



EXPERIENTIAL RELIGION VERSUS WORD-BASED FAITH

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EXPERIENTIAL RELIGION VERSUS WORD-BASED FAITH

Throughout history there have always been those who have created religion after their own desires. It is our spirit of idolatry to do our own thing in either our rejection of the word of God, or simply an absence of the Bible in our culture. We are religious beings, and thus, we are incurably creative in our efforts to express our religiosity according to our own desires. And because we are this way, in the absence of the word of God we will create a religion after our own inventions, which religion is always subject to our thinking.

In reaction to the formalism of those who have created and ceremonialized religion, others have moved to the extreme by discarding either traditionalism or ceremonialism in order to follow emotional-based religions. They have gone on this journey in order to have a greater sense of spiritual fulfillment, or a sense of victorious living of their faith. In their quest for this objective, they have rejected the mundane for a deeper experience of religiosity that is driven by human experience rather than divine guidance by the revelation of God. These religionists would be classified as experientialists.

In the world of Christendom today, we have religious faiths that are generally based on at least one of three foundations: (1) the traditions of the fathers,

(2) the emotional experiences of man, or (3) the word of God. Our immediate concern are those religious groups that have based their faith on human emotional experiences as opposed to the word of God. We will refer to these groups as **experiential religions**.

Experiential religiosity is not something that is unique with our present century. Such religiosity occurred at different times throughout recorded history, beginning with Montanus, a “converted” priest from pagan religion in the second century. Unfortunately, Montanus brought his spiritualistic baggage with him into Christianity upon his “conversion.” In A.D. 157, he claimed to be some prophet, considering himself to be the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. He assumed that he had a special relationship with the Holy Spirit beyond the ordinary believer. Montanus claimed that he was a prophet of the last period of revelation from God, and the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He was purported to have prophesied that in his lifetime the “new Jerusalem” would come down out of heaven somewhere in Phrygia. As a result of his influence throughout Asia Minor, he affected a great many people who converted to his leadership. The result was that he became a leader of one of the first apostasies to experiential religion.

Because Montanus was zealous in his ministry, his movement spread throughout the Roman Empire, reaching into western Europe. The movement became known as Montanism, of which the great religious leader, Tertullian, became a convert. The Apostolic Father, Eusebius, led in countering the apostasy of Montanus. Of his spiritual exploits, Eusebius wrote,

“So that he was carried away in spirit, and was wrought up into a certain kind of frenzy and irregular ecstasy, raving, and speaking, and uttering strange things and proclaiming what was contrary to the institutions that had prevailed in the church . . .” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, V, 16).

With contemporary church leaders, Montanus was considered to be an apostate from true Christianity. Even those who were associated with him affirmed that he did not follow any authority of the word of God in his theology. His system of faith was experiential, and thus, the word of God had little relevance to the foundation of his faith.

We have few records of experiential religiosity throughout the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic Church dominated Christendom. The only documentation of experiential movements from the time of the early apostolic age to the Protestant Reformation Movement was of the early Montanists. However, throughout the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century, and in reaction to the cold ceremonialism of Roman Catholicism, the Reformers dealt with what

Martin Luther called “the enthusiasts.” Church historians have called such groups “evangelical radicals,” “holy rollers,” and “holy jumpers.” These would be groups as the Munzerites, radical Anabaptists and others. Later came the Quakers who, as the early Gnostics, focused on discovering some “inner light.” Then came the Shakers of 1776. There were the Pietists, and then, the Irvingites that were started by a Scottish Presbyterian preacher. In the nineteenth century came the great “holiness” movement that swept across early America. This experiential movement included Mary Campbell, who in 1830, began a group that claimed to speak in tongues.

Campbell’s teachings began what was called the Catholic Apostolic Church. This group taught the restoration of all the miraculous gifts of the early church, affirming that the gift of prophecy was the greatest gift. However, because many of their teachings clearly contradicted the word of God, and because many of Campbell’s “prophecies” were not fulfilled, this group waned. It was dealt a heavy blow when one of the prominent leaders of the group, Robert Baxter, renounced the group and subsequently proclaimed that the “gifts” the movement promoted were only the work of evil spirits. Campbell herself later confessed that she was not correct by claiming that some of her utterances were the voice of God. When it was reported that immorality was rife within the group, and that many who had claimed to be healed, actually died soon after, the movement died.

In the past century experiential religion manifested itself in what church historians refer to as the modern Pentecostal Movement. This movement began in Topeka, Kansas in 1901 at the Bethel College. It began as a result of the work of a young man named Charles Parham. One of the students of Parham was a young woman named Agnes Osman, who yearned for a deeper spiritual life that was guided by her passion for the Lord. She longed for a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit that was based on a greater emotional experience. After an extended session of prayer, Parham laid hands on her and she received that for which she had yearned, to have an ecstatic experience, supposing that the experience was from the Holy Spirit.

After Osman had her ecstatic experience, the experiential movement grew and spread throughout the Midwest of America, extending into the state of Texas. By 1906 the movement reached as far west as southern California to the Azusa Street Mission. From the Azusa Street Mission there began what is known as the modern Pentecostal Movement. The movement has since extended throughout the world. It is a movement that is identified by tremendous spiritual fervor, ecstatic speech, shouting and dancing, with claims of prophecy and healings. Adherents of the movement have become known more by their experiential emotionalism, than their study and teaching of the word of God.

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The growth of experiential religion has become so expansive throughout the world today that some have referred to it as the third religious force in Christendom since the first century. The first was the Roman Catholic Church moment, then came the Protestant movement, and now the Pentecostal movement. But the fact that all three movements have come too late after the original establishment of Christianity should be the first signal that these are only counterfeits of the original and movements that have been generated by man. Since they are religious movements of man, they are suspect. Christianity was not a movement of man. It was the divinely revealed redemption of the cross to which men responded by faith.

As those who seek a restoration of the faith of the first century, we do not seek to reinvent either a Catholic or Protestant movement by the invention of another. We seek to restore a faith that is based on the word of God and a faith in the work of God through the cross. We do not seek to validate our faith by our feelings, but solely by the directives of our Lord Jesus after whom we call ourselves Christians. We seek to call people again to the testimony of the word of God in order to renew our faith in God's work for us through the cross.

Chapter 1

Knowing Who We Are

Our term “experiential religion” covers a great deal of religious faiths that fall under the definition of the term. In fact, many non-Christian religions would be considered experiential in that they base their faith upon human emotionalism and spiritual experiences. Under the umbrella of Christendom, however, the Pentecostal/charismatic movement would be classified as experiential religiosity.

Many church historians have viewed Pentecostalism simply as a remake of similar experiential religions that have existed throughout the history of mankind. As an experiential religion, the Pentecostal movement in the past century is only a redressing of older movements in that the foundation of the faith of the adherents is experiential.

It is important to understand what Pentecostalism is not. A lack of understanding concerning the theology of the movement—if indeed it has a theology—has led to a great deal of misunderstanding. We feel that too much nonsense has been propagated by those who have little information, or lack of understanding concerning Pentecostalism. It is certainly not fair, if not dishonest, to accuse any religious group of error on the basis of one’s own lack of information or understanding of those he opposes. This is often the case in reference to the opposition that less informed people have made

against what is commonly referred to as Pentecostalism.

Let us be clear that Pentecostalism is not defined by whether one raises his hands in praise of God, taps his foot or claps his hands. These outward bodily expressions of individuals in the excitement of their praise of God are not inherently wrong, neither do they define Pentecostalism. To condemn such practices because they supposedly reflect Pentecostalism only manifests one’s lack of understanding of Pentecostal thinking, if not one’s own efforts to bind on others his own cultural identity or worship behavior. To engage in debate over such bodily movements is beneath the dignity of honest theological discussion.

We are of a culture that is somewhat subdued in the expression of praise and worship. But this gives us no right to impose on others our subdued Western culture, and thus judge others wrong who have more expressive responses to the glory of God through the clapping or raising of hands. To do so would manifest efforts to impose a legal system of behavior on others that is outside any discussions in the Bible.

If we seek to subdue those who are more expressive in their praise and worship, then we are no better than the legalistic Judaizing teachers who also sought to impose their culture on the Gentile believers in the first century. The

Judaizers sought to command the Gentiles to be circumcised in order to be saved (See At 15:1,2). The anti-expressionists do the same by seeking to impose a legal command of something they believe should not be done in their eyes in order for one to be right before God. What is the difference? Therefore, only the uninformed would define Pentecostalism by expressions of bodily movements, not an investigation into theology or philosophy of religion. In fact, the origin of experiential religiosity finds its very roots in the cold, expressionless formalism of certain groups of Christendom who bound their sedate cultural and emotionless worship on those who sought freedom from rigid ceremonialism.

Experiential religion, or what is commonly referred to as modern Pentecostalism or the charismatic movement, has historically been a reaction to the cold formalism of traditional religion. The experientialist is in a religion of intense, personal pleasure that is often ecstatic in its manifestation. He focuses on a powerful and individual experience that is in opposition to emotionally indifferent ceremonialism. This leads experientialists to focus more on personal religious experiences than the word of God. The validation of faith, therefore, is experience, not the revelation of God.

We would not define Pentecostalism as a unique denomination, or body of theology. It is an experience as a way of life that is both personal and spiritual. The general belief of the experientialist is that experience supersedes revelation as the foundation of one's faith. The ex-

perience is often defined as the "baptism of the Spirit." The "baptism" is said to manifest itself in ecstatic speech, or speaking in an "unknown tongue." This experience is often accompanied by the gifts as prophecy, interpretation of tongues, and miraculous healing. As will be discussed in the following chapters, it will be found that modern experientialists have developed their own definition of "speaking in tongues," "baptism of the Holy Spirit," and "miraculous healings," which practices contradict the truth of the biblical definition of these first century phenomena.

A. A movement of experiences:

Pentecostalism in its purest form is a movement of those who elevate a human experiential response to God over the foundation of God's revelation. However, in its connectivity among different assemblies in the world of Christendom, Pentecostalism is a universalistic movement that seeks to bring together all those who have had some supposed spiritual experience of the Spirit, an angel, or some vision or dream. The movement is not defined by a unique catechism of doctrine. It is defined by the personal experiences of individuals. For this reason, the first validation the experiential adherent uses to define his salvation is some experience he or she has had, or some encounter with an angel, or the Holy Spirit. Dreams and visions also play a significant role to reaffirm one's faith. All those who have had such experiences, therefore, would affirm to be Pentecos-

tal, believing that their experiences are a restoration of the Pentecost events of Acts 2.

Pentecostals are brought into fellowship with one another on the basis of their common experiences. The word of God often has a minor role to play in this fellowship. For this reason, there are few Pentecostal theologians. The Catholic nature of the movement is their common salvation that they base on personal experiences, not on one's common obedience to the gospel (See Jd 3).

Because experiential religion is an ecumenical movement that is based on common experiences, differences in doctrinal belief are considered insignificant in reference to creating unity. It is not a Catholic movement that is based on a unifying belief in fundamental teaching, but a union of faiths that use experiential validation as the common identity of union. In fact, in some cases Bible knowledge and authority are minimized in order to maintain unity among all those who have had some experiential encounter. The principle that Jesus stated in reference to those Jews who based their faith on the traditions of men would apply here (Mk 7:9). Instead of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep one's traditions, the experiential religionist would reject the commandment of God in order to keep the experiential validation of his faith. In both religious scenarios the commandments of God take second place to either traditions or experiences. Whether a traditionalist or an experientialist, the commandments of God end up being rejected.

In the historical development of the holiness movements in the last two centuries, experientialists have often formed their own assembly groups that huddle together under the influence of dynamic speakers and a common acceptance of their experiences. But closely connected with these Pentecostal groups is the charismatic movement which is more ecumenical. This movement takes its identity from the Greek word *charisma*, meaning "gift." Charismatics focus on the continuation of all the miraculous, or spiritual gifts of the first century. Charismatics have taken the experiential manifestation of faith to all religious groups. As a charismatic, one can be a member of any religious group. The charismatic sees no denominational barriers.

Pentecostals, however, often identify themselves as a "Pentecostal church," and thus, meet as specific denominations that are based on the common experiences of the membership. Charismatics, on the other hand, are more catholic in that they have permeated all religious groups. Charismatics have a strong ecumenical spirit, and thus, seek to accept all experientialists regardless of their religious affiliation or doctrinal beliefs. As long as one claims to have had some spiritual experience in a dream, vision, speaking in tongues, healing, etc. he can be accepted by all charismatics.

Pentecostals are often charismatic in the sense that they believe in the continuation of the miraculous gifts of the first century. It is for this reason that the philosophy of the Pentecostal/charismatic

movement works as a catholic movement simply because charismatics do not seek unity that is based on doctrine, but on experience. They cannot disclaim the experiences of another person, and thus, they must accept one another. They cannot participate in any biblical discussions concerning their experiences for the validation of their faith is based on their experiences, not on the word of God. Their goal is to produce a union of experientialists, not unity that is based on the tangible truth of the word of God.

Those religious groups that believe they are the restoration of the Holy Spirit in these times can never have unity that is based on the word of God. Paul wrote that we should be “*eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ep 4:3). Since experiential groups marginalize the authority of the Scriptures, they can never “keep the unity of the Spirit” who has spoken to us through the inspired word of God (2 Tm 3:16,17). They can never produce unity because they marginalize the very foundation upon which the Bible teaches that we must establish unity.

The Bible nowhere teaches that unity is produced upon the foundation of the members’ experiences with the Holy Spirit. The experientialists, therefore, may create unions wherein adherents agree to accept one another’s experiences, but there can never be any real unity that is based on a variety of human spiritual experiences. True unity originates from the Holy Spirit speaking a united message in Scripture that honest believers objectively learn and to which

they humbly submit. This is the central meaning of Jude 3. “*Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write to you about **our common salvation**, I felt it necessary to write to you, exhorting that you earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*”

We cannot submit to one another’s experiences, and thus produce unity. We can be united only when we both agree to submit to the faith that was once and for all time delivered to the saints (Jd 3). **Union is accepting one another’s experiences. Unity is our common submission to the faith that was revealed two thousand years ago.**

The very fact that the Pentecostal/charismatic churches are not directly controlled by the Holy Spirit is revealed by the disunity which prevails among many Pentecostal groups. If the Spirit directly spoke to and directed such groups, there would be no disunity since the Spirit cannot be divided against Himself. And since these groups claim to be directly controlled and directed by the Holy Spirit, then they are accusing the Holy Spirit of sending contradictory messages to different groups or individuals. Their disunity is an accusation against the oneness of the Spirit of God because they are often teaching contradictory doctrines.

We must keep this point in mind in reference to Paul’s argument against those in Corinth who produced disunity by their prideful use of the spiritual gifts. Paul argued that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one, and thus, they do not work against one another in any function

of the body (1 Co 12:4-11). In the case of the Corinthian chaos, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit did not work against one another. The division that prevailed in the church, therefore, did not originate from the Godhead. Paul's beginning argument to correct the Corinthian division was to remind the church that the unity of the Spirit is manifested in those who submit to the direction of the Spirit's leading through the word of God (See 1 Co 1:10). **Unity is not obtained upon the foundation of personal experiences, but upon the foundation of the unchanging word of God.**

B. Neither Catholic nor Protestant:

Compromises, or revisions, can be made in reference to the particular doctrines that define Catholicism or one of the many denominations of Protestantism. These minor changes can be made, and yet, one can remain either a Catholic or a member of one of the Protestant denominations. However, one cannot compromise within the two religious world views concerning the fundamental doctrines that identify one as either Catholic or one of the protestant denominations. One must remain either Catholic or Protestant in reference to fundamental teaching that identifies Catholicism or a particular denomination. In general, one either has a Catholic theology and relationship with God or he has a Protestant theology and relationship with God. But the theological world views of the two bodies of faith cannot be mixed.

Pentecostalism, however, does not

belong in the camp of true Protestantism, for in Protestantism each unique network of the denominations is defined by a unique body of doctrine. Pentecostalism is generally not defined by a body of theology.

As an experiential faith, Pentecostalism belongs to a religion of subjectivism with little attention being given to doctrine. It is a faith wherein one is obsessed with his personal experiences, rather than being enthusiastic about what the Bible teaches. It is not an objective faith that is focused on a faith that is guided by the outside influence of the word of God. One's faith is validated by his subjection to inner experiences as opposed to the outward influence of the word of God. The true experientialist cannot quote and truly believe the statement, "*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ*" (Rm 10:17). If a supposed Pentecostal quotes and believes the concept of this statement, **then he is not a true Pentecostal**. If the foundation of his faith is the word of Christ, then he has allowed the word of Christ to have priority in his life over his experiences. He has thus left the experientialism that defines one to be a Pentecostal.

The true Pentecostal is so obsessed with his subjective experiences that his experiences become the focus of his religiosity and the validation of his faith. The true Pentecostal, therefore, is overwhelmingly subjective to his experiences. He is so overwhelmed by his experiences that such experiences become the focus of his faith. Spiritual experiences become so strong in reference to

his faith that he feels little need for any knowledge of the word of Christ.

We must clearly understand this point because there are many religious folks who have their roots in Pentecostalism, but they have grown beyond an experientially based faith. They have moved past themselves in order to discover what God requires of them in His word. They are not, therefore, true Pentecostals. Though they may not realize this, they must understand that they have moved past the definition of true subjective Pentecostalism to a faith that is based on revelation.

The true Pentecostal assembly is not an opportunity to come together to listen to the teaching of the word of God. The purpose of the true Pentecostal assembly is an opportunity to renew an emotional experience. Since true Pentecostalism is experientially based, then the assemblies of the adherents are for the purpose of renewing weekly the experiential flavor of the religion. It is for this reason that dynamic speakers who have the ability to cheerlead audiences into creating an atmosphere of ecstasy are usually the public leaders for Pentecostal assemblies. Such preachers are not known for their knowledge of the word of God, but for their ability to bring an assembly to the heights of emotional ecstasy. However, many Pentecostals have grown weary of such experiential oriented assemblies. It is as one member of a Pentecostal church once said, "We need more teachers and less preachers." We all knew what he was saying.

C. Carnal religiosity:

Since experiential religiously is centered on the experiences and emotions of the individual, it naturally focuses on man himself. This is humanistic religiosity. It is fleshly in that the validation of one's faith is based on personal subjective experiences, not on what one objectively discovers through his study of the word of God. It is interesting to note in history that when Mary Campbell promoted experiential religiosity in the early part of the nineteenth century, she was an ardent advocate of the supposed "pre-tribulation" event of the premillennial theology. She was one of the first people to promote the teaching. Her experiential thinking led her to interpret the Scriptures from a humanistic point of view. She was thus obsessed with those things that pleased the flesh.

Premillennialism focuses on the carnal desires of men who seek to rule over their fellow man during the so-called 1000 year reign of Jesus on earth. Subjective experientialists are intense about this fleshly teaching since the very foundation of their faith is focused on man. Those who would emphasize sensual feelings and experiences in order to validate their faith would naturally have a hope in an earthly, material kingdom of this world wherein they can reign as kings over others.

Jesus, however, taught servanthood in reference to the needs of man (See Jn 13:1-17). The Bible teaches that our purpose is to subject ourselves to God, and

to manifest such through our subjection to the needs of all men (Gl 6:10). The Bible teaches us to look out for the needs of others, and to bear the burdens of others (Gl 1:2). The true experience of Christianity is to lose oneself in service to others. Christianity is not a faith of self-glorification or an opportunity or occasion for one to exalt himself over

others. It is a faith that follows the example of its Founder who “*made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant ...*” (Ph 2:7). **Service for others, therefore, is the true experience of the disciple of Christ.** It is as Jesus said, “*If I then, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet*” (Jn 13:14).

Chapter 2

An Experiential Philosophy Of Religion

From the most unlearned to the most educated, and from the inhabitant of the hut to the penthouse dweller of New York City, everyone makes decisions on the basis of their philosophy of life. This is true because every man is concerned about what is morally right or wrong, good and evil, true or false. We are concerned about how to determine what is true, and what is real in life and valuable. We are all philosophers in reference to life. This is the way God made us.

In our philosophical approach to life, however, we must keep in mind our efforts to know and please God. **We do not come to an understanding of His will through philosophical means.** God speaks through His word and we obey (See Jr 10:23; 2 Tm 3:16,17). Through reasoning and common sense we objectively interpret His word. We do not come to an understanding of what is fundamentally binding for salvation through a philosophical approach to Bible study. Our faith is built on what God clearly

states in command, not on our philosophical deductions (See Rm 10:17). He speaks and we obey.

In order that we arrive at a knowledge of the truth, the Bible warns that we should be careful to identify what is false philosophy, for believing false philosophy will lead us astray. Paul warned Timothy, “*O Timothy, guard what is committed to your trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings and opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge*” (1 Tm 6:20).

In order to avoid establishing our faith on a false philosophy of life, we must be objective students of the revealed word of God. Once one submits to his objective understanding of what God would require of him, he relies on revealed truth in order to determine his philosophy of life. The truth of God, therefore, guides his philosophical deductions and conclusions. But if we subtract the word of God from our philosophical thinking, we will most certainly go astray, for it is not in man who walks to guide

his own paths (Jr 10:23).

When applying our philosophical approach to life to our religious thinking, there are (1) empirical religionists, (2) idealistic religionists, (3) experiential religionists, and (4) the divinely mandated faith. Every person has a philosophy of life according to at least one of or more of these general world views of thinking.

The **empirical religionist** believes that there is no truth except that which he perceives through his five senses. In other words, “seeing is believing” in reference to what he holds as true. This is the person, though he may be religious, who questions the miraculous foundation upon which Christianity was validated in the first century. If he is a religious person, then he has a faith that is void of the miraculous, and especially the work of God in the life of the Christian today.

The **idealistic religionist** assumes that he can determine truth by what he can intellectually conclude. He believes that all truth is subject to human reasoning. The idealist relies on man’s ability to reason in order to discover truth. Though he may be a person who deduces truth from the Bible, he assumes that all truth is the product of the reasoning of man, and thus, must be the result of and subject to man’s reasoning. That which is revealed in the Bible must be put through the scrutiny of man’s reasoning before it can be accepted as truth that is applicable to man’s moral behavior. The idealist would discard Bible truth if he judges that it is not applicable to the human culture or behavior of his time.

The **experiential religionist** has a philosophy of faith that subjects reality to the emotional whims of men. He assumes that the heart of man should have priority over the mind of man. He would reject the view that truth can be objectively discovered. He would do so because he believes that truth is determined by the feelings of the individual. In other words, the experientialist does not believe in a constant state or existence of truth because the emotions of the individual, or his circumstances, constantly change. That which is true or moral, therefore, can be changed according to the subjective feelings of man. The individual, not truth, is the absolute, and thus, truth or morality can change according to the emotional state or needs of the individual.

To the experientialist, what feels right is right. And thus, to him there is no absolute truth or morality to which we must conform. Truth must conform to the needs of man. Our relationship with God is thus based on our conditions and needs, not on the unchanging mandates of God’s commandments. In this way, experiential religiosity is subjective to the whims of men. (More later.)

The experiential religionist is his own authority in matters of faith, and thus, the consequences of his religion are devastating to true faith. His philosophy of faith is devastating to true faith for several reasons:

- He denies the authority of the Bible in the lives of those who would serve God.

- He exalts man's feelings over any unchanging truth from God to man.
- He denies that there is any standard of morality by which men should relate to one another.
- He negates the necessity of studying the Bible, for it is believed that truth is determined by the changing emotions, feelings and experiences of men.

The conclusion to the religious philosophy of the experientialist is that there is no such thing as an unchanging body of teaching that identifies the nature of the church of God. Since the experientialist substitutes the authority of his experiences for the authority of the Bible in matters of faith, then he has established his own feelings and experiences as the final authority in matters of faith. It is this philosophy of religion that governs the thinking of the true Pentecostal. One may claim to be a Pentecostal because of his heritage from Pentecostalism, but if he resorts to the word of God in matters of faith, he is not philosophically a Pentecostal. He has moved from Pentecostalism into the fourth philosophy of religious belief. He has moved from experientialism to the word of God. He thus walks by a faith that is based on the word of God.

We would technically not call the fourth religious philosopher a "divinely mandated religionist." True faith is not a religion. It is the same as saying there is no false "Christianity." There is only true Christianity. Everything else is a re-

ligion of man, and thus false.

The fact is that Jesus would have all men be simple Christians. And Christians base their faith totally on the word of Christ (Rm 10:17). Jesus said to the Jews who believed in Him, "***If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples***" (Jn 8:31). To His disciples He said, "***If you love Me you will keep My commandments***" (Jn 14:15). Jesus' word, His commandments, are not discovered or determined by the rational deductions and logic of man. They are mandated from heaven through His written word. His commandments are absolute. Their discovery and application are not determined by the experiences or emotional whims of people. They are discovered through diligent Bible study (At 17:11; 2 Tm 2:15). And since we will be judged by the word of Christ, then His word is absolute, that is, it cannot be changed (See Jn 12:48).

The philosophy of the true Christian is that the word of God is his final authority in matters of faith (2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:20,21). It is the foundation upon which his philosophy of life stands. He believes that all men must obey the gospel in order to be saved (Rm 6:3-6; 2 Th 1:6-9). He believes that there is only one church (Ep 4:4-6). These and many other mandated truths are certainly contrary to the philosophy that our experiences and emotions should have priority over the revelation of God.

Experiential religionists believe and live contrary to the philosophy of life of the Christian. The experientialist places his feelings above the Bible. The Chris-

tian places the word of Christ over his feelings. The experientialist changes his faith when he experiences new visions or has another dream concerning what he must do. The Christian believes in and lives by the unchanging word of God. The experientialist often questions the validity of his visions and dreams. The Christian has total and absolute faith in

the truth of God's word. Experiential religionists often have conflicting experiences, dreams and visions. But the Christian follows the unchanging word of God that is without contradiction, and thus, is specific concerning what mandates are necessary to obey in order to be pleasing to God.

Chapter 3

The Rise Of Religion

We must understand that God created man a religious being. He created man with intelligence in order to deduct the existence of God (Rm 1:20). Because man is inherently religious, and subsequently, seeks a divine being beyond his own existence, in the absence of revelation from the one true and living God, he will create a god after his own imagination. He will then create a system of religious belief and behavior that he feels pleases the god he has created in his mind. The culture of the religious believer, therefore, plays a very significant role in his religious beliefs and behavior in reference to his creation of his god and religion.

Every new generation of human beings is ignorant of the truth of God. It is thus the responsibility of every generation of fathers and mothers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Pv 22:6), if indeed they themselves have access to the word of God. In many places of the developing world, there is the total absence of the Bible, and thus, by word of mouth people

have propagated teachings concerning Christianity. However, these teachings have often been greatly amalgamated with local cultural beliefs, and thus a "christianity" has been developed that has been influenced more by local religious beliefs than the truth of the Bible. Throughout Africa there are thousands of religious groups that claim to be Christian, but have little knowledge of the word of God.

There are also those places where the parents have failed in their duties to impart to their children Bible teaching. The result has been that the succeeding generation of believers is not true to the word of God. They are apostate believers who carry on in their own ignorance of what God would have them believe and do.

There are also those situations where the fathers have allowed their religiosity to digress into a traditional system of ceremonies that is void of Bible teaching. More specific, there are those religious environments wherein "Christianity" has simply been relegated to ceremonial assemblies that are cold and formal. We

should not be surprised, therefore, to find in the religious world a vast assortment of religious groups that vaguely have any connection or identity with what would be called a “christian” church. The Christendom of today would probably best be described by Paul’s words in Romans 3:10: *“There is none righteous, no, not one. There is no one who understands. There is no one who is seeking God.”* Because we seek to fabricate a religiosity after our own desires, we have subsequently created a god whom we believe sanctions our fabricated religiosity.

When God said of Israel, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”* (Hs 4:6), in the historical context Israel was destroyed from the land because the people had allowed themselves to be destroyed as the representatives of God on earth. They had rejected being led by their objective response to the word of God, and thus following after subjection to their own religious imaginations, they were destroyed as the people of God. Nothing less happens today when religious people reject the word of God, either by ignorance, tradition, or willful neglect of studying their Bibles. In their ignorance of the word of God, they are willingly led about by teachers who will tickle their ears.

“Ear tickling” preachers are such because they have little knowledge of the word of God. They depend on their speaking abilities to woo into subjection an innocent following (See 2 Tm 4:3,4). Such people are often sincere in their beliefs. But we must keep in mind that in the Scriptures sincerity is never con-

sidered the final condition for salvation. One can be sincerely faithful to his erroneous beliefs, but certainly lost. The suicide bomber is sincere, but sincerely lost.

Because there is so little Bible knowledge among many groups that claim some connection with Christianity, it is easy to understand why the adherents of such groups would assume that religious experiences should validate one’s faith. Since they cannot quote a scripture from the Bible to prove that they are truly Christian, then they have only one other source of validation. Spiritual experiences under the guise of being touched by the Holy Spirit have become the common foundation upon which many individuals believe that they are right with God. For this reason, doctrinal beliefs play an insignificant part in their theology, if they indeed have a theology.

Bible discussions with experiential religionists are often fruitless simply because the experiential religionist places more emphasis on his experiences than what the Bible teaches. It is true that the experientialist has had some type of ecstatic experience, an experience that he uses as evidence for his faith. But when approached with Bible teaching on such subjects as the purpose of miracles, the purpose of tongues (languages), or the authority of the Bible, the experientialist will almost always resort to his experiences in order to invalidate any Bible teaching that may contradict his experiences.

It is not that this person has had an experience, but whether the experience was from the Holy Spirit, or just the ex-

citement of his own spirit. When someone says he saw the Lord, or God spoke to him in a vision or dream, it is not important what the person claims. What is important is to determine what the person claims the Lord said to him. If what the Lord supposedly said to someone in a dream or vision contradicts what is

taught in the Bible, then the origin of the supposed experience of the dream or vision was from the individual's own spirit, not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would never tell someone something that contradicted what He has already stated in the Bible.

Chapter 4

God's Work For Us

There is a vast difference between experiential religiosity and the faith that is revealed in and based on the New Testament. The emphasis of the New Testament is the revelation of the gospel to which God desires that all men respond through repentance (2 Pt 3:9). The gospel is Christ, and thus, all focus in the New Testament is on Christ. In order to complete God's plan to save man, He worked in two ways in reference to Christ:

1. His redemptive work through Jesus.
2. His redemptive work in and through the believer by the Holy Spirit.

In order to bring men into eternal dwelling, these two works of God in the lives of people are necessary and related. But they must be clearly distinguished from one another in reference to our justification.

A. God's redemptive work through Jesus:

God's redemptive work through

Jesus is based on the historical event of the gospel, which is the good news of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4). The gospel event is a statement to all men of **what God has done for man through Jesus**. It is not a proclamation of what God is presently doing or will do. **The event of the gospel has already occurred**. It happened two thousand years ago outside the city of Jerusalem. What God has done for us through the gospel is past tense, as Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 5:18. "*And all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ*" Paul reminded the Ephesians, "*In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace ...*" (Ep 1:7).

In order to accomplish this redemptive work, Jesus "*humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Ph 2:8). God's work of redemption through **the work of Jesus resulted from Jesus' obedience on our behalf**. His work was based on the principle of what Paul explained in Romans

5:8. *“But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* Because all have sinned (Rm 3:23); because there is none who are righteous (Rm 3:10); and because there is no one who can earn his salvation through meritorious works or perfect keeping of law (Gl 2:16), Jesus was obedient to the redemptive plan of God in order that all have the opportunity of His cleansing blood. Jesus did what we could not do for ourselves.

God's redemptive work has been accomplished for us. Jesus left heaven for us (Ph 2:5-11). He suffered on the cross for us. He bore our sins on the cross, died there, and was buried. He rose again on the third day for us in order to give us hope of eternal dwelling. He is now reigning as King of kings for us (1 Tm 6:15). And He is coming again for us (1 Th 4:13-18). God did all this for us, **not in us**.

The gospel event took place in history before us and for us. We can connect with the redemptive work of God through the gospel by obedience to the gospel in baptism (Rm 6:3-6). But we must keep in mind that regardless of our sinfulness, the gospel was revealed. Regardless of men's willingness to accept Jesus (Jn 1:11), Jesus came into the world for the salvation of all men. **This salvation is not discovered experientially, but objectively as one reads about it in the Bible.** If the Bible did not exist, no man could be saved by his own experiential inventions. Salvation results from one's obedient faith response to what is revealed in the Bible, not one's

experiences that he would offer to God for his own justification.

B. God's redemptive work in us through the Holy Spirit:

The second work of God on our behalf takes place as a result of our obedience to the work of God through the gospel. It is a blessing of grace because we are saved by our obedient response to God's redemptive work through the gospel. Peter indicated this work upon the first pronouncement of what men would receive when they obeyed the gospel by baptism for remission of sins. To the thousands on Pentecost in A.D. 30 who had asked, “What shall we do,” he responded, *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (At 2:38).

When one obeys the gospel by baptism, God begins His work for the obedient through the Holy Spirit. **Sanctification by the Spirit is a lifetime work of the Spirit on behalf of the obedient.** Throughout our lives we are regenerated by the Spirit in order to be transformed into the image of Jesus. Now consider this work of the Spirit in the obedient believer in reference to God's work for us through the gospel event. These two works must never be confused. They must never be made the same. Since the second is dependent on the believer's response to the first, then the Spirit can do nothing if one does not respond through baptism to the gospel of the cross and resurrection.

God's work outside and before us through the cross was accomplished on our behalf. We had nothing to do with the event of the cross, for Christ died for us while we were dead in our sins (Rm 5:8). For this reason, we must keep in mind the following points in order to maintain a clear understanding of the two different redemptive works of God on our behalf:

1. The grace of God appeared to all men regardless of the state of all men.

Paul wrote in the past tense, "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*" (Ti 2:11). Apart from our sinful actions, God took action in reference to our redemption. God extended grace in spite of our unrighteousness. The grace of God that was revealed on the cross is thus different from His grace in giving the Spirit to those who obey the gospel. The redemptive work for sin took place before the giving of the Spirit to the obedient for sanctification. His grace that was revealed through the cross was not dependent on the obedience of man, for "*while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rm 5:8). But the work of God in us through the Spirit is dependent on the submission of the obedient believer to the leading of the Spirit. In other words, God's grace in giving the Spirit does not happen until one responds to the grace that was revealed on the cross.

2. The gospel event happened before and outside us. We had no part in the work of God through the gospel. The gospel happened regardless of our sin-

fulness. "*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them*" (2 Co 5:19). Reconciliation took place outside us and regardless of us. We did not earn the event of the gospel. Because of our sins, we were spiritually not worthy of God's grace that was revealed on the cross. Nevertheless, because God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16).

3. Our acceptance by God upon our obedience to the gospel does not depend on the work of the Spirit after we have obeyed the gospel. Our acceptance by God is based on our obedience to the gospel through baptism. We are added to His family by Him when we obey the gospel (At 2:38,47). **Our acceptance by God, therefore, is not based on what the Holy Spirit does for us, but because of our response to what God has done for us through the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus.**

If God through the Holy Spirit had to regenerate a response in us in order that we obey the gospel, then He would be a respecter of persons, and thus an unjust God in view of the fact that most people will not respond to the gospel. But we must remember that God is not willing that any person perish (2 Pt 3:9). For this reason, the gospel goes out to everyone in order to give everyone an opportunity to respond. The fact that we have the opportunity to respond to the work of God through the gospel means that we must take ownership of our response to the gospel. It is not the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to generate a response in

our hearts to the message of the gospel.

4. God's work for us through the gospel is complete, perfect and sufficient. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was complete and sufficient. *"By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"* (Hb 10:10). On the other hand, God's work in us through the Holy Spirit is incomplete because we are sinners. The Holy Spirit is working with malfunctioning units. We cannot live the perfect life. We confess that we sin. John reminds us, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (1 Jn 1:8). The Spirit works in our lives in a sanctifying and transforming manner, but His work is with imperfect subjects who struggle to live according to the will of God. Christians are the sanctified in that they have been cleansed by the blood of Christ (1 Co 1:2). However, they continue to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit in separating themselves from the world. *"Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work"* (2 Tm 2:21). *"For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one ..."* (Hb 2:11; see Ep 4:17-32). We are being sanctified by the truth of God on a daily basis (Jn 17:17). Our response to the Spirit-inspired word of God continues to set us apart from the world. Through His blood, Jesus cleaned up our past sins when we obeyed the gospel (At 2:38; 22:16). But the Holy Spirit works to lead us through the word of Jesus in order to mold us for eternal dwelling.

In view of the preceding points, we must understand that what God did for us through the gospel was complete and perfect. However, His work that He does in us through the Spirit is incomplete because of our own inability to live the perfect life. While Jesus was with His disciples He wanted to make this point very clear to them. It was clarified when He sent out many of the disciples in order to heal the sick and cast out demons (See Lk 10). When the disciples returned, they were quite jubilant about their accomplishments. *"Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name"* (Lk 10:17). But notice Jesus' response to their ability to command the obedience of the demons in His name. *"Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you. But rejoice because your names are written in heaven"* (Lk 10:20). Jesus knew that His disciples would be excited about what God would do in their lives. But they must keep in mind that this was the work of God outside them, not in them. **They should not rejoice in that over which they had no power, but over that which God had done for them, that their names were written in heaven** (Lk 10:20).

We praise God for what He has done for us through the gospel. Through the regular observance of the Lord's Supper we remember Jesus and the cross (Mt 26:26-29). In reference to the Supper, Jesus said, *"This do in remembrance of Me."* We must continually be reminded of what Jesus did for us in order to keep our minds off rejoicing over what the Spirit is doing in us, lest we become ar-

rogant. Being Christ-centered means focusing on the gospel event, not on the Spirit's work in our lives. We have discovered that the more people focus on the work of the Spirit in their lives, the less they focus on doing that which Jesus did for them. They become less Christ-centered and more "me-centered." And because of this, those churches that obsess over the work of the Spirit in the lives of the adherents usually have little concern for remembering Jesus through the regular observance of the Lord's Supper. **Christ-centered churches regularly observe the Lord's Supper because they want to remain Christ-centered** (See At 20:7).

As long as we keep focusing on God and what He did for us through Christ, the Spirit will continue to do His work of sanctifying our lives. But when we take our eyes off Christ, and start focusing on what the Spirit is doing in our lives, we start minimizing what Christ did for us. We become obsessed with our own "spirituality" and our own experiences. We must always keep in mind what Jesus said in reference to the observance of the Supper, "This do in remembrance **of Me.**" Did Jesus make this statement because He knew that men would eventually take their eyes off Him, and start focusing on themselves? Certainly!

Chapter 5

Compelled By Love

The experience of love (Gr. *agape*) in the context of the experientialist is viewed differently than it is set forth in the Bible in reference to God's love for us. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul wrote, "***For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge that if one died for all, then all died.***" And if all died in their sins (Rm 3:9,10), then all need the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel. We are thus driven by the love that God extended toward us through Jesus. We are driven to extend the same love toward the lost. It is a love that is manifested through duty.

There are two different views of the nature of the *agape* (love) about which the New Testament speaks. (1) The ex-

perientialist will do good works because of the love in his heart to do such things. To him love is a rapturous feeling that compels him to do good. When love is in the believer's heart, then the believer will act. (2) The Bible presents love as a principle of unselfishness. Because one has submitted to Christ whom God gave because He so loved us, he in turn submits to the needs of others as God served our spiritual needs. "***We love because He first loved us***" (1 Jn 4:19). And God loved us even when we were unloving and did not deserve His love.

Biblical love cannot be separated from obedience, for it is manifested in obedience. "***For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments***" (1 Jn

5:3). See if this is not what John meant in 1 John 3:16. ***“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”*** Jesus laid down His life because of His duty to save the unloving. We, therefore, will respond to our enemies with the same love, and especially with our brothers. It is as John wrote, *“... let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed ...”* (1 Jn 3:18). It was Jesus’ duty to go to the cross. It was the Father’s will, not His will, for He wished that the cup could pass from Him (Mt 6:10; 26:39,42; Hb 10:7-9). It is the same in our response to the needs of others. We may not like the cross we bear, but we must bear it for Jesus. It is as Jesus said, ***“And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple”*** (Lk 14:27).

The experientialist will do something because he feels like doing it out of the love in his heart. But the biblical concept of love is based on obedience and duty. It is based on bearing a cross. **One does good whether he feels like it or not. His feelings do not determine whether or not he will carry his cross in caring for his brother.** When it comes to doing that which is his duty to do, he will do his duty regardless of his feelings. In fact, his true obedience (love) is exemplified when he does that which calls for great sacrifice and duty. His first desire is to glorify God, not himself. His first desire is toward others, not himself. Crosses are not a pleasure to bear.

Observers see the actions of the experientialist and glorify him because of

the love that he must have in his heart. Observers see the actions of the obedient who act regardless of their convenience or feelings, **and give glory to God for the works of the obedient.** The one who loves God with all his heart, mind, strength and soul will bear his cross in order to bring glory to God (Lk 14:27). He keeps the law of God at the expense of his own personal convenience or even his own life itself. He will love his enemies. He believes what Paul wrote. *“And let us not become weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not give up”* (Gl 6:9). The cross-bearer sometimes becomes weary in doing good, but he continues. He believes, *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially those who are of the household of the faith”* (Gl 6:10). The cross-bearing disciple continues when the feeling-motivated experientialist has long since exhausted himself.

Biblical love is not a sensual love experience. It is an objective obedience to the will of our Father that brings personal fulfillment (See Jn 13:17). God’s final definition of those who are His was revealed to John. ***“Here is the patience of the saints. Here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus”*** (Rv 14:12). We are of those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus regardless of our feelings and experiences. Regardless of our insufficient love, we have kept His commandments and remained faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ. Our confidence, therefore, is not in ourselves, particularly our

imperfect behavior. Our confidence is not in our experiences and our insufficient feelings. It is in our loving obedience to the commandments of God. It is not that we are perfectly obedient, but that we are struggling to walk in the light as He is in the light. In our obedience, we never forget 1 John 1:7. *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”*

The experientialist must remember Jesus’ words, *“Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.”*

To the experientialists, Jesus says, *“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and performed many wonderful works in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness’”* (Mt 7:21-23). Why is it that those religionists who claim to be prophets, claim to cast out demons, and claim to do many miraculous works, have never read this passage? Or maybe they have, and then ignored these words of Jesus to be meaningless because of the experiences they have exalted over the *“will of My Father who is in heaven.”* (More on this later.)

Chapter 6

Justification

A brief overview of the digression into apostate thinking after the first century illustrates where men will go when they take their eyes off the redemptive work of God through the cross and focus on their own performance of law and meritorious works. This overview especially helps in the African context where there are many who are so obsessed with spooks and spirits that they have a difficult time focusing on God’s word, *“that our names are written in heaven.”* We become so obsessed with demons we have created in our imaginations that we remain continually in fear of being possessed by some evil spirit. Our minds are our own worst enemy. Our creative and misguided imaginations destroy our confidence in Christ whom we often

marginalize by our imaginations.

Some Christians are too often as the disciples of Jesus when they returned from the mission trip of Luke 10. They rejoiced over the casting out of the demons while they should have been rejoicing over their names being written in heaven. If the focus of our faith is on what we can do, even though *“in the name of Jesus,”* then we forget what God has done for us through Jesus.

This is exactly what happened in the digression away from the truth that eventually led to the birth of the Roman Catholic Church. After the close of the first century, Gnosticism and Montanism in the second century began to refocus the thinking of many Christians. Focus turned from the cross to the supposed

direct function of the Spirit in the individual. This change of focus led people to create a subjective view of the individual's relationship with God. The Gnostic taught that one must be enlightened by being aware of what was called the inner divine light. The Montanist focused on a direct experience of the Holy Spirit in one's personal life. The focus of the believer, therefore, was turned from the work of God through the cross, to the subjective work of what men could do through their own "spiritual performances." It was the spirit of idolatry without the carving of a wooden idol. Men began to idolize their own spiritual experiences.

The obsession of one's focus on his own work instead of God's work, eventually led to the fundamental theology of the Roman Catholic Church. This theology is that one's acceptance in the eyes of God is dependent on one's personal experience of the grace of God within the individual believer. The Catholic doctrine of an "infused righteousness" was the belief that justification takes place on the basis of the experience of the believer, not on the basis of what God has done through the cross. Justification was subject to what one could generate within himself, and thus, the grace of God that was revealed on the cross needed the supplement of the believer's works.

One of the primary tasks of the leaders of the Reformation Movement was to restore the New Testament teaching of justification. They sought to restore the teaching that God's grace on the cross was sufficient for our justification and

not dependent on the performance of the believer. There was much discussion among the Reformers concerning justification by faith because they were teaching themselves out of the meritorious concept of justification that was taught by the Roman Catholic Church. The discussion centered around justification by our faith in what God has done, not in what we can do in our performance of law and meritorious deeds. If justification were based on our performance of either law-keeping or meritorious deeds, the Reformers argued, then our focus is on ourselves, not on the justification that freely came through the work of God on the cross. The Roman church taught that justification was earned. But if it is earned, then it is no longer a free gift. It is no longer by grace, but through merit. *"But if it is by works, it is no longer grace, otherwise grace is no longer grace"* (Rm 11:6).

A. Justified by the faith of Christ Jesus.

Our justification is not only based on our faith in what God worked on our behalf, but in Jesus who worked on our behalf through the cross. What must be the center of reference to our thinking on justification is what Paul taught in Galatians 2:16. *"Knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law, for by works of law no flesh will be justified"* (International King

James Version). Notice that our justification came “by **the** faith of Christ Jesus,” not by the experience of our own faith. Our faith is in what Jesus did on the cross when He “*became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Ph 2:8). Our salvation was made possible by **the faith of Christ** that took Him to the cross. Our faith is in His obedience of accomplishing our salvation outside our inability to live perfectly according to law. We thus thank Jesus for His faith in going to the cross, for we have faith in the cross for our justification.

But some recent translations have obscured the point of Galatians 2:16 by incorrectly translating the passage, and again placing the responsibility for justification on the performance of men, as did the Roman Catholics. Notice the *New International Version*'s translation of Galatians 2:16. “... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but **by faith in Jesus Christ**. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified **by faith in Christ** and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.” In the Greek text, the article “the” precedes the word “faith” in both phrases in reference to faith. But in the *New International Version* the focus is placed on the faith of man, **whereas the correct translation would place the emphasis on the faith of Jesus whereby He took Himself to the cross** (Jn 10:17,18). Galatians 2:16 is not talking about our faith in Christ in order to be justified. **Paul is talking about the faith of Christ to accomplish justification for us.** God reconciled us

to Himself through Christ. We did not reconcile ourselves to Him (2 Co 5:18). Justification was made possible by the faith of Christ. We have access to it by our own faith in Christ.

When Jesus said prior to His crucifixion, “*Not My will, but Yours be done,*” He was placing His faith in the Father to complete the plan of redemption through the cross. The work of God through the redemption of the cross occurred regardless of our faith. In fact, we were hopeless when the grace of God was revealed on the cross (Rm 5:8). Justification was the work of God outside ourselves and regardless of either our obedience or faith. **If it were not for the faith of Christ who worked through the cross on our behalf, we would have no reason for any faith in Christ.** His faith has generated our faith. We must never forget that it was His faith that made it possible for us to have faith in His work for us.

B. Justified by the righteousness of Christ Jesus.

It was Christ's experience for us on the cross, not our own experience, that is the foundation for “our names being written in heaven.” This is the exact prophecy of Isaiah 53:11,12. “*By His knowledge [of His redemptive work of the cross] My righteous servant [Jesus] will justify many, for He will bear their iniquities.*”

The life of the Christian is in Christ. Jesus said, “*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more*

abundantly” (Jn 10:10). Contrary to the thinking of many materialists, Jesus’ focus in this statement was not on prosperity, but on what He brought to all men through the cross. He is the life, and now the source of this life is in heaven. Our faith, therefore, must be focused on Jesus in heaven, not on ourselves on this earth. Jesus died for our sins. He rose for our hope. He reigns for our protection. He is coming again for our eternal salvation. Our faith, therefore, is in Him to accomplish that which we can never accomplish on our own. We praise and thank Jesus, therefore, for His faith in the Father that led Him to fulfill the gospel event, which event has led to our justification.

We must compare our religiosity, and especially the focus of our life, with the New Testament teaching concerning the justification that was revealed through Jesus. **The believer must ask himself if the focus of his life is on his own experiences to be made right before God, or on the experience of Jesus on the cross.** If one’s focus is on the experiences of his own life, then he has missed the point. He has forgotten that one is not justified by the merit of experiences (Gl 2:16). One may cry out “Lord, Lord,” but in all actuality, his faith is based on the performances of his own experiences, and not on the experience of Christ on the cross.

We must never forget that Jesus merited our justification on the cross, and then, He handed it to us as a free gift. This is true grace. And since it is a free gift, it can never be merited or earned by works of experience. By responsive faith

we access that which is free. Our confidence in our justification, therefore, is not in our ability to perform, but in Jesus’ “performance” on the cross.

C. No justification by personal performances of law.

Experiential religiosity is defined by the focus of the adherents on their personal experiences as the validation of their salvation and acceptance by God. But if one’s faith is based on the redemptive work of God, regardless of his sinfulness, then he is not an experientialist. We have discovered that many people who have come out of a Pentecostal background have actually grown out of the true definition of what a Pentecostal is. They have grown from trusting in their own experiences to trusting (faith) in Christ as the surety of their salvation. These people have grown away from a religiosity that was based on experience in order to have a faith that is based on what the word of God states concerning the work of Christ on the cross. Their faith, therefore, has become word based and not experience based as they climb out of the quagmire of experiential religiosity. In the true definition of Pentecostalism, therefore, they are no longer Pentecostals.

It has been one of the evangelistic methods of some to boast of how God has worked in their lives. The testimony of their experiences, therefore, has often become the message of their “gospel.” But this is contrary to what Paul preached. Notice his statement of 2

Corinthians 4:5. ***“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake.”***

We have met those who preach themselves. They are eager to boast about some experience they had with an angel or the Spirit working in their lives. They will carry on endlessly about how they had some vivid dream or vision when they were “slain in the Spirit.” **They preach themselves.** Paul said, *“But we preach Christ crucified ...”* (1 Co 1:23).

Luke recorded the emphasis of the apostles’ preaching. ***“And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus”*** (At 4:33). There is a vast difference between preaching one’s own experiences and preaching the crucified and resurrected Jesus. The subject of the preaching of one identifies him as the representative of a false religion, whereas the subject of the other identifies him as a messenger of the gospel.

When the apostle Paul spoke of his experiences, the subject was hardships and tragedies that befell him during his preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified (See 2 Co 11). But in all his trials

of preaching the cross, he wrote to the Corinthians, ***“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”*** (1 Co 2:2).

We can identify those who are preachers of the gospel. They do not preach their own personal experiences. They determine to know only the experience of Christ on the cross and His resurrection for our hope. True preachers do not preach themselves. They are not obsessed with telling others of their personal experiences. On the contrary, they are overwhelmed with the work that God did throughout history in bringing the plan of redemption to finality on the cross. They are in awe of the empty tomb. They tremble at the feet of the King of kings and Lord of lords. They work tirelessly in anticipation of the coming King who will finalize the purpose for which this world was created. They are looking for and pleading that the new heavens and earth be revealed (2 Pt 3:11-13). They can look forward to the coming of Jesus with anticipation because they do not trust in themselves for their justification. They fully trust in the work of Jesus Christ through the cross.

Chapter 7

Experiences Versus Truth

One of the reasons for the rise of experiential religiosity is that religion throughout the centuries often becomes so emotionally sterile, traditionally stagnant, and ceremonially performed that the emotional needs of people have been ei-

ther suppressed or ignored. In reaction to such rigid religiosity the swing of the intellectual and emotional pendulum goes from the one extreme of cold orthodoxy to the uncontrolled and ecstatic emotionalism of experiential religion.

People often run through Jerusalem in forsaking all forms of ceremony and personal self-control. They have rejected formally cold religiosity in order to emotionally base their faith on claimed divine experiences they assume are divine interventions in their lives. They have gone so far as to base their faith entirely on their experiences rather than the Bible. Many have digressed to the point that their emotional experiences have blinded them to the fact that they have actually forsaken the Bible as the foundation of their faith. They are philosophically and theologically ecumenical in reference to anyone who has had an emotional experience, regardless of what one believes concerning the word of God.

As Bible students we must keep in mind that a religious emotional experience proves that we have a spirit. We are emotional beings. We “*rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep*” (Rm 12:15). If we refuse to bring our emotionality into our faith, then we live in an emotional vacuum. We will also be a spiritually crippled being who has a difficult time in expressing our brotherhood and fellowship with others. We will never fully understand the nature of the God of love. But because we crave brotherhood, we seek to express our emotions with our faith in God. However, our emotions must be guided and controlled by the revelation of God.

This is the principle behind John’s caution in 1 John 4:1. “*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into*

the world.” Because we live in a world of religious spirits that have gone astray, John lays on Christians the responsibility of testing the spirits. And there is only one standard by which spirits can be tested. This standard is the word of God.

We are not, therefore, to believe every religious experience of everyone who believes in Jesus. We are to believe only those experiences that are tested by the word of God. In other words, only those experiences that conform to the teachings of the Bible must be accepted. The thinking of the experientialist is to be considered only if he allows himself to be tested by the word of God (1 Jn 4:1). Those whose teachings contradict the word of God are to be rejected.

It is imperative that we test the spiritual experiences of men with the word of God in order to guard ourselves from being intimidated, and subsequently, led astray by the experiential “spirituality” of those who arrogantly put forward their experiences as divinely generated. Paul reminded the Corinthians of their former experiences in pagan idolatry. “*You know that when you were Gentiles you were led astray to dumb idols ...*” (1 Co 12:2). In their former life, the emotional ecstasy of their idolatrous religious experiences led them away from God. The same happens today when people subject themselves to experientialism that is void of the word of God. **Without the standard of the word of God, religious experiences lead one away from God.** There is fertile soil for apostasy today in the religious world of experiential religion simply because there is a dearth of knowl-

edge of the Bible.

Experiential religionists often make the fatal mistake of behaving as some of the apostate Corinthians who had not yet forsaken their former behavior in pagan religions. Paul warned us concerning the behavior of these experientialists, "*For we dare not class or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise*" (2 Co 10:12). Experiential religionists often compare their emotional experiences with one another. They often try to outperform one another in recounting who had the greatest religious experience, healing, dream or vision. Upon first contact with one another, they begin to validate and exalt themselves with one another by focusing on who "spoke in tongues," had a dream or experienced a vision. They are not wise in doing this.

We would think that if one's personal encounters with the Holy Spirit should be our message to others, then certainly the apostles of Jesus would have preached themselves and their experiences. They could have magnified themselves, as some preachers do today, by explaining in detail their encounters with the Holy Spirit and angels. But Paul explained, "*For we [the apostles] do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake*" (2 Co 4:5).

Too many preachers preach themselves and their experiences, and at the same time preach little of Jesus Christ and His crucifixion. They exalt them-

selves by emphasizing sensational experiences with spirits and angels when they should be preaching Jesus Christ and His crucifixion for our sins. What has happened is that the message of the gospel has been subjected to the personal experiences of sensational preachers. And since they claim that their experiences originated from the working of the Holy Spirit, they have reversed the ministry of the apostles of Jesus. They have done so by exalting the work of the Spirit over the work of Christ in redemption. Instead of glorifying Christ, they bring glory to themselves and the Holy Spirit. Such preachers are counterfeits of the true messengers of the gospel. They are counterfeits simply because Jesus said the Holy Spirit would never work in a way that would bring glory to Himself (See Jn 16:13).

One cannot validate his faith by comparing his emotional experiences with the experiences of others. This is circular reasoning, and in the mind of Paul, not wise. When Jesus said, "*Your word is truth,*" He meant that the word of God must be the standard by which we test one another (Jn 17:17). When Paul said, "*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves,*" he meant that the standard by which we test one another and test the spirits, is the word of God (2 Co 13:5). One can know that he is "in the faith" only by God's declaration through His word that he is in the faith.

We would not know if we have gone astray if we had no divine standard from which we can go astray. Hu-

manistic religion places man as the standard of judgment. The Christian places the Bible as the standard by which we can determine if one has gone astray from the faith. If we compare one another's emotional experiences, then we can never determine who has gone astray. This is especially true in reference to our salvation. Some validate their salvation by some emotional experience. But if their salvation is not dependent on what God says concerning our salvation, then our emotional experience are invalidated as just experiences that any unbeliever would have.

What should transpire when one is saved is that he has an emotional experience when he knows he has followed the instructions of God concerning what is necessary for salvation. But if one has not obeyed the gospel according to the instructions of God, then his emotional experiences are in vain. True emotional experiences happen when we know we have been obedient to God.

If our emotional experiences become the standard by which we judge the validity of either our salvation or faith, **then we have become a law unto ourselves.** And when we become a law unto ourselves, everyone becomes his own standard by which he judges himself right in the eyes of God. We become as the apostate Israelites, *"Everyone did that which was right in his own eyes"* (Jg 17:6). If we judge ourselves as either saved or spiritual upon the basis of our emotional experiences, **then we have claimed to be inspired by the validation of our own experiences since we claim that**

the experiences come directly from the Holy Spirit. Regardless of what the word of God states concerning our salvation, we will thus exalt our emotional experiences over the teachings of the Bible. This is the curse of the experiential religionist. He is a law unto himself because he has based his faith on himself. He makes the Spirit contradict Himself. Instead of the supposed Spirit-inspired experiences leading him closer to the Spirit-inspired word of God, he is led away from the word.

The true Christian who guards himself from being deceived by the experiences of others, is as the one described by Isaiah concerning the wisdom of the prophesied Branch. *"And He will not judge after the sight of His eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of His ears"* (Is 11:3). The true believer will question great signs and wonders lest he be deceived (Mt 24:24). He knows that there are many false signs and wonders in the world that give the appearance of being miraculous (2 Th 2:9). If we trust in our senses, we will surely be deceived. If we trust in our experiences and use them to validate our faith, we will surely fall under the judgment of Proverbs 28:26. *"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool"*

Our faith is both intellectual and emotional. *"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth"* (Jn 4:24). Cold ceremonial and traditional religiosity does not fulfill the basic spiritual and emotional needs of the human being. God created us to be both emotional (in spirit) and

intellectual (in truth). If we focus entirely on the emotional part of man as the validation of our faith, then we will lead ourselves astray from the truth. Emotion must have truth in order to stay on the right path. If we focus entirely on truth without emotion, then we will also go astray. **All truth with no emotion leads us into a religiosity that has no personal relationships and a superficial brotherhood.** But if we abandon truth for emotional experiences as the foundation for our faith, then there is no end to which our idolatrous spirit will take us. If we have teachers who use their emotional experiences to validate themselves as teachers, then we need to test the spirit of these teachers with the word of God. It may be that we need to change teachers.

The point is that we do not need to

validate our faith on the foundation of an emotional experience if we have followed the instructions of God in His word. Paul instructed, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ...”* (Cl 3:16). When we are filled with the word of Christ, then we are filled with the Spirit (Ep 5:18). But no one who is ignorant of the word of God can be filled with the Spirit. Therefore, if we claim to have been filled with the Spirit through an emotional experience, but are ignorant of the word of God, then we should seriously question which spirit filled us. More accurately, the one who is ignorant of the word of God, but claims to have been filled with the Holy Spirit, has been filled with the spirit of deception. He has deceived himself into believing something the Holy Spirit has not done.

Chapter 8

Objectivism Versus Subjectivism

If someone wants to be religious, or express his religiosity, he must make a very important choice concerning the validation of his religiosity, or the expression of his faith. He must choose whether (1) to base his religiosity, and the expression thereof, on objective truth, that is, the Bible, or (2) he must decide whether to base his faith on himself. The overwhelming majority of people of faith throughout history have chosen the second option.

Since we focus on ourselves, and our desire to be free, it is quite difficult for us to allow authority outside ourselves

to be the foundation upon which we base our faith. Israel went astray because she chose the second option. In order to bring them back to the authority of God, Jeremiah reminded them, *“O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to direct his steps”* (Jr 10:23; see Pv 16:1; 20:24). Nevertheless, men seek to subject themselves to themselves in order to create a religion after their own desires. For this reason, almost all religions today are subjective to the catechism of traditions or emotional experiences.

A. Subjectivism:

Experiential religiosity is based on subjectivism. Subjectivism is the teaching that one comes to God on the basis of his own conditions. He subjects himself to himself. Whatever seems right to himself is the standard by which he submits to God. Subjective religiosity is the teaching that one's salvation, and continued validation of faith, is based upon what one feels, regardless of Bible teaching concerning salvation and faith. The subjective person would say, "I know what I believe because of what I feel." "I know that God is leading me because of what I experience in my life." "If it feels right, then it must be right."

Subjectivism can be better understood by comparing it with objectivism. **Objective faith means that one's faith is based on the foundation of revelation and law.** The objective person of faith affirms that his faith is based on what God has revealed through His word. The faith of the objectivist is based on something outside himself. This is the principle of Romans 10:17. "*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.*" The faith of the objectivist is based on what he objectively reads in the Bible (See Jn 20:30,31).

The subjectivist would say that he believes because of what he feels or experiences in his life. The objectivist would say that he believes because of what God has revealed. The subjectivist is directed by his experiences. The objectivist is directed by what is communicated in the word of God. The subjectivist is his own

authority, whereas the objectivist stands on the authority of the word of God. The subjectivist is led by the word of God only when it conforms to his emotional experiences. His experiential religiosity, therefore, is based on himself as the final authority in matters of faith. The objectivist, however, behaves on the basis of what God says. The problem with the subjectivist is that his salvation is based on his own experiences. In fact, the experiential subjectivist will often reject the conditions for salvation that are revealed in the Bible in order to cling to his own established creed of experiences. On the other hand, the objectivist will have confidence in his salvation because he can put his finger on the commands of God that he has obeyed in order to have his sins washed away (See At 2:38; 22:16).

As previously stated, subjectivism was the problem with the nation of Israel during the days of the judges (See Jg 17:6). The Israelites had become subject to their own desires, and thus, they did that which was right in their own eyes. Their subjective religiosity led them away from God. It will do the same today.

Subjectivism is a religious behavior wherein everyone does that which is right in his own eyes. The period of the judges was a time when the people had forgotten the law of God. And when religious people forget the law of God, they will become a standard of law unto themselves. This is subjectivism. Subjective religiosity is only a spiral down to idolatry wherein men create religious behavior after their own desires. Subjective

religiosity is spiritual anarchy against the law of God. The religious subjectivist always moves away from the God of the Bible because he has rejected the God who only is revealed through the Bible.

B. Religious subjectivism:

Some of the Corinthians were caught up in subjective religiosity. Subsequently, they were a divided church. Paul sought to correct their subjective religiosity in order to produce the unity for which the church is to be known. He exhorts that they *“all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions”* among them (1 Co 1:10). Unity could not be based on the members’ comparing their experiences with one another, even though their experiences were in their exercising of the spiritual gifts (See 2 Co 10:12). Unity could be established only on an objective response to and obedience of the revelation of God. Paul challenged the subjective experientialist, *“If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things that I write to you are the commandments of the Lord**”* (1 Co 14:37). The experientialists in Corinth needed to submit to the commandments of the Lord that were given through Paul. Peter stated the principle as such, *“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God”* (1 Pt 4:11). Experientialists need to be cautious about sharing their experiences. They need to be more concerned about sharing the oracles of God. Instead of speaking of their experiences they should speak the oracles of God.

Subjectivism will destroy the unity of any church. When we forsake the “oracles of God” as the standard for unity, there is no standard for fellowship other than the feelings and experiences of each member. Members may accept one another’s experiences, but when disagreements occur over personalities and methods, doctrinal agreement over fundamentals is not strong enough to keep a church from division.

The miraculous gifts that the Corinthians prized so highly as they experienced them in their lives, would soon pass away. Their experiences with the gifts of prophecy and tongues, in which they competed with one another, were not considered the greater gifts, for their exercising of the gifts with an unloving spirit resulted in their being divided. In the midst of a discussion concerning prophecy and tongues, Paul wrote, *“But earnestly desire **the greater gifts**. And yet I show to you a more excellent way”* (1 Co 12:31). The more excellent way would be the foundation upon which the disciples of Jesus are blessed.

The “greater gifts” did not include their experience with prophecy and tongues. As Paul continued in 1 Corinthians 13, love is the foundation upon which the greater gifts are based and unity maintained. When the miraculous gifts passed away, the “more excellent way” would continue. Paul continued, *“But when that which is complete has come, **then that which is in part will be done away**”* (1 Co 13:10). The miraculous gifts were only “in part.” But that which was “complete” (or, perfect) was

greater. He concluded chapter 13 by stating, “**And now abide faith, hope, love, these three. But the greatest of these is love**” (1 Co 13:13). Notice that the phrase “and now” emphasizes that that which is “complete” had come. Reference to the “complete” cannot be heaven. Heaven is yet to come. Reference is to **the complete revelation of the truth through the apostles** (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). This was the foundation upon which they could be united.

All truth had been revealed through the apostles by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (Jd 6; 1 Pt 1:3). This truth was verbally preached by the apostles, but would eventually be written. It was this truth upon which the unity of the body could be maintained, not on the experience of the miraculous gifts.

In order to correct the subjective religiosity of some in the church in Corinth, Paul enjoined upon them several mandates that would bring order to their chaotic disunity. He reminded them that it was the Spirit’s choice as to who would function with the gifts, and not the individuals who exercised the gifts (1 Co 12:11). He condemned them for minimizing one another’s gifts, for the body is one, though it is made up of many members (1 Co 12:15-26). He condemned them for being jealous of one another’s gifts (1 Co 12:28-31). He condemned them for speaking in a language in the assembly that no one understood (1 Co 14:6-9). He exhorted them to pray and sing in a language that could be understood (1 Co 14:15). He exhorted them to be mature and not think and behave as

children (1 Co 14:20). He chided them for behaving in their assemblies as madmen (1 Co 14:23). He condemned them for causing confusion by speaking at the same time in their assemblies (1 Co 14:23,24). He reminded them that all things must be done for edification of everyone, not just one or two individuals (1 Co 14:26). He instructed them that all teaching must be conducted in an orderly manner (1 Co 14:27-31). He taught that no prophet is subject to the influence of the Holy Spirit against his will, but that they must manifest self-control (1 Co 14:32). God does not work in an assembly that is out of control (1 Co 14:33). The wives of the prophets must keep silent in the assembly in order that they not embarrass their husbands when they are teaching (1 Co 14:34,35). And just in case someone might think that Paul’s instructions originated from himself, he reminded them that what he taught was “*the commandments of the Lord*” (1 Co 14:37). **Everything that Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 12–14 in reference to the assemblies of the saints is totally contrary to the out-of-control assemblies of a group of subjectivists.**

Those who have fallen victim to subjective religiosity often forget one very important teaching of Paul in the context of his instructions of 1 Corinthians 14. Verse 32 states, “*Now the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.*” The “spirit” (or attitude, character and demeanor) of the mature teacher is under control. If a teacher loses control of himself, he must blame himself, not the Holy Spirit. **The Holy Spirit never**

moved an individual to lose control of his personal demeanor. If a prophet lost control of himself so as to behave senselessly, then he can never blame the Holy Spirit for such foolish behavior.

C. Objective response to the gospel:

It is not coincidental that Paul immediately begins the subject of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 after concluding his instructions an assembly in 1 Corinthians 12–14. In speaking of the gospel, he reminded the Corinthians that they received and stood on the foundation of the truth of the gospel (1 Co 15:1,2). Their faith rested upon the fact of the gospel event that Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected for our hope (1 Co 15:3,4). **They did not stand justified through their experiences of the gifts, but in the truth of the gospel event.** Their stand upon the historical event of the gospel was objective, not subjective. **They believed and obeyed what Paul had preached** (1 Co 15:1,2). Their faith, therefore, was based on the gospel, not on the function and experience of the spiritual gifts. The spiritual gifts would pass away, but the historical event of the gospel would stand for eternity. Their misunderstanding was in basing their faith on the experiences of the spiritual gifts that would pass away and not on the eternal gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 1:21, Paul also reminded the Corinthians, *“For since in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching [the gospel] to save those who believe.”* The

world through its wisdom could not discover God. In the context of 1 Corinthians 1, the world could not save itself through its own religious inventions. God had to invade the world with the historical event of the gospel in order to reconcile men to Himself (See Ti 2:11). Therefore, only those who objectively learn of and obey the gospel can be saved (See Jn 6:45).

Personal encounters or spiritual experiences cannot be a means of salvation. There is no means of salvation revealed in the Bible apart from knowing and obeying the gospel. This is so biblically evident that Peter asked a question that he knew every Christian could correctly answer. *“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”* (1 Pt 4:17). We know the answer (See 2 Th 1:6-9). It is because there is salvation by no other means than an objective knowledge of and obedience to the historical event of the gospel, that Paul, and the other first century evangelists, preached Jesus and His crucifixion. This is the basis for what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:2. *“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”* (See At 4:12).

What the Corinthians seem to have done is that they took so much pride in the experience of the function of the spiritual gifts that they focused primarily on the gifts that were only the means to an end, the end being Christ. They had reversed the order of importance in coming to Jesus Christ. They believed that

coming to Christ was the means by which to experience the spiritual gifts. They took pride in the gifts but marginalized their “names being written in heaven” because of their obedience to the gospel of Christ. They needed to remember that their obedience to the gospel of Christ should reflect one’s focus on Christ. The work of the Spirit through the gifts should have continued their focus on Christ until that which was complete, or perfect, had come. And since their faith was based on revelation, the perfect word of God would keep their minds focused on Jesus, not on the miraculous gifts which would soon pass away (See 2 Tm 3:16,17). Their experiences with the gifts, therefore, should never have taken their focus off Christ.

When people minimize the word of God for the Spirit, they are taking their focus off Christ in order to exalt the means (the Spirit) to Christ. The Spirit works to glorify Jesus, not Himself. Experientialists need to remember John 16:14. ***“He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will declare it to you.”*** Jesus is the discovered pearl of great price (Mt 13:45,46). He is the hidden treasure that is found (Mt 13:44), the fullness of the Godhead (Cl 2:9). He is the Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace (Is 9:6). We do not minimize Jesus Christ by obsessing over the work of the Holy Spirit. Our primary focus is on Jesus. The focus of the Holy Spirit is on Jesus. The Spirit would take that which was of Jesus in order to focus the minds of men on Jesus by means of

the inspired Scriptures (Jn 16:13,14). If Jesus is not foremost in the minds of those who claim to be Christians, then they are not Christian. Christ, not the Holy Spirit, is the center of our attention.

D. Humanistic theology:

When one forsakes a knowledge of the Spirit-inspired word of God, he has no alternative for religious validation than his own religious feelings and performances. He thus becomes subjective to his own imagination and guided by his emotions. His feelings, therefore, determine his behavior. He determines whether something is either right or wrong based on how he feels about a particular situation. What happens is that one subjects himself to himself. Feelings become the criteria for rejecting the commandments of God. He forgets that the law of love and the love of law are not exclusive of one another. They are mutually inclusive. This is brought out in Jesus’ statement, *“If you love Me you will keep My commandments”* (Jn 14:15). John restated the same principle. *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments”* (1 Jn 5:2,3).

God’s love does not do away with His law for us. Because He loved the world, He gave law in order that men not lead themselves astray by doing that which was right in their own eyes. In turn, it is not possible for us to return the love of God by ignoring His law. The one who truly loves God, therefore, is an ardent

Bible student. He is a student of the law of God in order to please the One who extended great love for him. For this reason, **it is impossible for one to love God outside the realm of God's law.**

Religious people who are ignorant of the law of God have established a foundation of love that is based on their own standards and their own experiences. Their undoing in their relationship with God is that they have sought to do that which was right in their own eyes, not that which is right in the eyes of God. Subjective religiosity, therefore, is the religion of one coming to God upon the foundation of his own apart from the law of God. His relationship with God is humanly defined, not defined by the word of God.

It is relevant in this context to notice some of the final words of Paul to the evangelist Timothy. *“Take heed to yourself and to the teaching. Continue in these things, for in doing this you will both save yourself and those who hear you”* (1 Tm 4:16). Notice that Timothy was to take heed to “the teaching,” not to any personal experiences. Timothy was to base his faith on “the teaching.” In doing such he would save both himself and those who obeyed the teaching. This is objective faith, not subjective emotionalism. Timothy was not exhorted to take heed to some spiritual experience, nor to recount some experiences that Paul may have related to him in his own personal ministry. No man's religious experiences are to be the foundation upon which our faith is based.

E. Supplementing grace:

One of the very first attacks against the work of God through the cross and salvation by grace was the legalistic teaching of the Judaizing teachers of the first century. These teachers went among many of the newly established churches and preached that unless those who had obeyed the gospel were also circumcised, they could not be saved (At 15:1,2). The premise upon which their teaching was based was that with works of law one supplements the grace of God. The Holy Spirit argued clearly through Paul in the book of Galatians against this theology. It was a theology that placed emphasis on the performance of the individual in order to make oneself right before God. The Spirit countered the legalists by stating that *“man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus”* (Gl 2:16).

By the end of the first century, another similar theology was making itself into the fold of the flock of God. It was the theology of Gnosticism. The Gnostic taught that through the knowledge of one's inner light he would be enlightened, and thus, saved through his self-awareness. As with the doctrine of the Judaizing teachers that focused on the performance of law, so the Gnostic focused on the spiritual performance of the individual in order to be justified. Both theologies were similar in that they focused on man, not what God had done for man through the cross. They were supplemental theologies in the sense that

both centered on the works of man in order for man to be justified before God. Both taught that the grace of God needed to be supplemented by some work (circumcision) or spiritual enlightenment (experientialism) in order to make the grace of God effective in one’s life in reference to salvation.

The Pentecostal/charismatic movement of these modern times falls into the same category of seeking to supplement the grace of God. It is assumed that some “spiritual” performance on the part of man is necessary in order to be pleasing before God. These performances often manifest themselves as to whether one has been “baptized in the Spirit,” “spoken in tongues,” or had some experiential encounter through visions or dreams. The essence of the theology is the same as the legalistic Judaizing teachers and the spiritual arrogance of the Gnostics. In all three theologies (Judaism, Gnosticism and experientialism) the grace of God is supplemented, or at least

marginalized by the performance or experiences of man.

When considering this point of theology, we would question the water baptism of some religious groups. If the baptism of the adherents of these groups was a work of law in order to supplement the grace of God, then the baptism became a simple work and performance on the part of man. Such an attitude toward baptism would thus be contrary to the biblical teaching that baptism is a response to the grace of God.

The Judaizing teachers made circumcision a work of law in order to be saved. The Gnostic made one’s experience of discovering his inner light a requirement for salvation. The experientialist makes his spiritual encounters with the Holy Spirit works of law in order to be pleasing before God. Theologically, there is no difference between the three groups. All three are man centered religions that focus on the performances of man in order to supplement the grace of God.

Chapter 9

“Spiritual” Phenomena

In the first century God confirmed the message of His messengers as Jesus had promised. *“And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and **confirming the word by the signs that followed**”* (Mk 16:20). We must investigate the claimed “supernatural” experiences of present-day religionists in the context of the early church experience of God *“confirming the word by the signs that followed.”* Experiential

churches today seek to validate their existence by supposed supernatural manifestations as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, prophecies of the future, supernatural voices, visions, casting out demons (exorcism), and divine healings. Most emphasis is usually placed on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and divine healings.

We do not deny the occurrence of experiences today that are equated with the

works and experiences that are found in the New Testament. The experiences that some have today do happen, though we would question that these experiences are the same as the supernatural phenomena of the first century that God used to confirm the early message and messengers of the gospel.

We must keep in mind that when men trust in their own senses, they can be easily deceived. Jesus said that even many Christians would be deceived because of the overwhelming appearance of some phenomenon that seem to be supernatural (Mt 24:24). But if Jesus said that such is deception, then deception cannot be the evidence of truth. If the unexplained phenomenon were true, then one would not be deceived by believing in something that is actually supernatural.

For those who affirm that God continues to work today through confirming miracles, then we must ask them how do we identify a false miracle? If there is such a thing as false signs as Paul stated in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, then how are we to identify such false signs in order not to be deceived? **We have found that those who are adamant about confirming miracles today say very little about the New Testament teaching not to be deceived by false miracles.**

When discussing this subject, there are obviously some questions that arise. Are the experiences of “speaking in tongues” today the same as the phenomenon of speaking in languages that was experienced by the early Christians? Were there divine healings and the exorcism of demons in the first century?

What we would need to determine is if the supernatural phenomena of the first century were meant to continue throughout the history of the church.

In our investigation we must also be careful not to read our experiences into the Bible. We have found that this is often the case in reference to the subject under discussion. People will have an ecstatic experience of speaking in gibberish, and then associate this experience with the speaking of languages in the New Testament. As a result, their understanding of the purpose of the ministry of the gift of languages is twisted and confused. They are as those who sprinkle people for baptism. Since sprinkling is a common practice for “baptism” today among many religious groups, the practice of sprinkling is read into the cases of baptism in the New Testament. It is thus difficult to reason with this method of Bible interpretation because people are so adamant about keeping their tradition of sprinkling. It is the same with those who have had the ecstatic experience of speaking in gibberish. They know that they have had the experience, and thus, they seek to validate their experience as being from God by seeking out some promise in the Bible that their experience is a promise of God.

Another question that must be answered and considered is this: Is the phenomena of supposed “speaking in tongues,” “casting out demons,” “healings” and “prophecy” that are assumed among many religious groups today, even among non-Christian religions, actually occurring today? If these phe-

nomena are actually the work of God, then these religions, including the non-Christian religions, must be validated as true, if indeed such phenomena are from God. Of course God would not confirm as true those religious faiths that are non-Christian and do not believe in Christ or the Bible. Neither would God through miraculous manifestations condone those who deny and refuse to obey fundamental truths of the Bible.

We must take a very serious look at the spiritual phenomenon that occurs today and is equated with what is recorded in the Bible. Since Jesus claimed to be the only way into eternal life (Jn 14:6; see At 4:12), then those religions that use personal experiences and supposed supernatural occurrences to confirm their faith must with us be very cautious about confirming our faith by our personal experiences.

We must be cautioned about using Bible names to define spiritual phenomena that are totally the result of human experiences. We have found that people are too quick to use a Bible name as “demon possession,” “speaking in tongues,” or “baptism of the Holy Spirit” to identify some spiritual phenomenon that happened in their life. Using a Bible name does not ratify an experience as biblical. A human experience that is labelled with a Bible name only manifests the lack of knowledge of some who have little understanding of the biblical definition of demon possession, speaking in tongues, or baptism of the Holy Spirit.

A. “Tongue speaking” among pagans:

Keep in mind that the purpose of the miraculous manifestation of signs and wonders in the first century was to confirm the message of the messengers as they went out to preach the gospel to the world. *“And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed”* (Mk 16:20; see Hb 2:2-4).

A phenomenon that has often been used today to confirm one’s faith is the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” that is supposedly manifested by the “speaking in tongues.” If these manifestations are true, then we must believe that wherever there is the “speaking in tongues,” God has confirmed the messenger, as well as His message. So we now have a problem. The problem is that the “speaking in tongues,” as well as other ecstatic experiences, have been manifested throughout the world, **and in many different religious groups.** The phenomenon has been so prevalent among all religious groups that Pentecostal/charismatic groups have had to assume a Catholic Church world view in reference to all religions that claim to have had such experiences. In other words, if the phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” occurs in all religions, then we must assume that God is confirming all religions. Of course this is totally contrary to the teaching of the word of God. Nevertheless, when one takes the position that the ex-

periential phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” is actually the same as the tongues in the New Testament, then he has to take the position that God is working among all religious groups who claim to have experienced the phenomenon, regardless of their teachings.

Glossolalia is a Greek word that refers to the gibberish speech of one who is experiencing a semiconscious state of emotional hysteria. It is a natural phenomenon of speech, but should not be confused with the speaking in languages that is mentioned in the New Testament. (More on this later.)

Nevertheless, speaking in gibberish is often confused with the speaking in languages in the New Testament. But if this were true, then we have some problems in reference to the “speaking in tongues” among apostate cults as the Thracian Dionysus, as well as the Delphic of Phrygia, the Bacides and the Sybils of early Greek culture. They also experienced the phenomenon of glossolalia (See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Eerdmans Pub. Co.). P. Feine wrote of these groups,

The Greek oracles were mediated through priests or priestesses who uttered what the divinity suggest to them while their consciousness was in complete abeyance [state of suspended consciousness]. Another characteristic of the giving of oracles is the obscurity or unintelligibility of the oracles, which ever needs explication (“Speaking in tongues,” *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*).

In 1921, T. K. Oesterreich wrote the book, *Possession: Demoniactal and others among Primitive Races, in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times*. Though Oesterreich was not a person of faith, his purpose for writing was to investigate the phenomenon of ecstatic speech among people throughout the world. Though he did not write as a believer in the supernatural, he did give witness to the fact that the phenomenon of glossolalia was something that was experienced by many different religious groups. In his work, he dealt with what was claimed to be “demon possession” He did not refer to such beliefs as religious fiction. He simply understood that such psychological phenomenon in man had a psychosomatic origin, that is, such phenomena originated in the psyche of man, not the result of an alien force possessing man.

In his studies, Oesterreich also reported that people of pagan religious faiths spoke in ecstatic utterances, practiced the casting out of demons, pronouncing of curses, and making prophecies of the future. The conclusion to these studies was that “speaking in tongues” was not unique with any particular religious group, but was practiced among all the religions he studied, regardless of their doctrine.

In his book, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, George B. Cutten investigated cases of “speaking in tongues” by those who were simply ingenious in their psychic behavior. He investigated and recorded the case of a Helene Smith (a pseudonym) who was born in Geneva, Switzerland in 1864. Smith was the

daughter of a linguistic father who spoke at least six languages. Her mother was a spiritualistic medium who claimed to have visions. At the age of 28, Smith too became involved with spiritualists, and eventually, she became a medium of a group of her own followers. In her suspended state of consciousness she claimed to be under the control of a spirit named Leopold. Would we affirm that her experiences were a confirmation by the Holy Spirit that what she taught should be believed and followed? Keep in mind that in February 1896 she claimed to have journeyed to the planet Mars, then returned and spoke words of a supposed Martian language, which she also translated for her cult.

Outside the context of the faith of Christendom, there is also the case of Albert LeBaron (also a pseudonym). In his past association with mystics and spiritists, he claimed to have had experiences of visions and speaking in tongues. After he had become a follower of spiritualism, he proclaimed and asked others to believe in his incarnation. He too spoke in tongues, claiming that his speaking in another language was proof of a language that he had spoken in another existence of life. After he had escaped such cultic practices, LeBaron later confessed,

They are . . . but a ludicrous and silly mistake of the man’s imagination allied to some species of humorous hallucination and are not to be considered seriously, or they are a perjury, or a ghastly jest, or a very profound mental trick, or the loose jargon of a maniac (quoted in

Speaking With Tongues, Historically and Psychologically Considered, Yale University Press).

A host of authors have accomplished a great deal of research and reported countless cases of tongue speaking, healings, exorcism and visions among non-Christian religions throughout the world. Healings have supposedly occurred among certain groups in the Tonga Islands. In Ceylon, it was claimed that people were healed by visiting the temple of a demon called Vakuka Dandara Devijo. In the book, *A Doctor In Search Of a Miracle*, the author reported that in the Philippines surgery was performed without the use of anesthetics. In India, healings are reported to have occurred during pagan ceremonies in the temple of Hur-Hureshvirku. It is claimed that the blind received their sight, and others have claimed to have been healed by the mother of Buddha. Demons are supposed to have been exorcised by pagan “doctors” of Siam. The list goes on. If such cases of healings and speaking in tongues are true, then those who practice such among “Christian” groups must also affirm that God is working among these unbelievers through pagan “doctors” or religious practitioners. If they do not believe that such phenomena are miraculous among unbelievers, **then they are burdened with the task of proving such acclaimed miracles to be false.** If they say the miracles of non-Christian faiths are false, then they must challenge themselves concerning the validity of their own miracles.

B. “Tongue speaking” among religious people:

In his book, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, E. R. Dodds documented the phenomenon of ecstatic utterances (gibberish) that was practiced among the Hittites as early as 1,400 B.C. He also documented the same practice among the Phoenicians as early as 1,100 B.C. In Greek religions the practice extends back to the time of Apollo at Delphi, when it was affirmed that a “god” entered and controlled the vocal cords of certain individuals. We must keep in mind that these documented cases are of ecstatic experiences of “tongue speaking” **before Christ**, before the revelation of the gift among the early Christians.

In the early existence of the church, there were apostate groups that followed after the religious inventions of some dynamic leaders. Montanus (around A.D. 156) was said to have experienced speaking in tongues when he was in a rapturous state of semiconsciousness. He had two female companions whom he referred to as prophetesses, whom also he claimed to have had the same experience. Around A.D. 150 it is claimed that Marcion had the same experience of glossolalia when in a state of ecstatic frenzy. In the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* it is also recorded that Apelles, who was one of Marcion’s disciples, “seems to have engaged in magical practices and paid great attention to visions, to the utterances of oracles, and to . . . prophetic revelations.”

Throughout the centuries there have

been numerous cases of the phenomenon of glossolalia. The psychological phenomenon permeated many religious groups. It has been practiced by unbelievers and heretics alike. Since one can learn to “speak in tongues,” some Protestant groups have had classes on how to speak in tongues. It is thus of human origin that can be induced by hypnotic suggestion, or simply by bringing oneself into a state of semiconscious emotionality. For this reason it is a purely human phenomenon that people confuse with the actual speaking in languages in the New Testament. There is nothing inherently wrong with the phenomenon of glossolalia. But to equate such with the speaking in languages of the first century is erroneous. It is erroneous for the following three reasons:

1. False “speaking in tongues” today minimizes the purpose for the gift of speaking in languages in the first century. As previously discussed, the purpose of the gift of languages in the first century was first to identify God’s people in fulfillment of prophecy. Second, it was practical in allowing evangelists as Paul to easily communicate with those foreign peoples to whom he went to preach the gospel (See 1 Co 14:18).

In the setting of principle trade cities as Corinth, the ministry of speaking in languages not only proved to visiting Jews that the Christians in the city were the people of God, it also allowed those brothers in Corinth the opportunity to teach the word of God to the visitors. For this reason, the speaking in languages

was both a **signal** and a **ministry**. It was a signal to the visitors that they were among the people of God. It was a ministry in that the visitors could be ministered the word of God by those who had the gift of languages.

If the gift that was used as a signal and ministry was simply speaking in gibberish, then the purposes for the gift of languages was useless. The visitors would know of other non-Christian religious groups who “spoke in tongues” (gibberish). Thus God’s validation of the Christians as His people in Corinth would be invalidated. And, no teaching could be ministered to the visitor with gibberish. If the gibberish was from the Holy Spirit, then why would not the Spirit simply inspire the teacher to speak in the language of the visitor instead of forcing the “tongue speaker” to work through an interpreter?

2. False “speaking in tongues” today denies the sufficiency of the Scriptures: *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Tm 3:16,17). This statement by Paul should eliminate all need for a validation of faith outside the Scriptures. We seek the Scriptures in order to be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work. Paul’s affirmation in this statement reveals the authority and validation of the Scriptures in the life of the believer. The believer, therefore, should not seek for another foundation for his faith than the

word of Christ (See Rm 10:17).

Those who seek and practice “speaking in tongues,” are actually seeking to supplant the word of God with a personal experience. The “speaking in tongues” becomes the confirmation of their salvation other than the word of God. The problem with the emotional outburst of a “speaking-in-tongues” experience is that the Scriptures take second place as the foundation for one’s faith. In fact, the “tongue speaker” will minimize his desire for the authority of the word of God in his life, trusting that his emotional experience cannot be denied. When asked if he is a Christian, the “tongue speaker” will invariably resort to his “tongue-speaking” experience as proof of his sonship.

Some have even taught that people are not spiritually complete without the experience of “speaking in tongues.” The non-tongue speakers feel that their faith is marginalized by those who have “spoken in tongues.” Some even consider the faith of the non-tongue speakers to be weak because they have failed to “speak in tongues.” Such thinking is not only carnal, but it also marginalizes the sufficiency of the word of God in the life of the believer. Those who study their Bibles and trust in the will of God are viewed as weak until they have spoken in tongues. Such thinking denies the sufficiency of the word of Christ that dwells in the heart of the student of the Bible (See Cl 3:16).

3. False “speaking in tongues” today leads to the spiritual destruction of the individual. When Paul left the el-

ders of Ephesus, he made a very important statement of truth. *“And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace that is able to build you up ...”* (At 20:32). He also reminded Timothy, *“If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished by the words of faith and of good teaching that you have followed”* (1 Tm 4:6).

When one validates his faith by his personal experience of “speaking in tongues,” he minimizes the power of the word of God to build him up in the faith. If faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, then his faith will come to destruction because he no longer focuses on the word of God as the source and builder of faith. His obsession over his experience of tongue speaking marginalizes his desire to study the word of God. The only consequence to such thinking is the destruction of one’s faith. Faith cannot be “built up” through ignorance of the Scriptures. When one is not nourished by the word of God, his faith will suffer

The above explains why those who have experienced “tongue speaking” are so adamant about their experience as a validation of their faith. When the psychological experience dies away, they are left in doubt concerning their faith, for they do not have a biblical foundation upon which to stand. A faith that is based on a moment of psychological frenzy will become weak if the psychological experience cannot be continually repeated.

One interesting note to make in reference to true speaking in tongues was that the Corinthians were able to speak in tongues on a regular basis as those who had the gift could so choose. The gift was subject to the speaker (1 Co 14:32). The one who possessed the gift did not have to work himself into a psychological frenzy in order to use the gift. He was totally in control of his mental facilities when he spoke in tongues. This is far different from the mental state of those who practice “tongue speaking” today.

If the phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” is proved by the Scriptures to have been simply a psychological phenomenon of an individual losing control of his senses, then the whole world of faith of the supposed “tongue speaker” comes crumbling down. The individual must understand that he had a true experience. He did experience the psychological phenomenon of glossolalia. But to equate this experience with the speaking in languages of the New Testament is to lead one’s self to believing something that is simply not true. But if one does come to an understanding that they were self-deceived, and thus were only experiencing a state of emotional senselessness, then they must begin anew the building of their faith on the word of God. There is no substitute for the Bible as the foundation upon which we build our faith.

Chapter 10

Speaking In Languages

When discussing any subject in the New Testament, it is necessary to consider every teaching in the context in which it is found. If a teaching is taken out of its context, then it can easily be twisted to conform to the bias of the student. This is especially true in reference to a study of experiential religion, specifically to a study of the gift of speaking in languages. Each context in which the gift is mentioned must be scrutinized in order to determine all the facts relevant to the function and purpose of the gift. If there are still questions concerning our understanding of the teaching in a particular context, then the whole context of the Bible must be the final dictionary to aid us in our study of the subject. To fail to observe this principle of interpretation will lead to our reading into a particular context or teaching our theological prejudices and experiences. Failure to observe this simple principle of Bible study has led to a great deal of confusion in reference to understanding the gift of “speaking in tongues.”

The gift of languages (tongues) is mentioned in only three books of the New Testament. In these two books, Mark, Acts and 1 Corinthians, the writers record four cases where individuals spoke in languages (See At 2:1-13; 10:1 – 11:18; At 18:24 – 19:7; 1 Co 12–14). The reference to the “new language” in Mark 16 is prophetic (Mk 16:17). References to tongues in the book of Acts refer to the

historical event of the gift. The reference to tongues in 1 Corinthians is in reference to corrections concerning the misuse of the gift. Therefore, the 1 Corinthian discussion of tongues is more **expository**, whereas the accounts in the book of Acts are historical.

In 1 Corinthians Paul sought to correct the use of the gift in reference to the purpose for which the gift was given. What is important to remember concerning all four cases of the mention of tongues is that no other New Testament book speaks of the gift. We would assume from this, therefore, that the gift of tongues was not something about which the early disciples obsessed, as is characteristic of some religious groups today. The cases recorded in Acts are given as evidence of the God-ordained faith that the early Christians maintained and preached throughout the Roman Empire. If there had been no problem with arrogance and pride among the Corinthians, then there would have been no mention of corrective measures concerning the use of the gift when Paul wrote to the Corinthians. We assume, however, that the gift was manifested in other churches, but there was no misuse of the gift. These thoughts lay the foundation upon which the gift was given, and thus, must be remembered as we study those New Testament books that were written to particular churches.

In the New Testament there are also

lists given of the special gifts that were given to establish and build the early church in the absence of the written truth of the New Testament. It is interesting to note the lists of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10,28-30. Other lists of the special gifts do not list the gift of tongues. In the list of 1 Corinthians 12, tongues and the interpretation of tongues are placed last. If there is a priority of function of the gifts as is indicated in verses 28-30, then it would seem that the gifts of tongues and interpretations were the least important.

In the expository discussion of Paul over the misuse of the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, he clearly stated that the gift of prophecy was greater than the gift of tongues. This would confirm the less important function of the gift of tongues in comparison to prophecy in the edification of the church. The gift, therefore, was to be kept in its proper place of function, while the one who possessed the gift should pray that he prophesy, that is, teach by inspiration.

A. Definition of the gift of tongues:

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-13, Jews and proselytes to Judaism from every nation of the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem (vss 9-11). The apostles were in an upper room in Jerusalem on this day when the Holy Spirit came upon them. They were empowered by the Holy Spirit and began to “*speaking with other languages [glossais], as the Spirit gave them the ability*” (vs 4). Verse 6 states that “*everyone heard them speak in his own language [dialekto].*” Those

who were present asked concerning what was happening, “*And how is it that each one hears them in our own native dialects [dialekto] where we were born?*” (vs 8). They also stated, “*We hear them speaking in our own languages [glossais] the wonderful works of God*” (vs 11).

If one would simply read these verses without reading into them any modern-day ecstatic utterances, he would clearly understand that Luke is describing a miraculous endowment of speaking in languages that had been received by the apostles.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to speak in the languages of the people who were present. The people heard them speak in their own dialects the wonderful works of God. The people understood what was being said by the apostles because they said they did. Luke records that they heard the apostles speaking the wonderful works of God. Therefore, the apostles were not speaking gibberish because of some emotional hysteria. They were not speaking some language that was unknown to man. They were, through the languages of men, speaking the wonderful works of God. There is nothing difficult in understanding that the apostles miraculously received the ability from the Holy Spirit to speak the gospel in “new languages” (Mk 16:17) to those who were present. (As we will see later, the reason they spoke in languages had more to do with the event than simply communicating the gospel to the multilingual audience.)

In the context of Acts 2, there are two

different Greek words that are used in reference to the languages that were spoken. The Greek word *glossa* is used in the plural (*glossais*) in verses 3,4,11 and 26. This word refers to a **known foreign language**. It is used in this manner in the context of these passages. The apostles were not speaking a language that was unknown to man. They were speaking known foreign languages that were new to them, for they had never before studied these languages.

In verse 4 the apostles “*began to speak with other languages [glossais], as the Spirit gave them the ability.*” The “tongues” here are defined in verse 11 where the word *glossais* is used again. “*We hear them speaking in our own languages [glossais] the wonderful works of God.*” The meaning is that the apostles were speaking in the languages of the people who were present from every nation. They were speaking languages that could be understood.

The Greek word *dialektos* is used in verses 6 and 8. This term can refer to either a **dialect** or **language**. It is used in this manner in the context of Acts 2. Those from every nation who heard and saw the apostles preaching, stated, “*And how is it that we hear, each in our own native dialects [dialekto] where we were born?*” Not only were the apostles speaking in the languages of the people who were present, they were also speaking in the dialects of the Jewish audience.

A mother language may have several dialects that are unique to different regions where a mother language is spoken. What seems to be indicated here is

that the apostles not only spoke the mother languages, but also the regional dialects of the mother languages. This fact may be what truly stimulated the curiosity of those who heard. They could not understand how these Galileans could fluently speak in their native dialects.

From the use of the above two Greek words in the same context, it is evident that in some way Luke uses *glossa* and *dialektos* interchangeably. *Dialektos* is used in verses 6 and 8. *Glossa* is used in verses 4 and 11. Both of these words are actually used **by the people** in the context that is recorded by Luke. In other words, the audience used these two words interchangeably in the context when they responded to the apostles. Therefore, we would understand that these were synonymous words in the culture when used in reference to spoken languages. At least we must conclude that the people not only heard their languages spoken (*glossa*), they heard the derivatives of their languages (*dialektos*) spoken. The miracle of the apostles’ speaking in languages was magnified in the sense that the Spirit not only inspired languages to be spoken, He also inspired all the dialects of the mother languages to be spoken.

The Jews in Acts 2 came from areas where hysterical (or, ecstatic) gibberish was undoubtedly practiced in pagan religions. However, when they came to Jerusalem and experienced the events of Acts 2, they recognized that the apostles spoke the languages of their homelands. The apostles were not speaking hysterical nonsense. They were speaking the actual languages of the people who were

present. The proclamation of those who heard on the day of Pentecost proves that the tongues which the apostles spoke were languages.

In Acts 2:13 Luke recorded, “*Others mocking, said, ‘They are full of new wine.’*” This statement has been used by some to affirm that the apostles were actually speaking in gibberish that sounded like men who were drunk. But this is not the case. Keep in mind that the apostles were speaking in different languages. Those from Parthia would not understand the language that was spoken by those from Libya. Those from Galilee, who knew that the apostles were from Galilee, would not understand the language of those from Parthia or Egypt. To the audience, the apostles’ speaking in any other language than what they understood would only sound like men who were drunk. Therefore, the irreverent mockers dismissed as drunken the apostles who were speaking in something they did not understand.

This event of the apostles’ speaking in “tongues” on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 becomes the dictionary to define the rest of the cases where “tongues” are discussed in the New Testament. This is a consistent manner by which we must allow the Bible to interpret itself. Therefore, when we come to the other records of miraculous speaking in languages, we must understand these biblical contexts from what is learned in the Acts 2 context.

B. The gift was a sign.

Since the gift of languages was such a uniquely and divinely given grace, it is important to fully understand its purpose in the context of the establishment of the church in the first century. This is crucial in order to understand the function and purpose of the gift among the early disciples, as well as to understand why the gift ceased by the close of the first century.

1. *Tongues were a sign.* Paul stated, “*Therefore, languages are for a sign, not to those who believe, but for unbelievers*” (1 Co 14:22). The word “sign” comes from the Greek word *semeion*. The miraculous endowment of languages was a signal, or a token that indicated something greater than the gift itself. Jesus was signalled to be the Son of God because of the supernatural manifestation that God worked through His miracles (See Jn 20:30,31). Jesus worked miracles in order to signal to everyone that He was from God. In a similar manner, the gift of tongues was a signal of something greater than the gift itself.

2. *Tongues signalled the saints.* Jesus had promised that His disciples would speak with “new languages” (Mk 16:17). They would do so for a special reason. In reference to Paul’s preceding statement of 1 Corinthians 14:22, we understand that the sign was for “unbelievers.” Now we must determine who these “unbelievers” were in order to understand the purpose of the gift of languages, specifically in reference to Jesus’ promise that His disciples would speak with new languages.

3. *Tongues fulfilled prophecy.*

Paul's quotation of Isaiah 28:11,12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21 is very crucial in understanding the purpose of the gift of tongues. God had promised Israel through Isaiah, "*With men of other languages and other lips I will speak to this people, and yet for all that they will not hear Me.*" "This people" in the context of the ministry of the prophet Isaiah was **the Jewish people**. Paul makes this application to the Jews in 1 Corinthians 14:22 when he introduced the statement of the verse with the Greek word that means "therefore." So when he made the application, "*languages are for a sign ... for unbelievers,*" he stated the purpose of the languages, **that they were a sign to the unbelieving Jews**. This is based on the fact that the original prophecy was made to the Jewish nation.

In the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 14:22 the article is present with the word "languages." This fact must not be overlooked because the article identifies "the languages" to be given for a specific purpose, that purpose being that **through the gift of languages God signalled His people to the unbelieving Jews**. This makes the gift special, and thus, given for a different purpose than the other spiritual gifts in the sense of being a unique work of God to signal to the world those who were His people.

God had promised through Isaiah that He would identify His people with the "other languages" by which He would speak to them. Jesus had promised that His disciples would speak with "new languages." **The clear understanding of**

the prophecy and fulfillment is that God signalled to the world the identity of His people by the gift of languages, through which He spoke to His people.

Whenever the gift of languages was manifested, as recorded in the book of Acts, there were Jews who were present. When Peter was in the house of the Gentile Cornelius, he had taken Jews with him in order to witness what he was doing (At 10:23). Now while Peter was speaking to the household of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit fell on them and they spoke in languages (At 10:44,46). Notice what Luke records in reference to the reaction of Peter's Jewish companions. "*And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished ...*" (At 10:45). They were astonished because they knew the prophecy of Isaiah 28. Since Isaiah's prophecy was in the context of "this people" (the Jews), they must have assumed that only Jewish people would speak with the new languages, and thus be confirmed to be God's true Israel. But in this historical context, the Holy Spirit came upon Gentiles and endowed them with the gift of tongues. They too were confirmed to be God's people. They too were to be accepted into the spiritual Israel, the church. The speaking in tongues by the Gentiles was God's visual signal to the Jews that the Gentiles were to be grafted into the people of God (See Rm 11).

When Peter and his companions returned to Jerusalem from the household of Cornelius, the Jewish believers contended with him about going into the

house of a Gentile (At 11:2). But when Peter rehearsed everything that had happened, he explained that “*the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us [Jews] at the beginning*” (At 11:15). And because the Spirit fell on them as He did on the apostles in Acts 2, they too received the “like gift,” the gift to speak in tongues, just as Isaiah had prophesied (At 11:17). Now read carefully the response of these Jewish brethren in Jerusalem who fully understood the prophecy of Isaiah 28. “*When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying ‘Then God has also granted repentance to life to the Gentiles’*” (At 11:18). Their statement meant that they accepted the Gentiles into the new house of Israel, the church.

This same purpose for the giving of the gift of tongues is seen in Acts 19 when Paul encountered some disciples who had heard only of John and his baptism. Paul subsequently spoke to them the message and man Jesus Christ, on whom they believed. The Holy Spirit authenticated the message of Paul by endowing twelve men with the gift of speaking in tongues (At 19:6). It may have been that these disciples were Gentiles. Their speaking in languages was thus a signal to the Jewish believers in Ephesus that they too had been “*granted repentance to life,*” even though they were Gentiles. The Holy Spirit thus endowed these disciples for the same reason He endowed the household of Cornelius. The Gentiles were to be grafted into the new spiritual Israel, the church (See Rm 9–11).

We must take Paul’s explanation for

the gift of tongues to the context of Acts 2 when the gift was first manifested to the Jewish nation. We can only wonder how astonished the Jewish theologians were in Jerusalem when Galileans who had previously been with the crucified Jesus stood up on that memorable day of Pentecost and spoke new languages in fulfillment of Isaiah 28. Those whom they had contended with throughout the ministry of Jesus were now signalled by God to be the initial beginnings of the new covenant that He had established with His people (See Jr 31:31-34). Those who were subsequently baptized on that day were added to this new Israel of God (At 2:47). The astonishment of the Jewish audience was not simply in the apostles’ speaking in the languages and dialects. It was in the fact that they knew the Isaiah 28 prophecy. On that day they were experiencing its fulfillment before their eyes. Now we can understand why the antagonistic priests and Pharisees tried to pass off the speaking of the apostles as men who were merely full of new wine.

In the context of the Corinthian problem concerning personal pride in speaking in tongues, Paul corrected them by referring to the fact that a misuse of the gift would be childish (See 1 Co 13:11). If they did not understand the purpose for the gift, then they had missed the point, and thus, would be behaving childishly in their contention with one another as to which gift was greater.

The Greek word *teleioi* is used in 1 Corinthians 14:20. The word means to be mature in behavior and thinking. So

Paul was rebuking them in the statement, “*Brethren, do not be children in thinking. However, in malice be babes, but in thinking be mature [teleioi].*” They must be mature in understanding the purpose of God signalling His people through the gift of languages. We wonder if those today who are so adamant about “speaking in tongues” have carefully considered this point. Are they simply being childish in their pride that they have “spoken in tongues”? Or have they matured to realize that they are only behaving as children in becoming emotionally excited to the point of losing control of their speech, and thus, speaking gibberish? And in their state of senseless behavior, have they passed off such gibberish on the Holy Spirit that He is moving them to “speak in tongues”?

C. Tongues and the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

It has been asserted that the speaking in tongues is a signal of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The conclusion to this thinking is that if one does not speak in tongues, then he has not been baptized with the Holy Spirit. But this thinking would certainly be strange to Paul. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul stated that “*God has designated some in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, and varieties of languages.*” Paul certainly did not assume that everyone was designated an apostle, or that everyone had the gift of healing. **Neither did everyone have the**

gift of tongues. It seems that some today have conveniently overlooked this point. All of the Corinthians had been baptized in water in obedience to the gospel (1 Co 12:13), but not all the Corinthians spoke in tongues.

Some have unfortunately misunderstood the “baptism” of 1 Corinthians 12:13. Paul said, “*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondservants or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*” Notice that Paul said they were **all** baptized into one body, which is the church (Cl 1:18). Some have asserted that reference here is to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But this cannot be true. In 1 Corinthians 12:30 Paul asked, “*Do all speak with languages?*” The answer is definitely “No.”

Now here is a problem for those who say that speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Not all the Corinthians spoke in tongues according to the question of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:30. If the “baptism” of 1 Corinthians 12:13 is a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, then not all the Corinthians had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. But Paul said that they had all been baptized. If speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, then why did not all the Corinthians speak in tongues if they were all supposedly baptized in the Holy Spirit? Were those who did not speak in tongues thus outside the body because they were evidently not baptized in the Holy Spirit? And if one is not baptized in the Holy Spirit, is he or she outside

the body? Some Bible interpreters need to take another look at the “baptism” of 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Some might wonder why the gift of languages was so prevalent among the Corinthians? The answer may be in the fact of where Corinth was located and what part it played in the economic trade of the first century. The Jews were a people of commerce. In their commercial affairs they settled in the economic centers of the Roman Empire. One of those centers was Corinth. It seems that one of the commercial ventures of the Jews was to go to this city or that city in order to trade (See Js 4:13). Because Corinth was such a strategic city in reference to national trade in the Roman Empire, we would suppose that there were many Jews in the city where people were coming and going in their marketing. These Jews would have been coming from many different areas of the Roman Empire, and thus speaking many different languages. When they arrived in Corinth, the sign of the gift of tongues would authenticate that the Christians in the city were indeed the people through whom God spoke “new languages” to His people. The gift of languages was evangelistic in the sense of signalling to visiting Jews that those who possessed the gift were the people of God. And because they were in the presence of the saints, they could be edified in their home language.

The use of the gift of tongues in the assemblies of the saints, therefore, was to be carried out in an orderly manner in order that the visitor not believe that he

had come into an assembly of confused madmen. Paul gave some simple instructions on how to use the gift to the greatest advantage of edification for the assembly, and for the benefit of the unbelievers who were present. (1) At any time, only two or three people were to speak in a language, and no more than that number (1 Co 14:27). (2) When one was teaching in a language, an interpreter must be present in order to interpret the message for those who did not understand the spoken language (1 Co 14:28). (3) No women were to exercise the gift in the assembly (1 Co 14:34). The women were to remain silent. By following these simple rules of conduct, order could be brought to the Corinthian church assemblies for the purpose of edification.

In view of the purpose of the gift of tongues in the first century, and its fulfillment of purpose from Old Testament prophecy, we would certainly question why there would be those today who would seek to validate the people of God by a supposed “speaking in tongues.” Is God still trying to validate His people to the Jewish unbelievers? In view of the fulfillment of Isaiah 28, God confirmed that the church was His people of the first century. This validation is recorded in the New Testament, and thus, continues as a recorded validation of the church throughout history.

In view of the prophecy of Jesus in Luke 21 and Matthew 24 in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, God gave the Jews every opportunity to believe that Jesus was the Messiah (Jn

20:30,31). By His bestowing of the gift of tongues on the Gentiles, He manifested to the Jews that they were to be grafted into the body of His people. When the times of the Gentiles' grafting in had been completed, it was time to consummate the physical nation of Israel by the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It was as Paul quoted Hosea, *"I will call them My people who were not My people [the Gentiles], and her beloved who was not beloved. And it will come to pass that in the place [Jerusalem] where it was said to them 'You [Gentiles] are not My people,' there they will be called the children of the living God"* (Rm 9:25,26; see Hs 1:10; 2:23).

When the Gentiles had been grafted in, then the sign of languages was no longer needed. If one today wants to know if the Gentiles have been accepted into the family of God, they simply need to read their Bibles. Modern-day proponents of speaking in tongues unfortunately fail to see the prophetic purpose and fulfillment of the gift. If they could understand that the purpose for the giving of the gift has been fulfilled, then they would understand that there was no need for the gift to continue after A.D. 70 when God gave a crushing blow to national Israel in order to terminate the nation.

Chapter 11

Passing Of The Gift Of Tongues

It is certain that 1 Corinthians 13:8 teaches that the gift of languages would cease. *"Where there are languages,"* Paul wrote, *"they will cease."* We have already concluded that when that which is perfect (or complete), has come, the imperfect miraculous gifts would no longer be needed to establish and confirm the early church. The "perfect" of 1 Corinthians 13:10 is neuter in gender, and thus cannot refer to the coming of Christ in His final coming. If reference were to Christ, then the gender would be masculine in reference to Christ. Reference cannot be to our eternal dwelling, for that which was complete was abiding at the time Paul wrote (1 Co 13:13). But to allow the interpretation that reference is to heaven, does not mean that the

miraculous gifts as a ministry among the disciples would of necessity continue until our final dwelling is revealed. God is in the heavenly realm, but there will be a realm of dwelling for the redeemed that is not as the heavenly dwelling of God, for we will be embodied for the special heavenly dwelling that is for the saints (See 2 Co 5:1-10).

We have also found that those who seek to read their ecstatic experience of speaking in gibberish into the actual gift of speaking in tongues in the context of 1 Corinthians 12 – 14, fail to see that all miraculous gifts must also continue until heaven is revealed if the gift of languages continues. If one gift continues, then all gifts must continue. Since many assume that all miraculous gifts continue,

the major part the word of God is to play in directing our lives is greatly minimized. The concept of 2 Timothy 3:16,17 is often foreign to those of this persuasion.

The best interpretation of “that which is complete” in 1 Corinthians 13 is the complete oral truth that was revealed by the Holy Spirit by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 13, which truth would eventually be written for our instruction. The written truth of God would maintain the faith and direction of the church until the coming of Jesus. When the complete recording of all truth happened, then there would no longer be a need for the confirming miraculous gifts, including the gift of languages. The revelation of all truth through the apostles had been completed by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. The recording of all truth would be completed by the close of the first century.

What is interesting to study is the history of the church between A.D. 100 and 400. In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers during this period, no emphasis is placed on the gift of tongues. One would think that if the gift were so important in confirming one’s faith, it would have been mentioned extensively by the post apostolic church leaders. If the gift were to continue indefinitely, then we would also assume that there would be much discussion in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers between A.D. 100 and A.D. 400. The historical fact is that the gift is nowhere alluded to or even hinted at as being exercised among the faithful of this era. This is an amazing historical fact if

the function of the gift was to continue outside the written historical record of Scripture as a confirming evidence of God that Christians were His people. Here are some interesting points in reference to the cessation of tongues in the post apostolic period:

A. Writings of the Apostolic Fathers:

Some Apostolic Fathers wrote to churches where tongues had previously existed. Clement of Rome, for example, wrote to the church of Corinth where the gift had been in existence during the lifetime of the apostle Paul (See Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians*, I,II). Now if there existed a church where the gift of tongues would have continued, certainly Clement would have mentioned something in his letter to the Corinthians concerning the gift in the first part of the second century.

In his book, *To the Corinthians*, Clement spoke of problems that faced the church in Corinth. Though one of the major problems during the lifetime of Paul was competition among those who possessed the miraculous gifts of prophecy and tongues, Clement says nothing of the gift of tongues in dealing with the problems in the Corinthian church of his time. Even when Clement speaks of their spiritual heritage as a church, nothing is mentioned concerning speaking in tongues (Ibid., XLII-XLIV). By the time of the writing of Clement to the Corinthian church in the second century, therefore, the gift of languages had long passed away.

In a similar manner, Ignatius wrote to the church in Ephesus. Though in the establishment of this church in Acts 19, some spoke in languages, Ignatius says nothing of the gift when he wrote to this church in the second century. We would also assume, therefore, that the gift had long passed from use by the saints in Ephesus.

B. Absence of the gift of tongues in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers:

There is no reference to the gift of tongues among the post apostolic churches regardless of the extensive travels of the early Apostolic Fathers. Polycarp was a shepherd in the city of Smyrna. While there, he wrote to the church in Philippi. As previously mentioned, Clement of Rome wrote to the saints in Corinth. Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the saints who were in the cities of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Smyrna and Philadelphia. Though we do not know its authorship, the *Epistle of Barnabas* was possibly written from the city of Alexandria in Egypt. *The Epistle to Diognetus* was also possibly written from Alexandria. *The Shepherd of Hermas* was possibly written from Rome. The *Didache* may have been written from either Egypt, Syria or Palestine. **In none of these writings do we find any evidence of the existence of the gift of languages in the church at the time when these documents were written.**

The writings of these individuals cover an extensive geographical area of

the early first century. If the gift of tongues played any significant part in the early church, we would certainly think that the gift would have been emphasized in these post apostolic writings. We would think that there would have at least been an allusion to the gift as a part of the assembly of the church. But the lack of any mention of the gift is an overwhelming argument that the gift of tongues, as well as the other miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, had ceased by the time the Apostolic Fathers addressed the second and third century church.

The absence of the gift of tongues in the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers argues against the continuation of the gift after the first century. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers were not textbooks on theology for the church. The Apostolic Fathers were men of renown who sought to correct doctrinal errors in the church. In their writings they discussed almost every major teaching of the New Testament, and yet, there is no mention of the gift of tongues. We would wonder that since the gift of tongues was a fulfillment of Isaiah 28 in reference to God confirming the church as His people, there would at least be some mention of the gift, if indeed the gift continued after the first century. This would be true if God sought to continue His confirmation of the church with the gift throughout history. But there is “silence of the Apostolic Fathers” on this subject. By the end of the first century, no reference is made to the gift of tongues as being a part of the ministry of the faithful.

1. *The Epistle of Diognetus*: An example of the cessation of the gift of tongues would be the Epistle of Diognetus. This letter was written in order to answer questions that had been posed by Diognetus concerning the church. In the letter, the writer defended the faith of Christians by discussing the foolishness of idolatry, the insufficiency of Judaism, and the superiority of Christ and Christianity over pagan religions. Since the gift of tongues was originally meant to be an evidence that God had placed His “stamp of approval” on the church as His people, we would think that in the letter to Diognetus there would at least be some mention of the gift if it had continued past the first century. If the gift of tongues was some experiential evidence of the individual Christian and his salvation, then certainly there would be some mention of the gift in the letter. But there is only silence (See Earl Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*).

2. *Against Heresies*: An interesting statement is made in Irenaeus’ reference to Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians. He said in the letter that those who “choose to do so, and are anxious about their salvation, can learn the character of his faith, and the preaching of the truth” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, 3,4). In the context of this statement, if the gift of tongues validated one’s salvation, we would certainly have expected Irenaeus to make reference to the gift if the gift was still in existence. But he is silent on the matter.

3. *Dialogue With Trypho and Hortatory Address to the Greeks*: Another

example of the absence of discussion on the gift of tongues in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is that of Justin Martyr who was born around A.D. 100. (The name “Martyr” is not his real name. It is only a reference to the fact that he was martyred somewhere between A.D. 163 and 167.)

Justin was born in Samaria, converted in Ephesus, and traveled extensively throughout the Roman Empire. In his work, *Dialogue With Trypho*, he made a very significant statement:

“For the prophetic gifts remain with us [Christians], even to the present time. And hence you ought to understand that [the gifts] formerly among your nation [the Jewish nation] have been transferred to us” (*Dialogue With Trypho*, LXXXII).

Some have assumed that in Justin’s reference to the “prophetic gifts” he included the miraculous gifts, including the gift of tongues. But this is not the case. The “prophetic gifts” about which Justin was speaking **were formerly among the Jewish nation**. However, the gift of tongues was not among the nation of Israel, for its mention in the Bible is only in reference to the church.

Also in Justin’s writings he mentions only seven gifts. He leaves out the gift of tongues (Ibid., XXXIX). The fact that Justin traveled extensively throughout the post apostolic church emphasizes the fact that he evidently had no experience or contact with the function of the gift of tongues. Since he never encountered this phenomenon in the church of his time,

then obviously his silence on the matter confirms the fact that the gift did not exist in the post apostolic church.

Since Justin was a teacher of doctrine, it is significant that he did not mention the gift of tongues as a part of “Christian doctrine.” Either the gift did not exist during his time of teaching, or he considered it insignificant in reference to the life of the Christian. Both points would be true in reference to the gift. According to Paul, the gift was not as important as prophecy. The exercising of the gift did not make one more spiritual. The case of the Corinthian church proves this point. They behaved carnally in their use of the gifts (1 Co 3:1-3).

The gift of tongues simply did not exist in the church of the second century. When Justin wrote his *Dialogue With Trypho* he defended the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. He defended the fact that the church was now the people of God. National Israel had passed away. Since the gift of tongues was in the prophecy of Isaiah 28 as a signal of God by which He would identify His people, certainly Justin would have used this argument to defend the church that existed in his day. If the gift of tongues was still in existence during the time of Justin, then he would have made an easy argument that God was at that time continuing to signal to the unbelieving world that the church was now His people, and not national Israel.

In his writing, *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, Justin set out to prove that Christianity was the true religion in contrast to Judaism and pagan religions. This

would have been the ideal opportunity for him to use an existing function of the gift of tongues to prove his point. But he is silent on the gift simply because the gift did not exist in the church at the time of his writing.

4. Irenaeus: Around A.D. 177, Irenaeus left Asia Minor and went to Lyons in Gaul. It was there that he became a presbyter. While in Lyons he heard of the erroneous influences of Montanus that were taking place in Asia Minor and Syria. Montanus was an apostate who supposed that he had a personal and ecstatic experience directly from the Holy Spirit. Since there was a close connection between the churches of Asia Minor and Lyons, Irenaeus had to deal with the influence of the Montanists.

Montanism was one of the doctrinal elements in the church of Lyons with which Irenaeus and others dealt. It was in the context of this controversy that Irenaeus made the statement, “we hear many brethren in the church ... who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages” (*Against Heresies*, V, 6.1). Irenaeus had heard of the experiential excesses of the Montanists, and thus, he wrote against such false religiosity in *Against Heresies*. But we must understand the context in which Irenaeus made the preceding statement.

In the development of the theology of Irenaeus, we must keep in mind that he had been greatly influenced by Polycarp, a bishop of Smyrna. As a boy growing up in Smyrna, Irenaeus had heard much from Polycarp. Because of the influence of Polycarp in his life, he

was subsequently greatly influenced by the teachings of the aged bishop. The gift of tongues did not exist during the teaching ministry of Polycarp, and thus, Iranaeus likewise did not consider the gift in existence in the church of his day. It seems that if the gift of tongues played some major role in the function of the church of their day, both Polycarp and Iranaeus would have focused on its use in their writings. But the lack of mention of the gift as a function of the church is evidence that the gift was not a part of the church in the second century. If Christians spoke in tongues during the lifetime of Polycarp and Iranaeus, we would assume that they would have written much on the phenomenon. But neither Iranaeus nor his associates experienced the gift, for he said in the preceding quoted statement that “we” have heard that some brethren speak in all kinds of languages. Because of Iranaeus’ vague statement, it is apparent that he had heard hearsay concerning the activities of the Montanist in Asia Minor. His statement must also be considered in the context that only Montanus himself claimed to have had a spiritual encounter with the Holy Spirit, as well as his two female prophetesses. In his arguments against the excesses of Montanus, Iranaeus only affirmed what he had heard of the apostate’s practices.

5. Tertullian: Tertullian of North Africa did come under the influence of Montanus. In his writings he makes reference to the spiritual gifts in a broad context, but does not specifically mention the gift of tongues as prevalent where

he resided. He only mentions a woman who was a Montanist who claimed to have spoken with angels and had other ecstatic experiences (*A Treatise on the Soul*, 9). But his mention of this case falls far short of being a testimony to any widespread exercising of the gift of tongues in North Africa.

In his writing, *Against Marcion*, Tertullian mentioned the gift of tongues, but does so only in reference to Paul’s writing on the subject in 1 Corinthians 12 – 14. In his discussions on the subject, he does not claim to have knowledge of anyone who exercised the gift.

6. Origen: Origen was known as one of the greatest theologians and lecturers of the post apostolic era. He traveled extensively, giving many lectures on theology. As a scholar who was well known throughout many regions of the Roman Empire, we would think that in his lectures he would have spoken on the subject of the gift of tongues. If the gift was in existence in Christendom, even in his writings we would think that he would have made some reference to the gift. The fact is that he does not speak of the gift of tongues as a phenomenon in the Christendom of his day. His lack of discussion on the gift clearly indicates that the gift did not exist as a function of the church of his time.

One of Origen’s references to “strange” words was in answer to Celsus. Celsus had claimed that the Old Testament prophets were in a state of ecstatic emotion when they made their prophecies. In the following statement, Origen discussed the teaching of Celsus in ref-

erence to the prophets:

To these promises are added strange, fanatical, and quite unintelligible words, of which no rational person can find the meaning: for so dark are they, as to have no meaning at all; but they give occasion to every fool or impostor to apply them to suit his own purposes (See Origen, *Against Celsus*, VIII, 8-11).

In his answer to the preceding beliefs of Celsus, Origen stated that though there were miraculous demonstrations of the Holy Spirit during the ministry of Jesus and the early stages of the church's existence, these demonstrations eventually ceased (*Against Celsus*, VIII, 9). Origen affirmed that in his time—the post apostolic era after the close of the first century—the miraculous gifts no longer existed.

7. Chrysostom: After his ministry in Antioch, Chrysostom became the patriarch of Constantinople. In this position of influence, he had contact with church leaders throughout the Roman Empire. He delivered many expository lessons on the New Testament in the fourth century, one of which is recorded. In his teaching on 1 Corinthians he stated in reference to spiritual gifts that the “whole place is very obscure.” He went on to say, “... but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and **by their cessation**, being such as then used to occur, **but now no longer take place**” (*Homilies on First Corinthians*, XXIX, 1). This is a very important testimony concerning the ces-

sation of the miraculous gifts, and in particular, the cessation of the gift of tongues. If the gift of tongues were as widely practiced as some today claim they should be, then certainly Chrysostom would have spoken of such as prevalent throughout the church of his day. But he testifies to the fact that they had ceased, and such they had.

The conclusion of the preceding testimonies is that the silence of the Apostolic Fathers on the gift of tongues in the post apostolic period is overwhelming evidence that the gift of tongues never made it past the close of the first century. If the gift of tongues were as prevalent throughout the church of the post apostolic era, then certainly the Apostolic Fathers would have mentioned its commonality. “Speaking strange things” was mentioned by the Apostolic Fathers who were arguing against the heresy of Montanus. His erroneous view of the Holy Spirit led him in a movement against the established views of the early Apostolic Fathers. But his presumption to equate his ecstatic experiences with the work of the Holy Spirit in the first century was considered heresy by the post apostolic writers.

We must keep in mind when studying the writings of the Apostolic Fathers in reference to the miraculous gifts that national Israel had already been terminated by the time these men wrote. For the believers, Israelite nationality ceased in Christ (Gl 3:26,27). Beginning in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost, those who were baptized into Christ became the

spiritual Israel of God. In the fulfillment of Isaiah 28, the baptized were confirmed to be the Israel of God. To the unbelievers, particularly the Jewish unbelievers, national Israel was terminated in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and the death of over 1,100,000 Jews. When the Apostolic Fathers wrote, national Israel had been terminated and the church had been confirmed to be the true people of God. The miraculous gifts ceased for the

church had been confirmed and established as the new Israel. During the early history of the church after the first century, the Apostolic Fathers wrote to defend the church as we would do so today. **They resorted to quoting the word of God.** They did not seek to prove their arguments against heresy on the foundation of their personal experiences, dreams or visions. They defended their faith on the foundation of the word of God.

Chapter 12

“Miracle” Based Religiosity

One of the primary obsessions of experiential religionists is “miracles.” When we use the word “miracle” in religious discussions, the definitions of the word are so endless in today’s religious culture that the word is essentially meaningless in differentiating between the confirming miracles of the Bible and the “miracles” that believers experience today. The word has become a generic term to refer to all of God’s work outside the ordinary occurrence of natural law. And admittedly, there is really no word that is provided by the Bible that we can use to explain the work of God today that is unexplainable, awesome, and assuredly, outside the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. Some have used the word “providence,” but this is not a biblical word, and thus, it needs definition itself by those who use it.

If a nonbiblical word needs definition, then the use of the word is subject to the theology of the one who uses it. But if the word is used in reference to a

Bible event, then the definition must come from the Bible, not our experiences. This is particularly necessary when discussing the miraculous work of God in the affairs of man.

When we say that the Bible must be our final authority in matters of faith, we mean also that it must be our final dictionary in defining matters that took place in the time when the Bible was written. Because many people have a limited knowledge of the Bible’s definition of such things as demon possession and miracles assumes, we will have endless confusion in our discussions of these matters. But regardless of the confusion, we will remain with the Bible as our center of reference for defining Bible things, not our experiences, traditions or religious culture. We will do this because we know that we can be easily deceived by our experiences.

When God works today in the affairs of man, it is certainly “providential,” but in the extended use of the word

“miracle,” it is also miraculous. It is miraculous in the sense that something happens outside the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. God works in the life of the Christian outside the bounds of the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. Some use the word “miracle” to define this work simply because there is no other Bible word to use. Some use the word “providence,” but they have extracted a word from a secular dictionary in order to explain something that is beyond the definitions of our dictionaries. So we are left with a dilemma. Whenever we use the word “miracle” we are certain to be misunderstood. We are misunderstood because there is no Bible word that can be used to explain God’s work beyond the “confirming” miracles of the Bible, but is still outside the realm of the ordinary occurrence of natural laws.

We could thus speak endlessly about definitions of “providence” and “miracle,” but frustrate ourselves with arguments over our definitions. One thing is true, however, is that everyone who is involved in the discussions, or debates, believes that God is working today in the life of the Christian. No baptized believer doubts this, though we will struggle with our definitions.

So we would begin the discussion of this chapter by clarifying our understanding of what substantiates our faith. Miracles—whatever definition we use—do not stand alone in confirming faith. **We would say that the definition of the church is not a body of confirmed miracles.** The church does not rest upon a catechism of miracles. Miracles draw

attention to the message and messenger, and subsequently point one to the faith of the messenger. Nevertheless, the miracles do not define the faith of the messenger. **It is revelation that defines the church.**

God confirmed the word with signs in the beginning of the early church (Mk 16:20). The word that was first spoken by Jesus was then confirmed by the early believers “*both with signs and wonders and with various powers and gifts of the Holy Spirit ...*” (Hb 2:3,4). It was the **word** that was confirmed. Miracles do not confirm miracles. Miracles were a signal that the word spoken by the early messengers of God was from God.

Miracles may confirm a faith, **but the faith must be examined on the basis of what is taught by those who hold the faith.** It is the word of God that determines and defines our faith. We believe the occurrence of the miracles, **but it is the word of God that explains to us what to believe and how we should behave as children of God. It is thus the word of God that builds us up** (At 20:32). Any religion, therefore, that professes to be a true religion must stand upon the word of God. Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, not by standing on a catechism of miracles. And in the context of our discussion, our faith is not based on our experiences of what we would claim to be miracles. Our faith is based on the word of Christ. It must be this way because there are so many false signs and wonders out there that people are easily led astray (See 2 Th 2:10-12). But it is difficult to be led astray when

one objectively deals with the written word of God. We can question one another’s experiences, but we cannot question the infallible word of God.

God worked through signs and wonders in order to confirm the word that was spoken by the early evangelists. However, the early evangelists did not stand alone in the miraculous work of God. Miracles served only partially in reference to their faith in Jesus (See Jn 20:30,31). Miracles validated that which was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, which prophecy was recorded. Notice that Paul did not resort to the proof of miracles when preaching Jesus to the Jews in Rome. He persuaded *“them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning until evening”* (At 28:23). Throughout the book of Matthew, which was directed to the Jews to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, the statement is continually made, *“that it might be fulfilled”* (Mt 1:22; 2:15,17,23; 4:14; 8:17). The book of Matthew is a confirmation that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. The Jews to whom Jesus came had their copies of the Old Testament in order to search the prophecies that were made about Him.

The first “miracle” to validate the foundation upon which our faith is built is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus as the Messiah. As the Jews, we need to study our Bibles in order to establish this foundation for our faith (See Jn 5:39). But what if one has little knowledge of the Bible? This is the reason many resort to “miracles” today as the validation

of their faith. They have so little knowledge of the Bible that they seek elsewhere for validation of their faith. This is the foundation upon which experiential religion is based. In the absence of the word of God, people have flocked to miracle-based religions. This is the reason so many people obsess over the miraculous. **If their miracles are proved to be only false (2 Th 2:10-12), then they have no foundation for their faith.**

Psychosomatic refers to the power of the mind. It is a word that refers to the power of the mind over the physical body. It is true that a positive mental attitude lends one to being more healthy. The power of hypnosis proves that one person can have a great influence over the mind of another. The power of suggestion (hypnotism) is real in reference to bringing one’s thinking into the subjection of another person. Through hypnosis one can be convinced that he has no pain, and subsequently, the person who has been hypnotized will feel no pain. There is nothing supernatural about hypnosis. It is simply a psychological tool used by some psychologist to bring mental healing to others.

Some religionists who plagiarize the word “miracle” from the Bible are fraudulently claiming miracles when they bring others into a state of subconsciousness, and then through the power of suggestion (hypnosis), tell the person that they are healed. Religious frauds have been doing this for centuries.

When we were in high school in our younger days a hypnotist would come by our school and demonstrate the power of

suggestion (hypnotism). On one occasion he hypnotized an entire group of students into doing different things we thought were quite hilarious. There was no magic about what he was doing. There were no miracles. But if one were ignorant of the power of suggestion, he would think that the hypnotist was casting some spell over others. Now think about all the nonsense and confusion fake healers are causing in the religious world by using the power of suggestion to deceive people into thinking that they are healed.

One of the most interesting books we have read throughout the years was written by William A. Nolen who wrote the book, *A Doctor in Search of A Miracle* (Random House Pub). Dr. Nolen took a leave of absence as a writer for *McCall's Magazine* and went on a search throughout the world for a true miracle of healing. After an extensive investigation of supposed healings in the context of many different religions, he published the book. The book is a comprehensive investigation of so-called healings in all religious contexts.

Nolen was not a person of any faith, but just wanted to honestly investigate the claims of those who claimed miraculous healings. He made a very intensive study of the “miraculous healings” of Kathryn Kuhlman who was an acclaimed healer of America. At the end of his investigation, he came to three conclusions:

(1) He found no evidence of a miraculous cure for any physical deformity or disease. (2) People as Kathryn Kuhlman, though very sincere in their profession to heal people, had no understanding of the difference between psychogenic and organic diseases. (3) It is doubtful that the good that was psychologically done for people by those as Kathryn Kuhlman outweighed the harm they were actually doing to the people they claimed to have healed. They were giving so much false hope that when the psychosomatic effect of the “healing” wore off depression would often set in when the person realized that he or she was not actually healed.

Though we do not fully understand the power of the mind over the body, we do understand enough not to play religious “healing games” with people in order to generate a following. We simply submit to what James stated, “*Is anyone sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will restore the sick*” (Js 5:14,15). This certainly does not sound like a healing ceremony. What is important in the statement is that James said “call for the elders.” This is a plurality of men who would offer the prayer, not a single performer who would draw attention to himself by orchestrating a healing ceremony.

Chapter 13

Jesus Saw It Coming

It is not our purpose here to go into a biblical definition of how to identify a true confirming miracle. We affirm that God's work through confirming miracles in the first century and His work today are different. Though He no longer needs to work in a manner by which to confirm His written word, He certainly works today in the life of the obedient. What word we use to define His work in the life of the Christian today may be subject to our own understanding. But according to the Bible definition there is a difference between a "confirming miracle" and a wondrous work of God today that we as believers perceive through faith.

Confirming miracles were not perceived through faith. They were so empirically witnessed and experienced through the senses of men that even unbelievers could not deny their occurrence (See At 4:16). Such miracles were so evident that they were meant by God to be confirming miracles of His word and His messengers who were sent forth to preach the gospel to the world (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:2-4).

In this context, we must take another look at one of Jesus' statements that seems to focus directly on the problem He knew the disciples would encounter in their ministry. He knew that He was sending them out into a world wherein they could be deceived. It was a world described by Paul, for he lived in that world. *"The presence of the lawless one*

is according to the working of Satan with all deceiving power and signs and wonders, and with all deception of wickedness among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved" (2 Th 2:9,10). Therefore, Jesus forewarned His disciples, *"For there will arise false christs and false prophets. And they will show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect"* (Mt 24:24).

The "great signs and wonders" the disciples would encounter would cause many to be deceived. If the "great signs and wonders" were real, one would not be deceived if he believed them. One is not deceived when he believes that which is real. So the "great signs and wonders" about which Jesus spoke, and to which Paul referred, were false miracles. Though they were claimed to be supernatural signs and wonders by many, they were still false. We too live in a world of many fraudulent "miracle workers" who seek to deceive, if possible, even the elect of God. If we do not question these "great signs and wonders," then we too will be deceived. It is never wrong to question the spirits to see if they are from God.

Knowing that there would be a host of religionists in the world who would succumb to the fraud of deceptive "great signs and wonders," Jesus gave the warnings of Matthew 7:15-23. No context of Scripture seems to be more relevant to

the deception of experiential religionists than this warning of Jesus. Jesus knew that His disciples would be walking into a world of experiential religions as we have in the world today. Therefore, please study this message of Jesus carefully.

A. False prophets (vs 15):

*Beware of **false prophets** who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are **ravenous wolves**.*

The context of verses 21-23 begins with this statement in verse 15. **The false prophets would give the presentation of being harmless religionists.** They would be teachers, and thus religious leaders whose goal would be something other than the preservation of the sheep. The metaphor “wolves” indicates that **their intention would be to satisfy their own appetites.** They would be as those spoken of by Paul. **“For they who are such serve not our Lord Christ but their own belly, and by appealing words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the innocent”** (Rm 16:18).

We must understand the context of verses 15-23 in view of the devouring desires of the wolves. They would use the claims of verse 22 to gain and maintain their position as religious leaders. Once the innocent had committed themselves to be followers, the wolves were set to devour. **The problem with the innocent is that they do not know that they have been devoured.** The innocently believe many lies simply because they have little

knowledge of the truth.

B. Their fruits (vss 16-20):

You will know them by their fruits.** Do men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit, but **a bad tree brings forth bad fruit.** A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, **by their fruits you will know them.

Jesus instructed the sheep as to how they can identify the true nature of the wolves. “Fruit” is the product of something inward that is manifested outwardly. By their behavior, they will be identified. They will not be able to say as Peter said to the lame beggar at the gate called Beautiful, *“Silver and gold I do not have ...”* (At 3:6). The wolves are loaded with the possessions they have devoured off the innocent.

One of the quickest means by which to identify the motives of the false teacher is that **he seeks to fleece the sheep for his own gain.** He is a Balaamite in that he uses the occasion of the flock for his own gain (2 Pt 2:15). **One who is greedy for gain cannot produce good fruit.** The fruit he always produces is corrupted. The adherents of the churches of greedy preachers, therefore, give allegiance to the Balaamite because they too believe that they will become rich if they cry out “Lord, Lord.” The Balaamite preacher fills the church house with

promises that the adherents will also become prosperous.

The false teacher makes empty promises to his adherents by promising that “God will bless you, too.” The adherents keep coming to the assemblies because they are looking for gold, not God. The Balaamite preacher thus produces “bad fruit churches.” The adherents become as he is. They are not a church of Christ because they are drawn to God because of selfish motives. They are convinced that they must give in order to receive gain. Their motives for giving, therefore, are selfish. They do not give out of love for what Jesus has done for them. They give out of selfishness in order to be blessed as the Balaamite preacher. In the context of Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus teaches the faithful that ravenous false preachers and their group of followers can be identified by their ungodly thinking which is manifested in their behavior. They are flocks of selfishness who chime at the puff of the smooth and fair speeches of Balaamite preachers.

C. “Lord, Lord” religionists (vss 21-23):

*Not every one who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name and performed many wonderful works in Your Name? And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you. **Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness.**”*

It is almost ironic that experiential religionists claim **the very religious practices that Jesus here states are the claims by which the faithful are able to identify the false prophets.** It seems that if one is a religious leader, he would be very apprehensive about making the claims of this context since Jesus stated that the ravenous wolves would be identified by making these claims.

The false prophets will claim to prophesy, cast out demons, and work miraculous wonders. But Jesus said that those who make these claims are false teachers. They are liars and frauds. And those who believe these claims have been duped, and thus, they too are a part of a “bad fruit church.” They have allowed themselves to be swooned away by the theatrical claims of very charismatic preachers. They are carried away with such religious charlatans simply because in their ignorance of the word of God, they have no desire to investigate either the claims of the wolf or the word of God. They may be initially innocent victims, but they will be held accountable for their ignorance of the word of God if they do not investigate the claims of the Balaamite preachers with the word of God. “*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world***” (1 Jn 4:1).

Verse 21 is Jesus’ transition in the text to define those “Lord, Lord” people who do not do the will of the Father. He introduces the subject by saying, “*Not every one*” This means that there are

those who **will** enter into the kingdom of heaven. These are those who cry out, “Lord, Lord,” **but they also do the will of the Father**. While others simply seek an experiential identity of their relationship with the Father, these understand that any relationship with the Father depends on keeping His commandments (1 Jn 5:2). While some seek out books of authors who have validated their religion by their personal experiences, others seek out books that explain the word of God. Some “Lord, Lord” religionists thrive on reading about the personal experiences of others. But those who seek out the will of the Father thrive on the word of God. While some seek to discover in the Bible what God can do for them in the present, others discover what God has already done for them at the cross. While some obsess over any promises of what God can give to them in experiences, others obsess over what teaching they can learn in order to teach others (2 Tm 2:2). Some seek promises of experiences, while others seek teaching for correct moral behavior and teaching to keep their minds focussed on the will of God.

It is not without purpose, therefore, that in verses 21-23 Jesus referred to the three claims that false teachers will often use to prove that they are from the Lord. Our question, however, is why Jesus wants us to understand that false teachers can be identified by these three claims.

1. “**Prophesied in Your name**”:

The false prophets would present themselves as representatives of Jesus. The

word “prophesy” was used in both the Old and New Testaments to refer to a teacher teaching the word of God. In the Old Testament some of the recorded statements of the prophets (teachers) were prophecies of future events. But the ordinary work of the prophet was to teach the people. The false prophet in the context of Jesus’ statement evidently did not know his Bible. He did not do the will of God, or he knew the will of God and refused to obey. It is not surprising, therefore, that those who would “prophesy in Your name” would presume to tell the future of individuals simply because they have little Bible knowledge to teach. And such we have found throughout the preachers of experiential religions. They know little Bible, and thus, they have to resort to their “prophecies,” “casting out demons,” and “healings” in order to gain and maintain a following.

The deceptive trick of the modern-day prophet is that he claims to prophesy the future when actually he is only **predicting** the future. There is a difference between prediction and true prophecy. Prediction is based on known present facts that indicate that something will happen in the future. In true prophecy, however, there are no known facts in the present to indicate what will come in the future. It is interesting that no so-called prophets of modern times prophesied the fall of the Berlin Wall. No so-called prophets prophesied the 911 attack on the World Trade Center. No so-called prophet prophesied the economic worldwide downturn that began in 2008. And

where were the prophets who would have prophesied the Arab Spring? These major events that affected the entire world were not prophesied by any modern-day, self-proclaimed prophets. What we have found is that fraudulent false teachers prey on the innocent by “prophesying” the coming events in individuals who are gullible and seeking for a “quick fix” in their religiosity that is void of any investigation into the word of God.

2. “Cast out demons”: Jesus said that the false teachers can also be specifically identified by supposedly “casting out demons.” We would think, therefore, that all those today who claim to cast out demons would fear in reference to this statement simply because Jesus alerted the faithful that they can identify false prophets if they make this claim. Because false teachers do not fear to claim to cast out demons reveals the brash arrogance of such experiential religionists. Their fraudulent character can be identified by their making such claims.

But why did Jesus refer to the real casting out of demons during His ministry as a signal of false teachers who would come after Him and make the same claim? The answer is simple. **People who have never experienced real demon possession would not know how to identify real demon possession.** Because they would not have a real life experience with demon possession, they would easily associate present psychological phenomenon or dysfunctional mental conditions with what the Bible defines as true demon possession.

The biblically challenged will always

refer to any psychological disorder as a demon, and thus seek to “cast out the demon.” And because of their thirst to have power over Satan in a visible manner, they will resort to performances of exorcism in order to demonstrate to others that they have power over Satan. Such false teachers would confuse epilepsy, mental illness, or just the spirit of fear in individuals who have little faith in themselves or God, with true demon possession. They would assert that mentally challenged people are demon possessed. The imagination of such religionists runs wild in conjuring up demons in all sorts of situations. Their basic fear of the unexplained causes them to label any unexplained phenomenon to be a demon. The more uneducated the people, the more demons that seem to exist in the minds of the people.

As the idolater creates a god after his own imagination, so people are quick to create a demon after their own lack of understanding of the word of God. They forget 1 John 4:4. *“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them because greater is He who is **in you** than he who is **in the world.**”* The Spirit of God is **in** the Christian. But the Christian must continue to remember that Satan is **“in the world,”** not in people. Right?

3. “Wonderful works in Your name”: God, the Father, and the Holy Spirit did many wonderful works through Jesus in order to prove that He was the Son of God (Jn 20:30,31). God worked many wonderful works through the hands of the apostles when they went forth to

preach the gospel to the world (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:2-4). These were true miraculous wonders that even the unbelievers could not deny (At 4:16). It would be reasonable to assume, therefore, that false teachers would also want to validate themselves and their messages by performing many “wonderful works.” **It is only natural that a religious person who has little knowledge of the Bible, and no willingness to study the Bible, would turn to something other than the Bible to validate his “Christianity.”**

If the “wonderful works” of the false teachers were true, **then certainly Jesus would not have stated that the false teachers were false.** If God used “wonderful works” to prove that Jesus and the apostles were from Him, then the same works, if true, would prove that the false teachers were true and not false. **But the fact that Jesus in this context states that the teachers are false, means that their “wonderful works” are also false.** They are fraudulent, deceptive and a lie. However, they are such persuasive “wonderful works” that even some Christians would believe them (See Mt 24:24). But they are **deceiving** “wonderful works” (2 Th 2:10). Those whose faith is experientially based are always quick to find “wonderful works” upon which to base their faith. Instead of basing their faith on the word of God, they seek out “wonderful works.” Their search for “wonderful works” identifies them as experi-

ential religionists. Again, we would think that since Jesus used the “wonderful works” as a means by which to identify false teachers today, then we should be cautious about believing frivolous claims of miracles here and there.

One thing is true. If one is mesmerized by the “wonderful works” of a particular teacher, he does not need to be confused as to whether the “wonderful works” are miraculous. If the teacher is not a Christian, then his works cannot be miraculous. He may claim to be a Christian, but if he has not obeyed the gospel by baptism for remission of sins, **then he is not a Christian** (See 2 Th 2:9-11 in reference to Rm 6:3-6; At 2:38; 1 Pt 4:17). **God would not do miracles through a teacher who is not a Christian.** For this reason, all the “wonderful works” (“healings”) of the non-Christian are false. We would suggest that the next time you encounter someone doing “many wonderful works,” you ask the so-called healer if he has obeyed the gospel. We would venture to say that he does not know that the gospel was the historical event of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (See 1 Co 15:1-4). And for sure, he probably does not understand that one must go down into a grave of water with Jesus and be raised in order to walk in newness of life with Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). If he has not obeyed the gospel, his “wonderful works” are false.

Chapter 14

“Lord, Lord” Churches

We must be clear in reference to what Jesus said in the context of Matthew 7:15-23. He was speaking of “Lord, Lord” religionists who had deceived themselves into thinking that their relationship with God was correct. The deception of the group is that they professed allegiance to the Lord, but believed and practiced that which was not the will of God. It was a religiosity based on deception. Because they were not doing the will of God, then their supposed casting out demons and doing many mighty works would lead us to conclude that they were deceiving people into thinking that they were casting out demons and doing mighty works. The fact that they were not doing the will of God means that they were deceiving people.

On the outside a group of such religionists are perceived to have an active relationship with God because they cry out “Lord, Lord.” But their fruits tell another story. Bad leaders produce bad fruit. And bad fruit is the indication of ravenous wolves who are very religious, but very wrong. The following is the bad fruit that is produced by these false teachers and their followers:

A. Twisted concept of salvation:

Bad fruit churches teach a twisted concept of salvation. They always have a corrupted and twisted view of how one is to be reconciled to God. **We must un-**

derstand that that which is most important for man to do in order to be saved eternally would be the greatest focus of Satan in his work to deceive man. And in the area of what is necessary for salvation, Satan has done some of his greatest work among “Lord, Lord” religionists.

We hear fraudulent claims for salvation as “Just believe on Jesus,” “Call on the name of Jesus,” “Receive Jesus into your life,” etc. People are led to believe that if they make such simple statements that they will be saved immediately. Though these are statements that are similar to statements found in the New Testament, they are statements that are used today to emphasize only a part of the whole of what is necessary for salvation. For example, Jesus said, “*But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish*” (Lk 13:3; see 2 Pt 3:9). Calling on or receiving Jesus without repentance is fruitless. The people cry out, “Lord, Lord,” but this plea alone will not save. If we call on the Lord, we must be willing to accept the entirety of what the Lord requires in reference to our salvation. The entirety includes faith, repentance and immersion for remission of sins (See Mk 16:16; At 2:38). “Lord, Lord” believers are only dead men walking because they have called on the name of the Lord, but they may not have repented and crucified themselves with Jesus. If they have repented, they may have not

gone down into the grave with Jesus and been resurrected with Him (See Rm 6:3-6).

Bad fruit churches will always teach that one does not have to obey the gospel of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection through immersion in order to walk in newness of life (See 2 Th 1:6-9; 1 Pt 4:17). False prophets preach false teachings that are believed by entire groups of people, and thus, the people reflect in their lives erroneous teaching. God will not through any miracle validate people who have not obeyed the gospel. One’s faith may take him to the point of crying out “Lord, Lord,” but if it does not take him to obedience of the gospel, then his faith will fail him when Jesus comes (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

B. Warped understanding of obedience:

Bad fruit churches have a warped understanding of what one must do in reference to obeying God. The experiential religionist confuses his experiences with true obedience to the word of God. He feels that his experiences are obedience. He assumes that his calling on the name of the Lord is obedience. But Jesus said that “Lord, Lord” only will not save. Obedience refers to objectively studying the will of God, and then, doing what God commands. But the “Lord, Lord” churches, according to Jesus, are not doing the will of the Lord by casting out demons and doing many mighty works.

The experientialist claims that his participation in healings and exorcism are

obedience to the will of the Lord. But he has deceived himself. He has substituted such practices for doing “*the will of My Father*” (Mt 7:21). He is thus “*practicing lawlessness*” because he has substituted prophesying, exorcism of demons, and doing wonderful works for his own obedience to the law of God.

When the thousands on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 cried out to Peter as to what they should do, Peter responded with commands they had to obey. Specifically, they had to repent, and then be baptized in the name of Jesus (At 2:38). Their cry as to what one must do in order to be saved was answered with instructions on what to obey. And what they had to do was obey the gospel by repenting and being baptized for remission of sins.

C. Twisted understanding of miracles:

Bad fruit churches have a twisted understanding of true miracles. Since those who were claiming to do “wonderful works” were actually practicing lawlessness (Mt 7:23), then their “wonderful works” were not true. They were only lying wonders (2 Th 2:9,10). In their deception, they trusted in their lawless activity of practicing that which was not true. They believed in their practices, not in the true miracles and prophecies that are defined in the Bible. Since “Lord, Lord” churches are not doing the will of the Lord, then their wonderful works cannot be miraculous. God does not supernaturally confirm those who refuse to do

His will. He does not work through lawless people.

D. Belief in the erroneous:

Bad fruit churches reveal their character by their belief in that which is erroneous. People will believe almost anything. And in the world of confused religiosity, if one has little knowledge of the word of God, he will allow his misunderstandings to take him into extreme fantasy. Gullible people will believe all the stories about people being raised from the dead, and all the fantasies false preachers tell about some “wonderful work” here or there. Gullible people are identified by their willingness to believe all the stories of men that are told as “wonderful works.” Bible-believing men of faith, however, are not gullible because they trust in the Holy Spirit inspired testimony of the wonderful works **that are recorded in the Bible**. In order to believe, they believe that the signs of Jesus were written that we “*might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*” (Jn 20:30,31). They consult their Bibles in order to confirm their faith, and then, they use their Bibles to test the spirits of those who perform many wonderful works.

Some people walk by believing in fanciful stories of “wonderful works.” People of Bible faith walk by believing in the wonderful works that are recorded in the Bible. Their faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rm 10:17), not by hearing and believing the fictitious stories that are propagated by false preachers who are seeking to mesmerize

great audiences for their own gain. When a group of gullible people organize a church, they revel in their fanciful stories of unexplained phenomenon. They have a warped understanding of the miracles of the Bible, and thus, they find it very difficult to distinguish between the confirming miracles by which God stood behind His Son and the apostles, and the “wonderful works” that Jesus states in Matthew 7:15-23 are false.

E. Lack of love for the truth:

Bad fruit churches pay little attention to the word of God. Though one may not understand all the phenomena that occur in his life, he can trust in one solid source of truth. This source of truth is the word of God. Because we live in a world of unexplained phenomena, God knew that we could easily be deceived (Mt 24:24). He thus directed our attention to the solid foundation of His word (See 2 Tm 3:16,17). And for this reason, Paul commended the Ephesian elders to God and to His word (At 20:32).

Instead of trusting exclusively in what a teacher is doing, **the hearer should pay more attention to what he is teaching**. If one is not teaching that one must obey the gospel in order to be saved (2 Th 1:6-9), **then whatever he claims to be miraculous is false. God would not work miracles through a false teacher who is teaching that one should not obey the gospel in order to be saved**. Though one might be confused by the so-called “wonderful works” of a ravenous wolf, **he can determine if the**

ravenous wolf is a false teacher simply by asking him if one must obey the gospel in order to be saved. If the wolf says that one is saved apart from obedience to the gospel (At 2:38), then you know that all his “wonderful works” fall into the practicing of lawlessness about which Jesus warned us in Matthew 7:15-23. It is as simple as that.

Our obedience to the gospel, not our experiences, is the final determining factor as to whether we are pleasing in the eyes of God. If one has been baptized for remission of sins, God has added that

person to His fold (At 2:47). Therefore, one should never feel that his faith is marginalized by those who have allowed themselves to be overcome with emotional experiences that seem to be spiritual and from the Holy Spirit. Our confidence in our salvation is in our obedience to what God requires of us to be saved, which requirements are clearly stated in the word of God. Our faith, therefore, is based on the word of God in that we have done what God has said to do in order to be saved. Our faith is not in our experiences, but in the commandments of God.

Chapter 15

Jeremiah 23

A book as this would not be complete without an expository lesson from Jeremiah 23. The religious environment in which Jeremiah lived is so close to the religious environment today that it is almost prophetic. Jeremiah lived in the same world of misguided religiosity wherein men, who had rejected the word of God, believed that they were right in their own thinking and behavior. The religious leaders of Jeremiah’s day had rejected and/or forgotten the word of God. In their religiosity, therefore, they created a god after their own image and religions after their own desires. The cause of the religious environment was explained by Hosea.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you so that you will

be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children (Hs 4:6).

In the historical environment of Jeremiah and Hosea’s day, the people had forgotten the law of God. The religious environment today is somewhat different in that **religious people have not yet learned the law of God.** Religious people today have simply carried on with that which is right in their own eyes, and thus, they continue on a path of destruction, thinking that their religious man-made traditions and ceremonies are pleasing to God. Nevertheless, the religious environments are the same in that religious people have no knowledge of the law of God. It is in this context that Jeremiah’s religious environment is comparable to ours today. The comparison in Jeremiah

23 between then and now is striking.

A. Wayward shepherds:

Bad religious leadership is identified by those “*who destroy and scatter the sheep*” through misguided leadership (vs 1). It is not that the sheep are led to be nonreligious. They are led by shepherds who have no knowledge of the law of God. Leaders who lead God’s people into ignorance will be attended to by God (vs 2). Jeremiah stated that because their doings were evil God would bring judgment down upon them.

In contrast to the shepherds who led the people into ignorance and disobedience of God’s law, God promised that He would gather His sheep again out of the nations to which He drove them into captivity. However, He would gather them unto shepherds who would feed them with the word of God (vs 4). As a result, the sheep would no longer fear either Him or invading nations. They would not be dismayed, or lack anything (vs 4). Good shepherds bring the sheep to the word of God wherein they find peace of mind (Ph 4:7).

In this context of God’s exhortation to Jeremiah’s generation, God made a promise of the Messiah who would come. The “Branch of righteousness” would be the Christ who would “*execute judgment and righteousness in the earth*” (vs 5). In a historical context of despair in captivity, God gave hope of deliverance from those shepherds who led the people astray through their ignorance of the will of God. The shepherds who were igno-

rant of the word of God would be replaced with the Branch of righteousness who would lead them to God through His word (See Jn 12:48).

B. Bad preachers lead to bad results:

In verse 9 Jeremiah turned to the prophets (preachers) who were guilty of leading the people astray into destruction. He wrote, “*My heart within me is broken because of the prophets.*” His lamentation over the spiritual state of the people rested on the backs of the religious leaders. “*For both prophet and priest are profane*” (vs 11). God had “*found their wickedness*” (vs 11). As a result of their behavior, God promised that He would “*bring disaster on them*” (12).

God had “*seen folly in the prophets*” (vs 13). Their folly was that they “*prophesied by Baal and caused My people Israel to err*” (vs 13). Because the prophets had rejected the standard of God’s word, their behavior reflected their moral rebellion. “*I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing*” (vs 14). The horrible thing was that they “*commit adultery and walk in lies*” (vs 14). In this context the “adultery” probably refers to their “theological” adultery with the false teaching of Baal prophets. As Israelites, they were married to God in a covenant relationship, but slept in the bed of Baal idolatry. They were thus full of lies. Their corrupted moral leadership set an example for the flock to follow. Therefore, “*they strengthen also the hands of evildoers so that no one turns back from his wickedness*” (vs 14).

God's judgment of adulterous preachers who compromise the word of God with the false teachings of men is not pleasant. God would feed them with the bitterness of wormwood. They would be made to drink bitter gall for the profaneness they had preached throughout the land (vs 15).

Jeremiah's exhortation to the people was that they should change preachers. "*Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you*" (vs 16). The reason the people needed to stop listening to the preachers who were ignorant of the word of God was that **the people were made worthless** (vs 16). They were worthless as a witness to the nations that there was only one God. They were worthless in setting a moral example before the nations. They were worthless in leading people to faith in the one true and living God.

Lying prophets can always be identified because they often preach their visions instead of the Bible (vs 16). Because they have rejected the word of God, they trust in their visions in order to validate their positions before the people. They seek to entice the people to listen to them because they have supposedly seen some vision or had some dream. They thus preach their visions and dreams and not that which comes from "*the mouth of the Lord*" (vs 16).

The audience of the bad prophets listens because the people are of the same nature. The prophets, therefore, have an audience for they speak to those who walk "*according to the imagination of his own heart*" (vs 17). These are the "itching ear audiences" about which Paul

warned Timothy (2 Tm 4:3).

God's proclamation to the people in reference to the prophets is, "***I have not sent these prophets ... I have not spoken to them***" (vs 21). If these preachers had preached the word of God to the people, then the people would have turned from their evil way (vs 21). But the fact that the people also followed the false preachers was evidence that the preachers were false.

Jeremiah then identified those who had forsaken the word of God in order to preach their own lies. We can identify them by what they say. In order to validate their religious positions, and thus command a hearing from the people, the false preachers will usually say, "*I have dreamed. I have dreamed*" (vs 25). They preach their dreams, and thus, they preach "***the deceit of their own heart***" (vs 26). In preaching their own dreams they "*try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal*" (vs 27). They speak more of their dreams to their neighbors than the word of God because they have allowed their dreams to have a greater impact on their lives than the word of God.

God challenged the prophet who subjected himself to his own dreams, "*The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream*" (vs 28). He then challenged the objective prophet who was faithful to the word of God, "*And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully*" (vs 28). The dreams of the dreamers would fail. But the word of those who preached the

word of God would break into pieces the lies of the false prophets (vs 29).

God says that He is against those preachers who preach lies (vs 30). He is against those who seek to validate their own existence as preachers by saying, "*He [God] says!*" (vs 31). When the preacher says, "God says," but does not quote the word of God, then he is proclaiming something that is based on his own feelings or intuition. What he says, however, may be true or false. But we can identify the false preacher when he says "God said to me," for such preachers are seeking to command the attention of the audience by something they feel in their hearts or have experienced in their lives.

Our faith is not in those who claim that "God has spoken to them," but in what is written (Rm 10:17). God is against "*those who prophesy false dreams*" (vs 32). He is against them because in preaching their false dreams, they "*cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness*" (vs 32). The people need to understand that God did not send those who preach their dreams (vs 32).

God's conclusion in reference to the one who preaches his dreams, and falsely claims that "God says," is that He will punish that man and his house (vs 34).

God told Jeremiah that He would cease giving "oracles" in his ministry. There would be no more revelation of messages whereby one could claim that

an oracle came directly from God. Therefore, **if anyone from that time on claimed that God had given him an oracle, then everyone would know that that person was lying.** They were lying because God was giving no more oracles (vss 34-40). The same principle is applicable today. God has granted unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pt 1:3). We are not to add to or subtract from His word (Rv 22:18,19). The faith has forever been granted unto the saints (Jd 3). All Scripture, therefore, is complete and able to furnish the man of God unto all good works (2 Tm 3:16,17). If some preacher says, "God told me," (that is, "the oracle of God"), then that preacher speaks a lie. In His word God has told us all that we need. He has left nothing out to be privately spoken to individuals who seek personal validation from God through their own experiences and feelings. The early inspired writers received the word of God through inspiration. We can know the will of God today only through hours of perspiration in study. "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Tm 2:15).

It is not our goal in the Christian life to be good meritorious "religiousarians," but to walk faithfully and obediently according to the will of our Father who is in heaven.