. This is something else we are told nowhere except in Paul's writings. Compare this to Colossians 3:2-3, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God," that is, in the heavens. Anything which causes our desires to focus primarily on this age and this world is contrary to Paul's gospel.

Not that we should stop expecting God to meet our needs in this present life. Paul told Timothy that godliness has "promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." (I Tim. 4:8) He also wrote, "Let your requests be made known unto God." (Ph'p. 4:6) Read the full context of that latter instruction, though. It does not primarily concern the meeting of earthly needs, although that is surely included. Rather, it explains how to be delivered from anxiety, so that we can be occupied with eternal things, things which are spiritually profitable. Worry binds us to the affairs of this world; prayer should direct our hearts to the next.

What should occupy our hearts and minds? Paul began to answer that question in his letter to the Philippians. He said some strange things in the third chapter of that book--strange, at least, to those who do not understand them.

In verse eight, he wrote, "Yea doubtless, and I

count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." This is not a popular teaching. . It is scriptural, but few are willing to contemplate losing everything for Christ. (See I Tim. 6:5) Notice that the apostle spoke of winning Christ. This is the prize for which he was willing to suffer the loss of everything he had formerly counted gain. He alone, of all the inspired writers, tells us of winning Christ.

At first glance, this might seem contrary to what we know of God's salvation offer. "The gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23) We know that this eternal life is Christ in us. In Romans 5:15-16, Paul called it "the free gift." If Christ in us is a free gift, then why did Paul speak of winning Christ? Since God does not contradict Himself, and since all of His word is true, we must conclude that there is something more of Christ which we can gain as a prize, a reward. Paul also refers to this as "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Ph'p. 3:14)

His imagery, in speaking of winning this prize, is that of a man engaged in a contest of sport--particularly a foot race. The prize is not gained by entering the contest (accepting eternal life in Christ), but by running so as to win. Read I Corinthians 9:24-27. Clearly, Paul did not teach that all believers would win the race, though all can. Few "run that [they] may obtain." The pattern of the world takes over, or else other religious and spiritual objectives take priority. Paul spoke of his own preaching, but expressed concern that he not "be a castaway," (better translated, "not approved" for the prize). Even good works, led of the Spirit, do not assure our winning. A full growth of faith, a focus of the life on God's eternal plan,

rather than on present problems or activities, is what wins the prize.

This requires a singleness of purpose. "And every man that striveth for the mastery," that is, to win, "is temperate," or exercises control, "in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." (I Cor. 9:25) "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Ph'p. 3:13) All things must be made to serve the one thing: Winning Christ. Paul did not leave off good works. These are a part of the race course; they are often the battle ground where our victories must be won. But he stated that his one, driving desire was to win Christ. Every good work became a means to that end.

He spoke of this as his desire to "apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." (Ph'p. 3:12) The word translated "apprehend," means to lay hold of. Jesus Christ had laid hold of Paul's life on the Damascus road, many years before. He had seized Paul for a specific purpose. In the years between that day and the time Paul wrote to the Philippians, Paul had served the Lord with all his might, and with good results. Yet he wrote, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do...." (Ph'p. 3:13) Paul believed that we are saved to win Christ. Until he was sure of having done that, he did not believe he had done all the will of God.

In that same chapter, he wrote, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (Ph'p. 3:11) Again, if you do not understand this, it might seem confusing. Some interpret Paul's words to mean that his own salvation was not secure. Not so; they twist his

words to their own hurt. Eternal life is eternal, the gift of God is a gift, and forgiveness is not probation. In discussing resurrection and translation, Paul said emphatically, referring to those who have trusted in Christ, "We shall all be changed." (I Cor. 15:51) He expressed absolutely no doubts about this, and left no room for us to believe that saved people must earn a right to share in the resurrection. To what did he refer, then, when he spoke of attaining to the resurrection of the dead?

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order." (I Cor. 15:22-23) There will be different orders of believers in the resurrection. They will have different glories. "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead." (I Cor. 15:41-42) Some of God's people will have laid hold of His purpose; some will not. The Greek word rendered "resurrection" in Philippians 3:11 is used only this once in the whole Bible. It means, literally, "out-resurrection." The "high calling of God" literally means "the upward calling of God." Paul joined winning Christ to participating in a special resurrection.

In other places, Paul told more of what it means to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of us. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us." (II Tim. 2:12) The word given there as "reign" means to rule co-equally. Not every believer is reaching out for this place with Christ. If we deny Him the right to rule our lives, He will deny us the right to reign with Him. "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. 8:17) All who believe are heirs of eternal life; those who

suffer with Christ will be joint-heirs in all His glory. (See also Ph'p. 3:10) We read of glory and of rewards elsewhere in the scripture, but only Paul has told us of the glory and reward offered specifically to us.

Consider this illustration in closing. Each state has its own laws governing those who drive on its highways. If you obtain a copy of all their driver's manuals, you will find them very similar. You can learn good driving habits from them all. Yet to obtain a driver's license in Missouri you would not study the traffic laws of California. The differences, some major, but mostly minor, between what was written for Californians and what was written for Missourians would probably make your failure on the licensing examination certain.

Paul's gospel was inspired of the Holy Spirit and was written specifically to those who trust in Christ during this age. The same Christ who appointed Paul to be our apostle is the great Examiner and Judge. (Gal. 1:1; Eph. 4:7-10; II Tim. 4:8) If we seek to follow the instructions God gave to others, rather than those He gave to us, we have denied Him the right to rule our lives; He will accordingly deny us the right to enjoy the highest glory with Him. If we study His word, believing it all, but using Paul's gospel to determine which of God's purposes apply directly to us, then we may have a sure hope that we will win the prize He has set before us.

Salvation

Concerning His purpose in becoming a man, Jesus said, “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10) On another occasion He said, “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.” (John 10:9) Paul told Timothy, “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (II Tim. 3:15) He also told him, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the *world* to save sinners.” (I Tim. 1:15) Salvation is central to Christian teaching. Those who have never been saved are not involved in true, Bible-based Christianity.

But what does it mean to be unsaved? What do people need saving from? The definition of “saved” is simple enough. It means rescued; preserved from harm or danger; protected against loss or waste. A drowning person may be saved from death. Money can be saved, rather than being wasted. Spiritually speaking, to be unsaved means to be in mortal danger of eternal loss, to be without the preservation and protection God wants to give us. So then, what are the dangers from which God wants to save mankind? What would we lose if we did not accept His salvation?

First, God wants to save us from our sins. (Matt. 1:21) Christ came into the world to save sinners. Some object to being called sinners, but who would argue with the statement, “All have sinned”? (Rom. 3:23) Are there any who have never lied, never stolen, or never coveted things to which they had no right? These things are sin.

Anyone who drives a car is a driver; anyone who swims is a swimmer; anyone who sins is a sinner. The degree or the frequency of the act is not the issue. All who have sinned are sinners.

Sin is like a bad investment. We lose by it. A life entirely invested in those things God warns us against is totally lost. (See Matt. 16:25.) Even in terms of our present life, sin brings loss. Look for yourself at the sort of thing the Bible calls sin. Then look at the world around us. Sinful acts and habits produce illness, violence, family tragedy, emotional distress, financial hardship, and death.

The stock market crash of 1929 brought loss and poverty to many thousands who never joined in the market speculations which helped cause the depression. So it is with sin. Even the so-called private sins of “consenting adults” have a ripple effect that can destroy non-consenting non-participants. The sin of Adam gives the clearest possible picture of how sin’s effects tend to reach beyond the boundary of the individual sinner’s life. Those things God said would happen to Adam if he sinned have now come upon the entire human race. (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:17-19; I Cor. 15:22) The result of sin is never as limited as the wise of this world would have us to believe, but then, neither are the effects of righteousness.

In love, God wants to save us from the sins which will destroy our lives, the lives of those we love, and even the lives of strangers and casual acquaintances.

God also wants to save us from being judged for our sins. God is holy, righteous, and just. He must judge those who do things which cause injury to themselves and to those about them. Paul described one phase of God’s judgment like this, “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of

our Lord Jesus Christ: Who,” that is, the unsaved, “shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” (II Thess. 1:8-9) John wrote, “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Rev. 20:12, 15)

God wants to stop the destruction caused by sin. Judgment is the only way to do this. Some have difficulty accepting this part of the gospel. They don't believe it fits in with the picture of a kind and loving God seen elsewhere in scripture. Such people do not understand how terrible sin really is, or that a loving God will do whatever is necessary to protect those who return His love. God has said He will judge sinners, and He will do so.

A court of law holds men accountable for injuries to others, whether they result from a vicious attack or from carelessness and poor judgment. With God, the issue is not whether a sinner intends to hurt others. The facts are these: God warns that sin is destructive. People don't believe it, and sin anyway. He offers to help them. They don't take time to consider their need or His offer. He holds them accountable.

As He pursued His campaign against sin's devastation, Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me.” (Matt. 12:30) Those who do not follow Jesus, work against Him and for the tyranny of sin. During World War II, most German citizens were ordinary working people, what we might call good people, knowing nothing

of what was done in concentration camps. Yet if they grew food, they fed those who knowingly worked to carry forward Hitler's schemes. If they labored in factories, they provided the materials that were necessary for him to do his evil work. Just so, those who reject Christ, though they be "good" people, work for a system of sin and death which has the world in its grip. They are against Christ. Because they have a choice (as most of the German people did not) they are accountable for their deeds.

God has no desire to condemn any part of mankind. He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" and be saved. (II Pet. 3:9) After telling Nicodemus how to be born again, Jesus said, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (John 3:17) Nevertheless, David wrote, "The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth." (Psa. 9:16) In love, God wants to save men and women from judgment, yet judgment must come if He is to be known as a just God.

What, then, must we do to obtain salvation? A Roman jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Acts 16:30-31) A simpler, more truthful answer cannot be given.

Other scriptures offer the same reply. In Romans 1:16, Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." In the tenth chapter of Romans, Paul made the following statements. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall

be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Rom. 10:9, 13-15, 17)

The events leading up to salvation are something like this. A person hears the gospel, either individually or in a gathering of people. The gospel is God’s record of how Jesus made it possible for us to be saved. It sets forth His offer of salvation to all people. The one who hears it has a choice of accepting or rejecting the message of Christ. If God’s word stirs faith in the heart, so that the person believes Jesus died for their sins, and was raised again by the power of God, that person may “call upon the name of the Lord,” or pray. The prayer will be one of asking for salvation, and of confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord and has a right to rule our lives. The person who does this will be saved.

What else do we have to do to have eternal life?
Nothing.

Paul said, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9) We are saved by accepting God’s grace. Grace is unmerited favor, kindness which is not based on anything done by the one who receives that kindness. “If by [His] grace then is it no more of [our] works: otherwise [His] grace is no more grace. But if it be of [our] works, then is it no more of [His] grace: otherwise [our] work is no more work.” (Rom. 11:6) In other words, when God says salvation is by grace, He means just that. Our part is believing—faith. Yet even our believing is not by our

own goodness. Faith is the gift of God. If He had not sent His Son to save us, if He had not given the Bible to testify of that salvation, and if He had not sent someone to explain the gospel of Christ, we could not have faith. Salvation is His work from start to finish.

Exactly what happens to a person who gets saved? What change takes place?

Being born again is perhaps the best known and least understood phrase associated with salvation. Jesus said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) That's a fairly clear statement, isn't it? Anyone who is not born again is shut out of God's kingdom. He can't even see it. How is a person born again? "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." (I Jn. 5:1) That, too, is fairly clear. The conditions for being born again are exactly the conditions for being saved. Anyone who exercises faith in Christ as Saviour is born again, and anyone who is not born again is not saved.

Behind that phrase, "born again," is one of the most wonderful facts of salvation. We really are "born of God." John wrote, "As many as received Him," that is, Jesus Christ, "to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." (John 1:12) The new birth is not a poetic fiction, used to describe a new way for us to look at ourselves. It is a spiritual fact. Those who trust in Jesus Christ become God's children. Again, John wrote, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." (I Jn. 3:2)

If we literally become God's children through a new birth, it has to mean we receive life from God, as from a Father. This is exactly the case. According to Peter we become "partakers of the divine nature." (II Pet.

1:4) We obtain a life which is the life of God. He is our Father. The old nature which we received from Grandfather Adam does not suddenly disappear, but the new life is no less real for that.

How secure this makes our salvation and our place in God's family! Peter also wrote of our "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (I Pet. 1:23) The Greek word translated "incorruptible" means undecaying, immortal. This word is used in the Bible to describe the unchanging, sinless, eternal nature of God; the nature of the believer's body after it is raised from death into eternal glory; and the spiritual life we now have through faith in the Son of God. This life will never die, decay, or become unacceptable to God.

The issue of how to deal with the fact of sin after we are saved is a separate, though very important matter. Sin does exist in the body and in the old human nature. (Rom. 7:17, 20) If we say that we have no sin we are liars. (I Jn. 1:8) Saved people may actually allow sin to dominate their lives, losing much thereby. About this possibility, Paul wrote, "If any man's work shall be burned," (in judgment as to its righteousness), "he shall suffer loss: but lie himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." (I Cor. 3:15) Still, the vital, eternal truth in which we rejoice is that when the old nature of the flesh has dropped away, and only the new life remains, it will not have sin, neither the guilt of sin, nor the marks of sin upon it. Sin will be gone eternally.

How is all this made possible? How can we who have sinned against God be cleared of our guilt and become His sons and daughters? He cannot pretend that our sins never happened. To do that would not satisfy any right standard of justice, and if God were not just, every

other standard of goodness would fall. He will not be unjust, yet He wants to save us from judgment. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” (Heb. 9:27) Unless our condition is dealt with now, in this life, we have no hope. Once this life is over, the next event on the calendar is judgment. But how can both mercy and justice be satisfied?

The answer to the problem is something called substitution. God taught from the beginning that He would accept a substitute in the sinner’s place. Adam and Eve sinned, and an animal was killed in sacrifice for their sin. From that point on, God commanded and used such sacrifices to reinforce the idea of substitution. He taught that He could not overlook sin, that He must demand a sentence of death for it, but that another could suffer judgment in the place of the sinner. It is the same principle (though on a vastly different scale) as someone paying the fine for another person who has been convicted of breaking a traffic law. The law is satisfied, no matter who pays the fine. Christ became our substitute.

“Christ died for our sins.” (I Cor. 15:3) “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.” (Heb. 9:28) “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just [one] for the unjust [ones], that he might bring us to God.” (I Pet. 3:18) By suffering death in our behalf, Jesus Christ satisfied God’s judgment and made it possible for Him to be our Father instead of our Judge. All we must do is accept what He did for us.

Our salvation cost the life of God’s only begotten Son. As John meditated on what God has done for us, he exclaimed, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” (I Jn. 3:1) Paul, seeking to show God’s goodness

and His desire to save us, wrote, “Now hardly for a righteous man will any be found to die (although some perchance would even endure death for the good), but God gives proof of His own love to us, because while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:7-8, Conybeare’s translation)

Such love deserves a return. What would we think of a man or woman whose life was saved at the cost of another’s life, if the one who was spared made light of the other’s death, or even ignored it, as if it meant nothing? Yet how often men and women have trampled on the knowledge of Christ’s sacrifice when God put the message in their path. Many give no more thought to the blood Jesus shed for them than they would to that of an animal killed by a passing car. Perhaps less. The Judge of all the earth has offered to be gracious, yet most show no interest, as if His grace had little value or importance. Read Hebrews 10:28-30.

Surely you are not such a person! Are you? God loves you. Though you have sinned, He wants to forgive you. He sent His Son, who willingly died in your place. The cross was not forced on Jesus. He said, “The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. No man taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself.” (John 10:11, 18) Have you spent your life ignoring the fact that someone loved you enough to die so that you might live?

If sin is a bad investment, salvation is a good one, but, as with every investment, there is a time factor. While in Vietnam in 1967, I could have bought gold for less than \$35 an ounce, but I turned it down. What an investment that would have been! Now I know how much I could have gained, but the time of opportunity is past. Paul wrote, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold,

now is the day of salvation.” (II Cor. 6:2) If you need salvation, invest your life with God beginning now, today. Do not delay your decision. Do not allow your day for spiritual gain to pass you by.

The Holy Spirit

(Part 1)

Among the revealed mysteries of the Bible is the teaching of one God who is made up of three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians have come to call this revelation of God "the trinity." He is called a triune God; "tri," meaning three, "une," meaning united into one.

Down through the ages, and even in our day, many have found it difficult to believe in only one God. To them, the universe, with all of its parts and forces, seems too big for just one God to handle. They imagine that God must have limitations, even as men do, and they have invented religions with various gods and goddesses who specialize in different activities, according to their abilities. The Bible shatters such thinking with one sentence, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." (Deut. 6:4) All the explanations men have developed to justify their false ideas about God must give way when He reveals the truth about Himself. He asks us to believe what we cannot understand, even if such faith in Him goes against what other people call wisdom and reason.

Some also find it hard to accept the fact of one God who is, at the same time, three persons. We believe it because it is the teaching of God's word. It was foreshadowed many times in the Old Testament. One of the Hebrew words for God, "elohim," is plural. Genesis 18:1 says, "And the Lord appeared unto [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre." The account then goes on to describe His appearance as that of three men. In the New Testament, as more truth was revealed, the trinity became even clearer. The Father is called God. (Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1-2) The Son is called God. (I Tim. 3:16, Heb. 1:8) The Holy Spirit is called God. (Acts 5:3-4) At the baptism of Jesus Christ by John, all three members of the Godhead were manifested. God the Son stood in the water of the Jordan River; God the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the likeness of a dove; and God the Father spoke from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:16-17) To doubt that we worship a triune God is to doubt the Bible.

There is no hint anywhere in the Bible that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are anything less than absolute equals in deity, wisdom, nature, power, and purpose. Yet though they are equals, each member of the trinity fulfills a different office. By this means, all three are revealed to us, and we are able to know each one individually. The Father is revealed as occupying a place comparable to that of an ideal natural father, wisely directing, counseling, and providing for those who are his responsibility. We look to God as our Father and the provider of our needs. (Eph. 5:1) In the natural, a husband and father should occupy the chief place in the family, not because the male is superior, but because it is God's order. Just so, the place of our heavenly Father in relationship to the Son and the Holy Spirit is a matter of divine order, not

of a superior ruling inferiors. The Son has accepted a place of service and submission to the Father. (John 5:19; Ph'p. 2:6-8) Though equal with the Father, He became, as to the position He occupied, less glorious and exalted than the Father in order to die for us and save us from our sins. Because of His willing obedience to the Father, we now can honor Him as Saviour and Lord. But what of the Holy Spirit? What place does He fill in the Godhead? What place should He occupy in our lives?

Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" (I Cor. 6:19-20) If we had only this one scripture to guide us, it would still be very clear that God intends for His Spirit to have a place of special honor among His people. In the Jewish temple of old, Israel worshipped and served Jehovah, the God whose name was in that place. (Ex. 20:24; Deut. 12:5, 16:6; I Ki. 8:16-29) Our bodies, if we are saved, are named by the scripture "temples of the Holy Ghost." In our bodies, then, God expects us to worship, serve, and honor the Holy Spirit. He is God, equally with the Father and the Son.

As Christians, we should be aware of a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, even as we are aware of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Our relationship with Christ results from the fact that we have believed what the Bible says He has done for us and will do for us if we let Him; we entered into a relationship with Him based upon that faith. This is the pattern followed in all of God's dealings with us. Anything He has for us is received by faith in His word. In order to honor and be fully blessed by the Holy Spirit, we must know what the Bible says about Him, believe it, and then go forward in faith. Vague or unscriptural ideas about the Holy Spirit's work or His place in our lives will not produce the faith

which we need.

What does the Bible teach concerning the Holy Spirit, His purposes, and His work for mankind?

The first time we see Him in scripture, He is involved in the work of creation. "And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." (Gen. 1:2) He was there, preparing the way for what was to come next--the creating of life in an empty and chaotic world. The scripture is very plain in giving credit for creation to the Lord Jesus Christ; it is the Father's purpose that Christ should have the preeminence over all creation. (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-18) Yet that work of creation, that bringing into existence of the things over which Christ would rule did not come about without the nurturing work of the Holy Spirit.

He is next mentioned in Genesis 6:3, when the Lord, looking on a wicked generation and knowing that they would not repent, set forth the reality of a coming judgment, saying, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." The implication is that the Holy Spirit had long tried to convince men of that age that there was a need to change their lives. Jesus said, concerning the work of the Holy Spirit when He would be sent to the Church, "When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin, because they believe not on me." (John 16:8-9) So then, we see Him as the member of the Godhead who prepares the unsaved to receive new life into the emptiness and confusion of their hearts. Christ died for our sins, and the Father has made Him the head over all things to the Church, but salvation does not take place without the Holy Spirit's tender and powerful preparation of sinners. (Titus 3:5)

Other examples could be given, but we can see

that the Holy Spirit is a preparer of the way, not for His own glory, but for Christ's. He is always present when life is about to be sent forth from the hand of God to fill empty places. He is always active when God's perfect order is about to replace confusion. He is always in at the beginning, and then steps back, as it were, allowing Jesus to accomplish and receive glory for what only He can do, according to the counsel of God.

One of the great tasks of the Holy Spirit was the bringing into existence of what we call the Bible. David, the author of many of the Psalms, said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me." (II Sam. 23:2) Over and over again in the New Testament, Old Testament scriptures are attributed to the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:16, 28:25; Heb. 3:7, 9:8, 10:15) Peter wrote of the Old Testament scriptures, saying, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (II Pet. 1:21) This same pattern is followed in the New Testament. Seven times in the second and third chapters of Revelation we read, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Surely the point is demonstrated: the Holy Spirit is the author of the scriptures.

This fits into the pattern which we have already seen. Without the Bible, man's ideas about God are confused. Close examination of those ideas shows them to be empty superstitions, philosophies without substance. By the Holy Spirit's work, a remedy is made for this condition. Of course, the central topic of scripture is always Jesus. Jesus was challenged one day by a group of self righteous men, who imagined that the purpose of the Bible is to set down rigid rules by which men must live. He told them, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed

me: for he wrote of me." (John 5:39, 46) Once again we see that the Holy Spirit's work is in preparing the way for Christ to receive honor.

When Jesus was about to go to the cross, He said a rather astonishing thing to His disciples. For three years they had been privileged to enjoy His ministry--listening to His teaching, watching Him work miracles, and being guided and blessed by His personal admonitions to them. "Nevertheless," Jesus said, "I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." (John 16:7) "Comforter" is a descriptive title given to the Holy Spirit. In other words, Jesus was saying, they would benefit more from the unseen presence of the Holy Spirit than from having Jesus Himself physically present with them. Many Christians would challenge such a statement as not giving glory and honor to Christ--but these are the words of Christ. It is another one of those things which is hard for some to accept, but which must be believed if we are to honor God and His word.

What is the benefit of the Holy Spirit's presence? Again, the words of Jesus, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak... He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." (John 16:12-14) The Holy Spirit is a great teacher. His purpose is to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ to us in a way no one else can do, teaching us from the inside. Christ, and not just the Holy Spirit, is glorified when we yield to the Holy Spirit.

Earlier, Jesus had said to the disciples, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that

he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." (John 14:16-17) The Holy Spirit was to enter and fill their hearts. This was an utterly new thing. John 7:39 says, "The Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." His disciples, although they were saved men who had been powerfully used by God (Luke 10:20), had never received the Holy Spirit in this fashion. Once given, He would abide in them forever. Never would a child of God who had received the Holy Spirit have His presence removed. This also was a new thing. (I Sam. 16:14; Psa. 51:11)

Notice that the Holy Spirit does not enter into unsaved people. Jesus indicated that only those who already know the Holy Spirit can receive the Holy Spirit. He finds a place only in the hearts of those who are saved. They know Him. He is with them. They have recognized and yielded to Him as God when He stirred their hearts to repentance and faith in Christ.

In the book of Acts, one more new thing is set forth concerning the giving of the Holy Spirit in this age. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was sent from the Father to the Church, Peter was moved by the Holy Spirit to say, "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39) The Holy Spirit's fulness and presence are now available to all who are called of God, that is, saved. He does not limit His presence just to those who need His anointing to do special tasks, as was the case in the Old Testament. This is new.

It should be understood that receiving the Holy Spirit is not the same thing as accepting Christ. If you

doubt this, read in Acts eight, about those in Samaria who had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and been baptized, but who had not received the Holy Spirit. Or read in Acts nine, about Paul's conversion and how Ananias was sent three days later to lay hands on him in faith, so that Paul would have his eyes healed and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let your doubts be dissolved by the word of God.

Paul wrote, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free...." (I Cor. 12:13, New International Version) Many of God's people are confused about the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. Everyone who has believed on Jesus Christ for salvation has been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. This is the spiritual reality of which water baptism is only a symbol. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is God's saving work on our behalf. Any other definition of this baptism is unscriptural. We should use scripture terms in a scriptural manner.

Yet Paul went on in that same verse, "And we were all given the one Spirit to drink." Baptism by the one Holy Spirit is not the same thing as drinking of the Spirit, any more than water baptism is the same as drinking water. Nor is the fact that God has given us the Spirit to drink, a guarantee that all will partake. Each person decides individually whether or not to drink and be full. Do you see that there is a difference between the Spirit's work at salvation and the fulness of that same Spirit?

We read in Romans 8:9, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Jesus said in John 4:24, "God is a Spirit." All three members of the Godhead are Spirit. All three are holy. This does not mean that we confuse them with one another. Only one member of the Godhead bears the title of "Holy Spirit." Anyone who receives Jesus Christ as Saviour has the Spirit of God

within. God is a Spirit; Jesus is God the Son; by faith, we receive the Spirit of Christ and are saved. Yet we must not confuse the Spirit of Christ with the One we call the Holy Spirit. Just by way of example, my son bears my first name as his middle name, and we both have the same last name--we are members of the same family. Yet people who receive me into their homes are never under the illusion that I am both of us. What the Bible teaches about our need to receive the Holy Spirit does not take away from the reality of receiving Christ. It is simply a different matter.

Paul wrote a brief and pointed instruction to the Christians at Ephesus concerning the Holy Spirit: "Be filled with the Spirit." (Eph. 5:18) Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? We have seen that Jesus Christ considers it vitally important for His followers to receive the Holy Spirit. We have seen that the Holy Spirit will teach us more of Christ than we could ever learn without His indwelling presence. We have seen that receiving the Holy Spirit is clearly different than receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We have seen that saved people are plainly instructed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. However hard it may be for some to accept it, this is Bible teaching. How good it is just to believe God's word and be blessed.

The Holy Spirit

(Part 2)

Paul's instruction to the Christians at Ephesus, "Be filled with the Spirit" is clear and easy to understand. However, some of the current teachings on how to go about obeying that instruction are not. The Bible speaks plainly on the subject, and so should those who teach the Bible. If you are interested in knowing how to receive the Holy Spirit, lay aside this piece of writing long enough to read Luke 11:5-13, Jesus' teaching on the matter.

Have you finished reading it? If so, let us continue.

Jesus indicated that some time may pass between our first asking for the Holy Spirit and the eventual fulfillment of our request. He gave a parable in which a man was unwilling to get out of bed to fulfill his friend's request for bread. Finally, the man arose and gave him the bread because he would not stop asking. We know God is willing to give good things to His children. He has promised to give us the Holy Spirit. (Prov. 1:23; Acts 2:39) Paul certainly would not have admonished the Ephesians to be filled with the Spirit if the offer was not for us in the Church age. Therefore, the lesson concerns our attitude, and not God's. The man doing the asking was persistent. He refused to give up before His request was granted.

After His resurrection, Jesus came to his disciples and "breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (John 20:22) While this made sure the promise of the Spirit to them, it was not fulfilled until later, on the day of Pentecost. Just before His ascent into

heaven, He said, "Tarry ye," that is, wait, "in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high," and, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8) They had not yet received the Holy Spirit, and they were not to stop seeking and asking until they had received Him. This was Christ's will for them.

Jesus then went on, in Luke eleven, to give assurance that those who will continue asking God to fill them with His Spirit will receive the Holy Spirit, and not something evil. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" (Luke 11:11-12) A stone could look enough like a bread roll to deceive a child, but if he tried to eat it, he would likely break a tooth and lose confidence in the father who gave it to him. A serpent would bite and poison the child; a scorpion would cause terrible pain. No sane parent would be so cruel to his child, nor should we believe that our heavenly Father will deal with us in such a way. "How much more shall your heavenly Father give thee the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13) If you have never been filled with the Holy Spirit, you need not be afraid of asking God to give Him to you. If we ask God for what is good, He will not give us something bad.

Just a little farther on in that same chapter, an incident is recorded in which certain Pharisees claimed that things Jesus did by the Holy Spirit were actually done by the power of Satan. (Compare Matt. 12:22-30 with Luke 11:14-23) It is no accident that God caused these two passages to be placed side by side in His word. Throughout the Church age there have been similar charges made against the work of the Holy Spirit. Such

accusations are no small matter. They tend to scatter and divide people who would otherwise be gathered together spiritually by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 11:23) Jesus rebuked His accusers sharply.

Coming back to what Jesus taught about receiving the Holy Spirit, how do we know when to stop asking for this gift? We are to ask, seek, and knock until we receive, but once He is given, our asking should become thanksgiving. If, as the Bible teaches, the Holy Spirit is not necessarily given at the time we receive the spirit of Christ, nor even when we first ask for the Holy Spirit, how do we know when we have received Him?

This question brings us to a controversial subject, speaking in tongues. According to the Bible, this miracle is the evidence that a child of God has received the Holy Spirit. Both the outpouring of the Spirit and the miracle of speaking in tongues, first occurred on the day of Pentecost. On that day those who had obeyed Christ and waited at Jerusalem to receive the Spirit "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:4) The word translated "tongues" means "languages." They miraculously began to speak languages they had never learned and did not know, as the Holy Spirit enabled them. That is quite a miracle. They apparently were not overly quiet about it, because a crowd gathered to see what was going on. At least fifteen different language groups were spoken and recognized on that day. (Acts 2:8-11)

When Peter was asked, "What meaneth this [speaking in tongues]," he replied, "This [speaking in tongues] is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." (Acts 2:12, 16-17) You will notice I have inserted some words enclosed in

brackets. This was done to emphasize that the question and the answer both concern the miracle of speaking in tongues. This miracle is what caused the crowd to gather. They did not ask the meaning of the words. "We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." (Acts 2:11) They asked about the meaning of the miracle. Peter's reply was that this speaking in tongues is the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What could be more plain? The fact that speaking in tongues is the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost.

"Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine." (Acts 2:13) Some ask what God is doing. Others mock. Somehow, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit always seems to provoke scorn and anger. What happened on the day of Pentecost did not take place in accordance with ideas of human dignity. If it had, no crowd would have gathered. That little group of Christians would have sat quietly in the upper room, silently praising God in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance, and no one but God would ever have heard them. There would have been no basis to suppose they were foolishly drunk. Notice the context of Paul's instruction to the Ephesians. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." (Eph. 5:18) Paul expected the Holy Spirit to give them a joyful exuberance sometimes associated with drunkenness. Is such joyful, Spirit-filled behavior disorderly? Some say it is. The Bible says it is not.

Was speaking in tongues a special miracle, reserved for a single group, on the day of Pentecost? Not according to the Bible. Besides the day of Pentecost, there are four other occasions recorded in the book of Acts when people received the Holy Spirit. These passages do

not record every detail about those occasions, but they all bear out the truth that when a person receives the Holy Spirit, that person speaks in another tongue by the Spirit's enabling.

In Acts eight, an account is given of Philip's preaching the gospel in the city of Samaria. The people listened to his preaching, and as they saw the miracles with which God blessed his ministry, they believed God's word and were baptized. No specific numbers are given as to how many got saved, but verse six says, "The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake." The spiritual awakening was widespread, reaching most of the population of the city. -Such a response would delight the heart of any godly preacher, and Philip must have rejoiced that God used him to gather so many souls to Christ.

Still, something was lacking. "As yet He," the Holy Spirit, "was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 8:16) They were definitely saved. Philip had baptized them in water, something he would never have done had they not been fully convinced of the gospel of Christ. (Acts 8:36-37) When word reached the apostles at Jerusalem that the people of Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. Upon their arrival, they prayed for the people that they might receive the Holy Spirit. God answered their prayers. "Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." (Acts 8:17)

Speaking in tongues is not mentioned, but a question is raised. How did the apostles know that these people had not received the Holy Spirit? And how did they later know that the people did receive the Holy Spirit? Obviously, they believed that they could know. Just as obviously, they believed that there is some

discernible evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, and this evidence was not manifested until after their arrival. Further, it was not something so secret or mysterious that only the apostles could recognize it. Anyone present when believers received the Spirit could observe it.

A man named Simon was present when the Holy Spirit was first given at Samaria. He had been a professional sorcerer and deceiver before Philip's arrival. "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." (Acts 8:18-19) Apparently, what Simon witnessed was so remarkable that his old, moneymaking instincts were aroused. What he imagined he could buy, he imagined he could sell. (Human greed does not make the power of the Holy Spirit less real.) What was it that amazed Simon? Peter told us on the day of Pentecost, didn't he? He said that speaking in tongues is the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit. If we take the Bible for our authority, there is no other miracle we can point to as evidence of receiving the Spirit.

You may find it hard to believe that the Bible would not state specifically that those people spoke in tongues, if this is really the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. If so, read Acts 2:41. It records the fact that 3,000 people were saved on the day of Pentecost. It does not say they confessed with their mouths the Lord Jesus, and believed in their hearts that God has raised him from the dead. (See Rom. 10:9-10) That very important fact is omitted. Our knowledge that they did so comes entirely from other scriptures. If they had not followed this pattern, they would not have been saved. The pattern for recognizing when the Holy Spirit has been given to

individuals is given in Acts two. There is nowhere else to look and no need to look further for an explanation of the miracle which impressed greedy Simon.

When the first Gentiles received the Holy Spirit at Caesarea, Jewish Christians who were present knew what had happened, "For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." (Acts 10:46) They were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on Gentiles, but they could not deny this evidence of speaking in tongues. When twelve men received the Holy Spirit at Ephesus, "they spake with tongues, and prophesied." (Acts 19:6) Acts 9:17 says that Ananias was sent to Paul so that Paul would receive the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues is not mentioned there, but to convince us that Paul did speak in tongues, we not only have the authority of Peter's statement in Acts 2:16, but also the testimony of Paul. He wrote, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all." (I Cor. 14:18)

The teaching that people who receive the Holy Spirit will speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance is not a product either of human emotionalism or of human reasoning. This teaching is an accurate and honorable picture of what the word of God says. Human reason and emotion may cause people to reject this Bible teaching, but those things did not produce it.

Coming back once again to the question of how we can know when to stop asking for the Holy Spirit, we now have a clear answer. We are to ask, seek, and knock until we have received the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. Until that takes place, we cannot say accurately that we have been filled with the Holy Spirit in accordance with the scripture. The Bible speaks plainly to any who will believe the truth. To those who would oppose, Paul said, "If any man think himself to

be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues." (I Cor. 14:37, 39) Let the Bible settle all controversy.

What will happen to you when you receive the Holy Spirit in obedience to Christ's desire, and according to the New Testament pattern? We are individuals, and God deals with each of us a little differently. For me to presume that I could tell you every detail of your personal experience with God would be wrong. Within the standard He set down in scripture, there is room for God to do what He chooses, room for Him to show His grace to you according to your particular needs.

My own experience on the night when I received Him was fairly typical, I suppose. I began, as many do, by asking over and over for the Lord to fill me with the Holy Spirit, but the longer I prayed, the more I was taken up with worshipping Jesus. When at last I began to speak another language as the Spirit gave utterance, my interest was not primarily in the miracle that was taking place, nor even in the fact that I had finally been filled with the Holy Spirit, but just in giving praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. I was not dignified in my worship. I was loud and joyful. Some might have objected to this (though no one did) but I had asked the Lord to fill me with the Holy Spirit, and I knew that what He had given me was good. The glory and joy of the Lord Jesus Christ filled my heart in a way I had never known before.

On the other hand, there really is no typical experience of receiving the Holy Spirit. I have seen some begin to speak in another tongue almost as soon as they knelt to pray. I have heard some do their praising very quietly, not because they considered loudness to be

wrong, but just because that was the way they worshipped God at that particular time. Although experience can deepen our conviction that what the Bible teaches is true, what we believe about Jesus Christ, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, or any spiritual issue, should not be based on experience, but on God's word--the Bible.

Still, when our own experience reflects what the Bible says, we do know our experience is right. Even though our Christian walk and faith cannot be based on experience, there comes a time when our experience should agree with the Bible. We need to read the Bible and to hear it preached and taught, but these things do not replace applying the Bible to our lives. At some point, individual believers must receive the Holy Spirit, or else all they have heard and read about Him does them little or no good. This is true of the teaching of salvation. It is also true concerning the Holy Spirit.

If you are a child of God, born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but have never received the Holy Spirit, possibly the best instruction that can be given to you about the Holy Spirit is that with which we began. "Be filled with the Spirit."

More could be said. The gifts of the Holy Spirit have not been mentioned here. (Read I Cor. 12:1-11) His part in cultivating the fruit of the spirit, which arises from the spirit of Christ in us, is little understood by most and has not been dealt with here. (Compare I Cor. 13; Gal. 4:6; and Gal. 5:19-24) The believer's reliance on the Holy Spirit to teach and confirm the word of God has not been discussed here in any detail. (See I Jn. 2:27) But, you see, the Holy Spirit cannot fully undertake any of those tasks in you until He dwells in you. He is with you, but if you will receive Him, He will be in you.

The Bride

"Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." (Rev. 21:9) Some of the sweetest teaching in the Bible concerns the bride of the Lamb. Jesus Christ is the Lamb, and His people will make up the bride. (John 1:29; II Cor. 11:2) The terms "bride" and "Lamb" are not intended to be taken literally. Jesus was not a tiny, silly, woolly lamb, led ignorantly and helplessly to the slaughter. The bride will not be one individual, a woman demurely arrayed in a white dress for her wedding. Neither will the marriage of the Lamb be a natural, literal marriage as we understand it. It will be spiritual, different and far better than what we know as marriage, but like marriage in certain ways. To discover what some of the likenesses are, we will go to Genesis, where God gave us a picture of His purpose for the first marriage.

"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet," that is, a suitable helper, "for him." (Gen. 2:18) God said this so we would consider His reason for giving Adam a wife. After each step of creation the Bible says, "God saw that it was good." When He looked at man standing alone, He said, "It is not good." Man was to have dominion over the whole earth. It was not God's will for him to undertake this as a lonely task, but as a joyful one. Without a suitable helper, it was not possible for his joy to be full. Real joy is shared joy. Real sharing involves sharing plans and responsibilities as well as possessions. It was necessary for Adam's companion to be able to partake fully in all his thoughts and labors, to see as he saw and feel as he felt, else there would not be true fellowship to make his life good. In all creation there was none qualified to fill that place. (Gen.

2:20) God made Eve to complete and share in the good purpose He had for Adam. This sharing in the working out of the Father's will is God's first and highest purpose for marriage.

Likewise, it is the Father's will for Christ to have dominion over all creation, visible and invisible, in heaven and earth. (Col. 1:16-18) He will not exercise His dominion in isolation. To make His joy full, there will be a sharing of His purposes and works with another. We are told that if we suffer with Christ, we will be joint heirs with Him, reigning with Him and sharing His glory. (Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:12) This is the place that is set before the child of God, pictured figuratively in "the bride, the Lamb's wife." Who else would share the throne of the great King? We are offered a place close to Jesus, completely and perfectly involved with all His spiritual desires. The Bible's teaching of the bride is aimed at those who are willing to satisfy and be satisfied by their Saviour.

Christ does not yet possess a bride. The picture God gives to us of our relationship with Christ during the Church age is this: "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." (I Cor. 12:27) Not until Revelation 19 do we read, "The marriage of the Lamb is come." These two figures, the body of Christ and the bride of the Lamb, speak of two different aspects of God's plan for us. To help us understand the differences between the two, we turn again to the example of Adam and Eve.

Was Adam's body the helper he needed? No, that would be a contradiction. A man who possesses only his own body is alone. Yet look at the part Adam's body had in bringing forth his companion. "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and

he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought hereunto the man." (Gen. 2:21-22) Adam's bride was created from part of his own body. "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Gen. 2:23-24) These words which Adam spoke are referred to a number of times in the New Testament, leading us to realize that they were more than a statement of the obvious. They were a prophecy of something yet to come.

In I Corinthians 15:45, Christ is called "the last Adam." The Church as a whole is the spiritual body of this last Adam. (Eph. 1:22-23) Is the Church, His body, the bride foretold by the scripture? Or does He await something more, even as the first Adam did? Adam alone among all creation had to wait for his mate. Only Eve, out of all creation, was brought forth from the body of her spouse. This was not done without purpose and forethought on God's part; it was done so that we might learn from it. Where will the Lamb's wife come from? As the first Adam's wife came from a portion of his body which God slipped out from his side and fashioned into a new individual who was rejoined to Adam in marriage, so it will be with Christ and His bride.

In Ephesians, there is a passage which some find hard to reconcile with this view of the bride. "As the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; That he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." (Eph.

5:24-25, 27) What confuses some is that those who will be presented to Christ are called "a glorious Church." After further instructions about marriage, Paul wrote, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." (Eph. 5:32) Again, "the Church." If the whole Church is to be the bride, then the way God made Eve has no particular meaning, and the meaning of the bride becomes obscure. Yet no one can rightly deny what is written in God's word.

The antidote to confusion about the Bible is learning more about the Bible. The New Testament was written in Greek. The Greek word usually translated as "Church" is "ekklesia." Its literal meaning is a "called out" group, and the word existed long before it was applied to Christians. It can refer to any group of people who are called together for any purpose. In Acts 19, where it is translated "assembly," this word is used to refer to an unruly mob at Ephesus who protested violently against the preaching of the gospel. When the word refers to saved people, it is used far more frequently to speak of local churches than to speak of the whole body of Christ.

The meaning of a word is partly determined by its context. Idol worshippers rioting against the gospel at Ephesus were not Christians just because they were called an "ekklesia." The Church at Corinth was not the whole body of Christ just because it was called an "ekklesia." Paul certainly spoke of saved people in Ephesians 5, but the mere use of this Greek word does not force us to believe he was referring to every saved person unless the context supports that thought. Paul indicated that what he was writing was "a great mystery." Mysteries demand careful consideration. A little thought tells us his real topic was not the proper conduct of a marriage, although he spoke to that issue. Further meditation, comparing

scripture with scripture by the Spirit's help, will tell us that this particular "ekklesia" is not the whole body of Christ, although he spoke to all within the body who will listen.

What is the will of Christ for the Church today? "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." (Eph. 5:26) With this in mind, He gave Himself for us. It is a preparation for the bride. Christ has not by His own choice excluded anyone from entering into this working out of His will, but in practical terms, not many Christians want to do so. Are there many people like those at Berea who, when Paul preached things they had never heard, searched the scriptures daily to see if what he said was true? How many are willing to let go of their own ideas when the word of God teaches differently? If the Bible shows that the teachings of a popular religious leader are wrong, do his followers applaud or condemn those who stand by the Bible instead of the man? Provision is made for all, but a part of the great mystery is that comparatively few partake of it.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth, "Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (II Cor. 11:1-3) Paul believed that his deep concern and solemn warnings about their spiritual condition would be viewed by the Corinthians as foolish. Theirs was a large and prosperous Church. The gifts of the Spirit were manifested among them. Outwardly, they had all the marks of spiritual success. Yet he was concerned, and could not keep silent

about his fears for them. What did he think might happen?

Consider what took place after Satan had beguiled Eve, first into misinterpreting God's word, then into doubting it, and then into disobeying it. "They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God." (Gen. 3:8) Here the figurative picture of Eve's relationship with Adam gives way to the reality of their relationship with the Lord. When Eve was beguiled away from simple trust, her relationship with God was damaged and permanently changed. Paul was concerned lest something like this should happen to the Corinthians.

He was not afraid they might lose eternal life. He wrote elsewhere, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Eternal condemnation is payment for sin. If we earn the right to possess eternal life, it is a payment rather than a gift. Gifts become the permanent possession of those who receive them; if the giver takes back the gift, then it was a loan, not a gift. Further, if the life God gave could ever perish, it would be semi-permanent, not eternal. No. Paul's concern was not for their salvation. They had believed on Jesus Christ and had received the gift of eternal life. That was settled.

On what aspect of their relationship with Christ was Paul's concern focused then? "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear...." His fear for them concerned their espousal, their engagement to Christ. Marriage arrangements in that day were made through a go-between. God had given Paul such a place with the Corinthians. Paul told them about Jesus, showing them

His spiritual wealth and eternal glory, inviting them to share it with Him. He had espoused them to Christ. If every child of God, secure in the promise of eternal life, is guaranteed a place in the called-out group referred to as "the bride," then Paul's godly jealousy, or zeal in this matter was as foolish as the Corinthians imagined. On the other hand, if his concern was not foolish, we too should be concerned lest we be found to have broken our espousals, lest we foolishly throw away the very best that God has offered to us.

Paul spoke of being "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." The word translated "simplicity" means "singleness." (See Eph. 6:5-6; Col. 3:22-23) Paul knew that while Christ is gracious and will in no wise cast out those who come to Him (John 6:37), neither will He enter into the highest and best spiritual union with those who are not committed to Him alone. If two people desire a lifelong relationship, they devote themselves and their marital love singly to one another. Nothing and no one is permitted to share the place which the marriage partner should have. If it is found before marriage that one of the two is given to divided love, or that other things will share a place of equal importance with the marriage, it is wisest to end the engagement. The Corinthians loved the Lord, but they were allowing other persons and other things to compete for their devotion.

This need for singleness of heart toward Jesus explains what Paul meant in writing, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." (Ph'p. 3:7) Paul cleared from his heart those affections which might intrude on his relationship with Christ. So also are the following words explained. "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win

Christ." (Ph'p. 3:8) To know the beloved One with an excellent knowledge was Paul's desire. Those whose hearts are drawn in love to possess such knowledge will win Christ, even as He has won their hearts. Those believers who care little about knowing all they can about Him will not win Him, even though the free gift of eternal life is fully secured by faith.

This "great mystery" concerning the bride was not revealed in ages past. It is a part of the revelation given to Paul for this age. It was hinted at and foreshadowed in such Old Testament passages as Psalm 45, Proverbs 31, and the Song of Solomon, but it was nowhere explained. It simply was not offered back then. Of the man who announced His coming and prepared the way before Him, Jesus said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." (Matt. 11:11) With a commendation like that from his Lord, I cannot believe John the Baptist received anything less than the best God offered, yet he said, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled." (John 3:29) While emphasizing to his disciples that he was not the Christ, he made it clear that he was also not of the bride. Did this great man know what he was talking about? I think so.

John expressed great satisfaction in the place God had given to him. It would be presumptuous to say that Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab, David, Daniel, Anna, John the Baptist, or any other devoted saint from ages past will have a place less joyful and satisfying than the bride, but it would be unscriptural to say they will be a part of the bride. We have been espoused to Christ as unto one husband. They were called to the wedding feast. Faithful saints from other ages will be the friends of the

bridegroom and companions of the bride. Read Psalm 45:14; Matthew 22:1-3, 25:1-13; and Luke 14:7-11. Revelation 19:9 says, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." Theirs will be a good place, a place of great blessing, but not the place of the bride. The bride is not called with the guests to the marriage supper. As Paul said in Hebrews 11:40, God has "provided some better thing for us."

What kind of ending should be given to a Bible study such as this, dealing as it does with the deepest relationship which can grow up between us and Christ? Frankly, I am not sure. If your heart responds to the opportunity of knowing more of Him and of His love for you, and if your desire increases to lay hold on His purpose for you, you will realize that no pat answers or simplified advice can bring you to the highest glory with Him. His love for you, and your love for Him will assure the finishing of the work. If you are indifferent to the offer He has made, and if you refuse to accept that place which would most completely satisfy His heart and yours, then many words and tearful admonitions will not move you. He gave His all for you. There is no more persuasive argument than this.

Nevertheless, a closing word. Revelation 19:7 says, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." Who will be in that gathering of people, called out to delight the heart of Christ in eternal companionship? Those who have made themselves ready. The word of God is central to this preparing work. If you yield yourself to Christ, He will use His word to show you how to make ready. He will do this step by step, as you walk together with Him. No one else can do for you what He must do. No one but you can prevent Him from doing it.

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