

FINDING THE PRICELESS PEARL

**An Adventure To Discover
The Gospel Way Into Eternal Life**





Jesus said, "The Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44,45).

Pearls are the result of years of pain and struggle. A pearl begins when a small foreign particle becomes lodged in the muscle of an oyster shell. Over many years, the oyster seeks to relieve the pain by coating the foreign particle with nacre, the substance out of which the oyster shell is made. After years of coating, a beautiful pearl is formed. Once the awesome pearl is formed, it takes great struggle on the part of those who search for pearls to discover those oyster shells that actually have pearls.

After the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, God labored with the seedline of woman, and then the seedline of Abraham, in order to relieve mankind of the pain of sin. God's patience and struggle with mankind over millennia eventually gave birth of the pearl of the gospel that came with the struggle and sacrificial offering of the Son of God on a cross outside Jerusalem over two thousand years ago. Finding this gospel pearl of great price will relieve one of all the pain of sin that we bring on ourselves. This book will aid you in finding the pearl of great price that is through grace given free by God.

Jesus calls us to discovery,
*Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you
and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy
and My burden is light.*

Matthew 11:28-30
(International King James Version)

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*For I am not ashamed of the gospel,
for it is the power of God unto salvation
to every one who believes,
to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
For it is the righteousness of God
revealed from faith to faith,
as it is written,
“The just will live by faith.”*

Romans 1:16,17

The World Gospel Book

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[We encourage the reprinting of this book, though all the information of this title page must be included in every printed edition.]

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WELCOME TO THE GREATEST ADVENTURE OF YOUR LIFE!

In every culture of the world we find people who are religious. The reason for this is that we are religious beings. And because we are religious, we conclude that this world is not all there is. We also have a conscience that moves us to do what is good to our fellow man. Because we seek good, we conclude that there is an eternal Good. Most people are assured that there is a God, and that this God has prepared us for something that is far better and beyond this world.

All of us have come to one common conclusion. We know that we do not have the ability to determine a final authority of what is moral and right. Societies have tried their best for thousands of years to make moral laws that will keep us on the right path. But the general lesson we have learned from our efforts to determine our own way, is that we lead ourselves away from God. We hinder our relationships with others because we often refuse to allow God to direct our behavior with one another.

Those who realize that it is not within us to determine our own behavior have come to the conclusion that there must be a God beyond this world who is the origin of all of us. The ancient Greek philosophers came to this conclusion. They concluded that man has the mental ability to create a god after his own imagination. And the ancient Greeks had a great imagination. They created many gods. However, one day in their history about two thousand years ago, someone who had encountered on a

Damascus road in Syria the Son of the one true and living God, came through Athens, Greece. He stood up on the platform of philosophical debate in Athens and said, "*The One whom you worship in ignorance, Him I declare to you*" (At 17:22-31)

The Greeks were knowledgeable enough to conclude that there was a God out there they could not define by the words of their dictionary. The best they could do was to build an altar "To the Unknown God." This is the God who is beyond the definition of our dictionaries, but the One we would conclude has revealed Himself to us. If He is truly God, then we conclude that He would speak His will to us. And He has. He has not only spoken through words of revelation, but also in the revelation of His Son. When people first encountered the Son, they concluded that if one has seen the Son, then he has seen the Father also.

Satan has deceived so many who have forgotten to seek the "Unknown God" who has made Himself known through His Son. But we know better. We know that in our busy lives we must slow down and discover the will of this eternal God who seeks to bless us with eternal existence. This is our quest. We want to know the heart of the God who would give His Son as an eternal sacrifice in order that we live in His presence forever. We pray that this book will be your road map on this quest. So sit back, and enjoy this wonderful journey of discovery of the heart of God, and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE GREATEST PROBLEM

Section 1

Almost all people have the desire to live forever. No one likes to view the grave as our final resting place. However, there is a serious problem that makes us question our destiny after the grave. This is our problem of doing wrong. All of us struggle in our relationships, both with God and with our friends. In our struggle to please God, we stumble. There are many who do not know what the will of God is, and thus, they do wrong without knowing that they sin. However, there are also those who know His will but still sin. People ignore God either willingly, or ignorantly. In either case, it is called sin.

We struggle in our relationships with others, even though God gave instructions to guide our behavior. But we often ignore these instructions, and thus, we cause harm to others and embarrassment to ourselves. We sin. Life, therefore, is a struggle. This is one reason why God gave us the Bible. He gave it to us to bring hope to those who are struggling in life and realize that they need a road map to happiness.

When we do wrong, we always have a bad conscience or a feeling of guilt. In order to deal with this guilt, many people who do not know the Bible, have simply developed their own solutions to take care of their guilt. As a result, many religions have been created in the world today in an effort to deal with the problem of

sin. Unfortunately, God does not accept man's religious inventions that are created by the imaginations of those who know little or nothing about His will. He does not accept our efforts to self-sanctify (cleanse) ourselves of sin against Him.

God is our creator. The fact that He is our creator means that He is the One who must tell us where to discover happiness. We must allow Him to tell us how to have fulfilling relationships with Him and one another. This means that we must focus on God's law and our problem of sin against His will. When we do this, great things will happen in our lives.

Chapter 1

CREATION AND LAW

The Bible does not seek to prove the existence of God. His existence is simply assumed. However, as the revelation of God to man, the Bible was given to us by God in order to answer the most important questions we have in reference to our existence.

- **From where did we come?**
- **What does God, our Creator, expect of us?**
- **What will happen when we die and where will we go?**

Everyone has asked the above

questions. In answer to the first question, the Bible simply states that the first two people on earth were created in the spiritual **image** of God (Gn 1:26,27). We are the product of the God who also created all things (Cl 1:16).

Since we are God's creation, then we should be concerned about what our duty is in reference to our Creator. The Bible says, "*Fear God and keep His **commandments**, for this is the whole duty of man*" (Ec 12:13). This statement answers the second question. It is our duty as God's created beings to obey our Creator. Those who love God will obey Him.

The Bible also answers the third question. Concerning our death, the Bible says, "*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the **judgment***" (Hb 9:27). For the Christian, there is hope of **eternal life** beyond the grave (Jn 3:16). But for those who have not submitted to God, there is a destiny of eternal destruction (2 Th 1:7-9).

The Bible thus answers the most important questions that we must ask. We came from God. We must obey His will. When we die, we will be held accountable in judgment for our obedience or disobedience of His will (2 Co 5:10).

Chapter 2 THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

God first created two people. They were Adam and Eve. He created Adam and Eve in His own image. All men since Adam and Eve are also in the spiritual image of God. Being in the image of God at least means that **man is a spiritual being** and has the **right to make choices**. We are people who can make choices concerning our behavior.

Having the right to make choices means that **we must be held accountable for our choices**. In other words, we will be held accountable in final judgment for the choices we make on this earth. The Bible says, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*" (2 Co 5:10).

In order for Adam and Eve to be in a situation or environment that would allow choices to be made, God had created this present world. This is a world that allows choices to be made. God also made natural laws in order to sustain order in this natural environment. This world, there-

SCRIPTURE READING: Gn 1,2; Ps 8; 19:1,2; Is 40; At 17:24-28

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: **Obedience:** 1 Sm 15:22; At 5:29; Hb 11:8, **Judgment:** Mt 5:21,22; Jn 5:24-30; 12:31; Rm 14:10; 2 Co 5:10; 1 Pt 4:17, **Eternal life:** Mt 25:46; Jn 5:21,26; 8:12; Ti 1:2, **Eternal destruction:** 2 Th 1:7-9; Rv 20:11-15; 21:8



fore, is the best of all possible environments for the dwelling of individuals who have freedom to make choices of either good or evil.

God gave **moral laws** to us in order to govern our behavior and relationships with one another in an environment where choices must be made. One of these moral laws for Adam and Eve was that they not eat of one special tree in the Garden of Eden, **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil** (Gn 2:16,17). Contrary to God's law, however, both Adam and Eve broke the law and ate of the fruit of this tree (Gn 3:1-8). By eating of this tree they transgressed (sinned against) the law of God. As a result, sin entered into the world because they were the first people to sin. With their sin came also their separation from God, and thus, **spiritual death** (Rm 5:12). Adam personally suffered spiritual death because he personally sinned by eating of the forbidden fruit.

SCRIPTURE READING: Gn 2,3

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Choose: Dt 4:32; 30:19; Ja 24:15; Pv 1:29; Is 7:15,16; 56:9; At 2:40; 3:19; 1 Tm 2:13,14; Hb 11:25; **Law:** Ps 19:7-11; 119:77,97; 1 Tm 1:9; Js 1:25; 2:8; **Judgment:** Mt 25; Jn 5:22; 12:48; At 17:30,31; Rm 2:8,16; Hb 9:27; 10:27; 2 Pt 3:7; **Sin:** Rm 14:23; Js 4:17; 1 Jn 3:4

Chapter 3

SIN AND SEPARATION

In reference to Adam and Eve's spiritual condition after they ate of the forbidden tree, the Bible records, ***“Therefore, as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin, and so [spiritual] death***

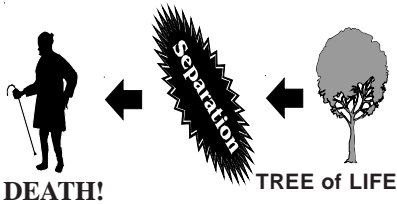
passed to all men because all have sinned” (Rm 5:12).

SPIRITUAL DEATH: When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, their sin caused their personal spiritual **separation** from God. As a result, they personally suffered **spiritual death**. Everyone since the days of Adam and Eve have also suffered spiritual death, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rm 3:23). Every person today is spiritually separated from God because of his or her own personal sin, not because of Adam's sin. Adam and Eve were personally responsible for the guilt of their own sin. We are personally responsible for our own sin today.

Isaiah 59:2 states, ***“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear.”***

PHYSICAL DEATH: Not only did Adam and Eve spiritually die before God when they sinned, they were also driven from the Garden of Eden, lest they also put forth their hands ***“and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever”*** (Gn 3:22). Consequently, **physical death** entered into the world for the first time. The Bible speaks concerning what happened when Adam and Eve were separated from the tree of life: ***“For since by man came [physical] death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all will be made***

alive" (1 Co 15:21,22). We suffer the consequences of Adam's sin.



When Adam was separated from the tree of life, all humanity was separated with him. Therefore, all men must physically die (Hb 9:27). We thus suffer the **consequences** of Adam's sin in reference to physical death because Adam caused all humanity to be separated from the tree of life.

Concerning our choices to sin, we are also like Adam. As Adam, all of us have made choices to sin against God's law. All of us therefore sin by transgressing the law of God (1 Jn 3:4). We sin by not doing that which we know is good (Js 4:17). For this reason the Bible is correct by stating, "*There is none righteous, no, not one*" (Rm 3:10).

When we think about sin, therefore, we must think about separation. When one personally sins, he or she is spiritually separated from God. We thus suffer the **guilt** of our own sin.

We must think about separation even when discussing the subject of physical death. When Adam sinned, he was separated from the tree of life lest he eat of it and live forever (Gn 3:22-24). Because of this separation, it is now necessary that all of us physically die, for through Adam all humanity has been separated

from the tree of life (Hb 9:27). We therefore suffer the **consequences** of Adam's sin in reference to physical death. This is what the Bible means when it says, "... as in Adam all die ..." (1 Co 15:22).

Though we sin against God, however, there is hope of reconciliation [reunion]! Even when Adam and Eve sinned, God gave hope in order that all of us be restored to a relationship with Him, for He knew that we would all sin as Adam. This hope for an eternal solution for sin was first given by God to Adam and Eve and recorded in Genesis 3:15.

THE GOSPEL SEED

I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise His heel.

In this statement God promised a solution for sin. It is very important that we remember this particular prophecy. This is the first announcement in the Bible of the **great news** (gospel) that God had in His plan to bring us into eternity with Him. Even before the creation of the world, God had a gospel plan to redeem us from sin. He made this plan because He knew that in our weakness we would sin (See Rv 13:8). Genesis 3:15 was a prophecy of God's intentions to set into action His gospel plan of salvation. It was a prophecy about Jesus who would come and crush Satan's head by His death on the cross for the sins of humanity.

SCRIPTURE READING: Gn 3:22-24; Rm 5:12-21; 1 Co 15:20-28

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Separation from God: Mt 7:21-23; Ep 2:1-3; 2 Th 1:7-9, **Physical death:** Ps 6:5; 13:3; 23:4; Jn 5:24; 8:51; 1 Co 15:54-56; Hb 2:14; Rv 2:10, **Spiritual death:** Rm 6; Ep 2:1, **Sin & separation:** Is 59:1,2; Ez 18:20; Mt 7:21-23

Chapter 4

THE DILEMMA OF HUMANITY

We must agree with what the Bible says in Romans 3:23: ***“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** The problem with sin is that it brings spiritual death because sin separates us from God. ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”*** (Rm 6:23).

It is necessary that we have moral laws that direct our relationships with one another. It is important to understand that we cannot be left alone in a world of human relationships to develop our own moral laws. Throughout history people have tried to establish consistent moral laws by which to direct their social behavior. But when we are left to ourselves to direct our own ways, moral decay is the result. The Bible is right when it says, ***“It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps”*** (Jr 10:23).

When we try to make our own moral laws, we always end up making laws that please our own **worldly** desires. We often make moral laws that will allow us to do as we please. Therefore, if we were allowed to make our own moral laws, then we often make rules that eventually lead

to social confusion and moral decay. God knew that we would do this to ourselves, so He took the initiative to give us moral laws that would direct our living in response to the gospel.

But the problem with any system of law is that we cannot keep it **perfectly**. For this reason, all of us have violated God’s law. Even if we try to do the best we can, we still break the law. And breaking God’s law is sin. Sin thus brings spiritual death because sin separates us from God (Is 59:1,2). When one is in a state of being separated from God because of sin against His law, he cannot by any means or methods of himself be reunited with God.

OUR DILEMMA

- **Inability to keep law perfectly in order to save ourselves.**
- **Inability to do enough good works to atone for sins we commit against God.**

We have problems. First, **we cannot keep law perfectly in order to save ourselves, for we have all sinned** (Rm 3:23). Even if our desire is to obey God in every way possible, we still sin. Therefore, because no one can keep God’s law perfectly, the law itself condemns us as law-breakers. We are thus driven to find something other than law in order to be reconciled to God.

Second, **we cannot do good works in order to atone for the sins we commit**. We cannot be saved by good works, **lest we arrogantly boast one against another**

because of our good works (Ep 2:9). God simply does not accept our good works as atonement for sin. He cannot because **there is no amount of good works that we can do to earn eternal life in heaven**. Therefore, we are in a state of condemnation in our sin. We are unable to redeem ourselves from our sin against God. All of us stand condemned in the sight of God because of our sins. So what can we do?

SCRIPTURE READING: Rm 3; Ep 2:1-10

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: All sin: Rm 3:23; 11:32; Gl 3:22; 1 Jn 1:6-9, **Sin and death:** Is 59:1-3; Ez 18:4; 1 Jn 3:6, **Definition of sin:** Rm 14:23; Js 4:17; 1 Jn 3:4

Chapter 5 POWER OF GOD'S WAY

In order to enjoy a great life, we must turn to the instructions of our Creator. We are obligated to follow His instructions simply because He created us. When we go wrong, we cannot invent our own religious system of forgiveness in order to sanctify (cleanse) ourselves. We must go only to the Bible in order to find a solution for our problem of sin.

God says of the Bible, *"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).

The word "inspiration" means "God-breathed." The Bible has thus been "breathed out" by God. **It is God's road map to bring us into**

eternal life in His presence. It is the guiding measure by which we must direct our lives according to the gospel of His Son. Therefore, we should consider the word of God as David did in his life when he wrote, *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (Ps 119:105). For this reason we hunger and thirst after God's righteousness (Mt 5:6). We yearn for direction from the word of God in order to find our way into His eternal presence (1 Pt 2:2).

God's word can change our lives. *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart"* (Hb 4:12).

Obedience to God's word in our lives will result in great **spiritual growth** and contentment beyond human understanding (Ph 4:7). The Bible says that we must *"grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 3:18). Our only source for knowledge of the gospel of Jesus, is the Bible. Therefore, Paul wrote, *"I commend you to God and to the word of His grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified"* (At 20:32). When we grow in knowledge of the Bible, we grow in knowledge of Jesus, for the Bible is about revealing the gospel of Jesus to us. Studying the Bible will spiritually build us up and reassure our souls because we discover the gos-

pel of Jesus Christ. The Bible, therefore, will do the following:

His Word Works In Us

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe (1 Th 2:13).

The solution for a stressful life is discovered in the Bible. The solution for a better life is also discovered in the Bible. Our knowledge of what the Bible says, therefore, is necessary in order that we have life and that we have it more abundantly through gospel living (Jn 10:10). The more we understand the gospel, the better our lives will be if we submit to what God has directed us to do. As students of the Bible, it should be our goal to better our lives by living the gospel way.

SCRIPTURE READING: Ps 19:7-11; 119

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Revelation: Mt 11:25; 1 Co 2:6-13; Gl 1:11,12; Ep 3:3-5; 2 Tm 3:16,17; Hb 1:1,2; 2 Pt 1:20,21, **Work of God's word:** Ps 19:8; 73:24; 119:40,93,104,130; Jn 5:24; 8:51; 15:3; 17:17; 20:30,31; Rm 10:17; 15:4; 1 Co 10:11; 2 Tm 3:15; Js 1:21,25; 1 Pt 1:22,23

Chapter 6

GOD'S AUTHORITY

When God gave the Sinai law to the Jews at Mount Sinai, He warned them about adding to this law. He warned, **"You will not add to the word that I command you, nor will**

you diminish from it, so that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you" (Dt 4:2). This was a stern warning and one that still applies today. God's final revelation to man was the book of Revelation. With the last verses of instruction to man in this book, God warned us not to add to His word.

No Additions Or Subtractions

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. If anyone will take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part out of the Book of Life, out of the holy city and the things that are written in this book (Rv 22:18,19).

God could not have made His point more clear. **We must not add to His word any of our religious traditions that we invent for ourselves.** We must not add as requirements for our salvation any religious rites of men. **Adding to God's law is saying that His word for us is not sufficient.** It is saying that God needs help to determine what is best for us. But God says that His law is the **"perfect law of liberty"** (Js 1:25). It is perfect in order **"that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"** (2 Tm 3:17). God's law is **perfect** and **complete** in order to bring us to Him through the gospel, and eventually into eternal heaven.

SCRIPTURE READING: Gl 1:6-10

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Do not add to the word: Pv 30:6; 2 Jn 9-11, **All-sufficient word:** 2 Tm 3:15-17; 2 Pt 1:3, **Word causes growth:** At 20:32; 1 Th 2:13; 1 Pt 2:1,2; 2 Pt 3:18, **Final revelation:** Gl 1:6-9; 2 Tm 4:1-4; Jd 3

Chapter 7

PROBLEMS WITH RELIGION

In the efforts of some to find a solution for the problem of spiritual and physical death, many have developed religions of self-sanctification. It is believed that through the practice of self-sanctifying good works and religious ceremonial rites one can justify himself before God. However, we must remember that good works, and the performance of religious rites, do not atone for our sins. Simply because good works and the performance of religious rites may satisfy our conscience and give us a good feeling about ourselves, we must not be led to believe that such religiosity will replace the gospel of Jesus. **The fact is that in seeking a solution for sin through religious performances, we actually sin by following after our own religiosity that leads us away from the gospel of Jesus. Religion always leads one away from God, whereas the gospel always leads one closer to God and His word.** Therefore, we must ask ourselves if we are living according to the gospel, or after our own efforts to cleanse ourselves of sin.

God is serious about our doing what He has instructed us to do in His word. The Jews of Jesus' day

did precisely what millions of people are doing today. Instead of obeying the word of God and responding to the gospel, they seek to sanctify themselves by upholding the traditions of their heritage. Here is what Jesus said of this practice:

Vain Religious Worship

*Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. **In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.**' For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men (Mk 7:6-9).*

Jesus called their religious behavior an act of hypocrisy. It was hypocrisy because they were practicing **their own religious rules and rituals** in order to sanctify (cleanse) themselves, and thus justify themselves before God. But Jesus called this **vain** (useless) worship. It was useless in an effort to please God. **It was useless religion because their hearts were not right with God, though they performed their religious ceremonies of worship.**

Some religious traditions are not wrong, as long as they are recognized as tradition, and thus, **not binding on our consciences as self-sanctifying religious rites.** However, when we make our religious traditions the law of our religion, then we do as Jesus said of the Jews. They were **"laying aside the commandment of God in order to hold to their traditions"** (Mk 7:8). This

is the tragedy of everyone who exchanges self-sanctifying religious rites for the gospel.

Many religious people throughout the world today are often more interested in keeping their religious traditions than in responding to the gospel of Jesus. Here is what Jesus continued to say to such people: ***“All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition”*** (Mk 7:9). Is this our attitude toward the word of God? Are we willing to lay aside the work of God through Jesus in order to keep our religious heritage? Remember, adherence to religion moves us away from, not closer to God.

We must not miss this point that Jesus said to the Jews. Religious traditions originate from our religious history, and thus become our religious heritage. It is not wrong to do things in a traditional manner. However, when the traditional manner of doing something becomes the only way something can be done, then it becomes a religious tradition, or rite, that is bound on the consciences of the people. If we cause division among believers because of our religious traditions, then such traditions have become binding law on our minds. If we believe that our own religious rites must be kept in order to be sanctified before God, then we

are moving away from God.

At this point in one's apostasy from the word of God, the traditions start to replace the commandments of God. Jesus said in Mark 7 that we first start this process of falling from God by ***“teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”*** (Mk 7:7). One then continues to fall away from God by ***“laying aside the commandment of God”*** in order to practice the religious rites of his heritage (Mk 7:8). Eventually, one finds himself rejecting ***“the commandment of God”*** in order to keep his traditions (Mk 7:9).



Each one of us must ask ourselves if this has happened to our faith. If it has, then it is the purpose of this book to restore the word of God in order that we are able to determine what is tradition and what is the actual word of God. **It is a serious matter to add to the will of God in a futile effort to seek God's favor through our own self-sanctifying religious behavior.** The reason this is serious is because one's religion may actually be in vain. It may be useless. Add to this what Jesus said of those Jews who did the same in His day. **They were hypo-**

DIGRESSION INTO RELIGION

Teaching
Traditions
of Men



Laying Aside
Commandments
of God to keep traditions



Rejecting
Commandments
of God to keep traditions

crites in their religious behavior because they rejected the commandment of God in order to keep their traditions. They were obedient to their own religious traditions, but rebellious to the commandments of God. This is religious hypocrisy.

Many Jews did believe in Jesus. However, their belief was so weak that it would not move them to leave their religious heritage in order to follow Him. Therefore, Jesus said to these Jews, ***‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed’*** (Jn 8:31). But they would not abide in His word as many today will not abide in His word. To the same religious people, Jesus added, ***‘You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.’*** (Jn 8:44). A faith that does not move one closer to God, moves one away from God and closer to Satan.

In conjunction with religious traditions, some have been led astray by their own emotions and feelings. They seek to self-sanctify themselves through emotional experiences rather than obedience to the gospel. Some even claim that the Holy Spirit is leading and moving them to do things the Holy Spirit never said He would do in the first place. This is where the disciple of Jesus should be careful.

The only way we can know what the Holy Spirit will do in our lives is to listen to what He said He would do in the Bible that He inspired to be written and read.

Religions that focus on human emotional experiences, while ignoring the Bible, **are religions that lead one into the deception of self-sanctification.** Remember, strong emotional conviction in religion is not a guarantee that one is of the truth and saved. Having a zeal for God without knowledge of God is a useless religious exercise in reference to our salvation (Rm 10:2; Gl 4:17,18; 1 Tm 1:5-7). For example, Cornelius was a devout man who did many good works (At 10:1,2). However, he had to hear and obey the gospel before he could be saved (At 11:1-14). Simon was a strong religious leader in the city of Samaria. Everyone in the city believed him (At 8:9-11). However, he also had to hear and obey the gospel in order to be saved (At 8:12,13). It is not good enough to be religiously committed, devoted or zealous toward God. We are not saved by works, but through a positive response to the gospel. We must remember that it is not in man to direct his own steps to eternal life (Jr 10:23).

The only way one can know for sure if he or she is doing what God would have one do is to search the Scriptures. We must be as the Bereans. Luke wrote of them, ***‘These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to see whether those things were so’*** (At 17:11). Noble believers study their Bibles.

We must be challenged to

search the Scriptures in order to determine if our faith is based on the word of God or on our religious heritage. We must be challenged with the following two questions. Our answers to these questions will determine whether we are willing to listen to God concerning His solution for our problem of sin, or continue to trust in our religious heritage.

YES - NO If you discover in the Bible that you have been serving God according to human religious traditions, and not according to the word of God, then are you willing to change in order to do what the Bible instructs us to do in order to find a solution for sin?

YES - NO If you discover something in the Bible that contradicts your present religious heritage, are you willing to change in order to do what the Bible says?

SCRIPTURE READING: Mt 15:1-9 (Is 29:13); Mk 7:1-9; Rm 1:21-32; Cl 2:1-23

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Traditions: Ep 5:6; Cl 2:8,20-23; 1 Tm 6:20, **Deception of traditional religions:** 2 Th 2:10-12; 1 Tm 4:1-5; 2 Tm 4:3-5; 2 Jn 9,10, **Seeking God:** Mt 7:7,8; 11:28,29; Rv 3:20

Chapter 8 IMPOSSIBLE THINGS

We all know that we have a problem with sin. What many have done, however, is attempt to work out their own solutions to remedy their sin problem in order to have a good conscience before God. In this effort to find solutions for sin and behavior that we suppose pleases God, many

have simply forgotten two very important principles. Both principles involve the great news that surrounds the truth of the gospel.

1. We cannot buy heaven with good works.

Suppose you owed someone so much money that it would take you five hundred years of working every day in order to earn enough money to repay your debt. Could you possibly repay the debt? Certainly not! If you were physically strong, you could possibly live to be eighty or ninety years old. At the time of your death, however, you would still be in debt. Thus there is no possible way you could personally work the five hundred years in order to repay your debt.



Now suppose God would offer you a gift that was so great that there would be no possible way for you to repay what it cost. Upon accepting the gift according to God's conditions of acceptance, you would say, "What I now owe is greater than what I can repay." You are correct. You could not repay God the cost of the gift.

Remember the parable of the man who owed ten thousand talents to a king (See Mt 18:23-35). There

was no possible way for him to repay his debt. When the man was brought to pay his debt, he responded to the king by falling down on his knees. He begged for relief from the debt. The king had mercy and subsequently forgave him his debt. This was grace given to one who could not repay his debt.

So it is with our relationship with God and entrance into heaven. We cannot pay God for eternal life in heaven. **What we would owe is more than what we could possibly pay.** We are thus doomed because we cannot buy forgiveness for our sins that separate us from both God and heaven.

Some people believe that they can pay God with their good works. In other words, they believe they can put God in debt to them by doing good works that will make God owe them their forgiveness and heaven. But the fact is, **one cannot live long enough in order to do enough good works to pay God for one day in heaven.**

We are deceiving ourselves if we think we can buy our salvation from God with good works that we suppose will atone for the sin that separates us from God and heaven. God says we cannot do enough good works to adequately pay for the eternal life that He has to offer. If we could live a thousand lifetimes, we still could not pay the price of our eternal life. If we are doing good works in order to buy eternal life, then we have no chance of paying the final bill.

The point is that we cannot put God in debt to give us eternal life. We cannot make God a **debtor**. If the reward of heaven were by good works, then **“the reward is not credited according to grace, but according to debt”** (Rm 4:4). Therefore, we cannot stand in final judgment and demand eternal life from God because of our good works. The gift is too great to be earned by the efforts of any person.

2. *We cannot earn God's favor (grace) with perfect law-keeping.*

The second principle that identifies some who are religiously misguided is the belief that one can so live according to God's law that he or she can demand salvation on the basis of obedience to God's law. Some may feel that they are good because of their self-righteous obedience. However, **one sin makes a sinner**. The Bible says, **“For whoever will keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he has become guilty of all”** (Js 2:10). If we think we are righteous according to our obedience, but break one law, the law condemns us to be unrighteous. Therefore, **“man is not justified by the works of law but by the faith of Jesus Christ ... for by the works of law no flesh will be justified”** (Gl 2:16). The Bible also says, **“Therefore by the deeds of law no flesh will be justified in His sight”** (Rm 3:20).

The reason why one is not pronounced righteous before God by

trying to keep law perfectly is the fact that all men break God's law (Rm 3:23). *"There is none righteous, no, not one"* (Rm 3:10). And the wages of sin is spiritual **death** (Rm 6:23). This is why no one can possibly be justified before God by keeping His law perfectly.

We cannot earn our salvation by doing good works. We cannot keep God's law perfectly in order to live without sin. We are thus condemned by the law of God to be eternally separated from God and heaven. We are in a state of condemnation unless there is a solution for our problem of sin. In recognition of our sinful state of condemnation, every one of us should be driven to ask what Paul proclaimed, *"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"* (Rm 7:24). The answer to this question is not in the invention of religion or our own methods of self-sanctification. **When dealing with sin against God, the only solution is God's solution. The only source for discovering God's solution for sin is found in the Bible.**

SCRIPTURE READING: Rm 3,4; Gl 2,3

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: **Sin and death:** Is 59:1,2; Rm 5:8-21; 6:23, **Sin and law:** Ez 18:20; Rm 14:23; Js 4:17; 1 Jn 3:4, **Good works:** Rm 3:27,28; 4:1-5; 11:6; Ep 2:8-10

We must never forget that God created man with the ability and freedom to make choices. Adam and Eve were placed in an environment that allowed choices to be made. We are in the same environment today.

Adam and Eve were **free-moral individuals**. They were created to be moral individuals with the freedom to choose concerning the behavior of their lives. So are we.

But with freedom comes responsibility toward God and one's fellow man. And in order to control our behavior toward God, and our relationships with one another, God gave instructions (law). Law is necessary for all of us to live together in harmony. Law assumes that we will be accountable for our behavior.

But with law comes sin, for no one can keep law perfectly. When sin occurs, there is separation from God, and thus, spiritual death. If one continues in a state of spiritual death, he or she will be eternally destroyed from the presence of God.

People throughout history have realized that they were sinners, and thus, have constructed various religious practices in order to try to make themselves right in the sight of God. There are thus numerous religions throughout the world that offer different self-sanctifying rites for one to attempt to be justified before God. However, God does not accept the meritorious performance of our religious rites that have been created after our desires to justify ourselves before Him. Man-made religions mean nothing to God. They are only the invention of those who seek to be religious according to their own desires.

We must keep in mind that though people are religious, being religious does not mean that one is right with God. Most people are religious.

But being a Christian as one of God's children means that one believes and is conducting his or her life according to the gospel of God. One cannot claim to have faith in Jesus Christ if he refuses to base his faith on the gospel of Christ (See Rm 10:17).

Some have misled themselves into believing that the Holy Spirit can save them directly. In turning from the gospel of Jesus, Jesus knew that some would deceive themselves into believing such. So He promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit will **"guide [you apostles] into all the truth"** (Jn 16:13). And just in case there would be those who would lead themselves to believe that the Holy

Spirit would personally reveal other truth than what was revealed through the apostles, Jesus stated that **"He [the Holy Spirit] will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears [from the Father], that He will speak"** (Jn 16:13). And just in case some might take their focus off the gospel revelation of Jesus who was preached by the apostles, Jesus added, **"He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify Me"** (Jn 16:14). Therefore, any religion that glorifies the Holy Spirit over Jesus, is not listening to either Jesus or the Holy Spirit. True faith in Jesus glorifies the gospel of Jesus over the Holy Spirit, for it is Jesus who saves.

GOD'S GOSPEL SOLUTION

Section 2

When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he spiritually died, for his sin separated him from God (Rm 5:12). He was also separated from the tree of life, and thus, he took all humanity with him from the tree of life and into physical death. Subsequently, all of us must now suffer the consequences of his sin in that we all must physically die (1 Co 15:20-22). In the midst of this human tragedy, however, God made a promise that a gospel solution for sin would come (Gn 3:15). When we discover God's gospel solution for sin, we will find eternal life.

Throughout the Old Testament there are hundreds of prophecies that speak of the coming Messiah who would atone for the sins of the

world. These are prophecies that speak of an opportunity to return to an eternal relationship with our Creator. These are prophecies of the Son of God who would die on the cross in order to reconcile us to God. He would be the source of eternal life. The Son would come to give us a gospel way to conquer our fear of physical death that terminates life (Hb 2:14).

Chapter 9

THE GOSPEL BLESSING

Four thousand years ago, God chose a man by the name of Abraham through whose seed He would bring into the world the One who would be our Savior. God promised

Abraham, **“And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed”** (Gn 12:3). From the time this promise was made, God continually reminded His people that there was a “Blessing” that was coming who would bear the iniquities of the people (See Is 53). The promise was not only to the descendants of Abraham, the Jews, but to **all families of the earth**.

tan by offering Himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. This was the great news of the gospel that would restore the hope of eternal life.

SCRIPTURE READING: Gn 12:1-3; 21:12; 22:18; Is 53; Gl 3

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Prophecy of cross: Ps 22; Is 53, Prophecy of Jesus: Ps 41:9; 22; Is 7:14; 9:6,7; 42:1-4 Jr 31:15; Hs 11:1; Mc 5:2; Zc 13:7, Reconciliation: Rm 5:10,11; 2 Co 5:19,20; Ep 2:16; Cl 1:20

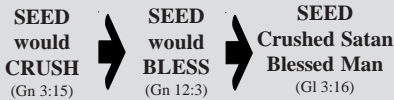
Chapter 10

THE GOSPEL CRUSH

Exactly how did Jesus crush the head of Satan, and at the same time, become a spiritual blessing to all mankind? Answering this question explains the gospel. By answering this question, we also understand that we must respond to the gospel of God’s blessing.

THE GOSPEL BLESSING: God’s Solution To Our Spiritual Death Problem!

THE SEED WOULD CRUSH & BLESS



So who was the Blessing? Peter stated, *“You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant that God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed will all the families of the earth be blessed.’ For you first, God raised up His Servant **Jesus** and sent Him to bless you **by turning every one of you away from your iniquities”** (At 3:25,26). **The Seed of Abraham that would bless all mankind was JESUS!** The blessing was that Jesus would turn us away from our sins. Paul wrote, *“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as to many, but as of one, ‘and to your Seed,’ **who is Christ**”* (Gl 3:16). So the Seed was Jesus Christ. After Adam sinned, this was the Seed of woman that God promised would crush the head of Satan (Gn 3:15). Jesus would crush Sa-*

Jesus came to take care of our sin problem. The Bible says, *“He who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. **For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, so that He might destroy the works of the devil”** (1 Jn 3:8). Because we were spiritually dead in trespasses, Jesus came to die on the cross in order to make a sacrificial atonement for our sins (Cl 2:13-15). In doing this He crushed the works of the devil. However, He bruised His “heel” in that He had to come in the flesh of man in order to die on the cross.*

THE GOSPEL BLESSING: God's Solution To Our *Physical Death Problem!*

Not only did Jesus take care of our spiritual death problem in reference to sin, He took care of our physical death problem. The Bible says, *"Therefore, since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise partook of the same, so that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"* (Hb 2:14,15).

Jesus died on the cross in order to take care of our spiritual death problem that results from our personal sin against God (Is 59:1,2). He died in order that people might be brought back to God. He was resurrected in order to give us hope that we too can be resurrected to eternal life in the future. **By His resurrection, He took care of our physical death problem** (1 Co 15:20-22).

A. Jesus was the incarnation of God the Son.

Jesus, as the Son of God, was first in the form of God, but He *"came down out of heaven"* (Jn 6:51,62). He lived and was tempted as every man (Hb 4:15). He was the Son of God who *"made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondser-*

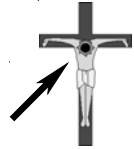


vant, and being made in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Ph 2:7,8).

B. Jesus died for our sins.

Jesus, the Son of God, was crucified on the cross of Calvary for the sins of all people.

He **"bore our sins in His own body on the tree, so that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness—by whose stripes you**



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were healed" (1 Pt 2:24). Jesus died for all of us! Through His atoning sacrifice, all people who believe and are obedient to this good news will receive the forgiveness of their sins. **This is great news! This is the gospel, but not all the gospel!**

Jesus crushed the power of Satan by dying on the cross so that people might have an escape from sin and spiritual separation from God. However, in making such a sacrifice, He bruised His heel (Gn 3:15) in the sense that He had to physically suffer in the flesh on the cross in order to offer atonement for our sins.

Jesus had to shed His sanctifying blood in order that we might be redeemed. Redeemed means that He **bought us with His blood and brought us back from Satan who had captivated us through our own sin.** There was remission of sins, therefore, only through the shedding of His blood. The Bible says that *"without shedding of blood*

there is no remission" (Hb 9:22). Therefore, the Bible reminds Christians that we were redeemed **"with the precious blood of Christ"** (1 Pt 1:18,19). Jesus took care of our spiritual death problem that was brought into our lives by our own sin (Rm 5:12). **This is great news!**

C. Jesus was buried to be raised.

In order to overcome our problem of physical death, Jesus was buried in a tomb. However, on the third day after His burial He was raised on Sunday morning from the dead. He came forth from the tomb (Mk 16:9). Jesus had the power and authority to lay down His life. He had the power to raise Himself from the dead. He said, *"No one takes it [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have **power** to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. This commandment I have received from My Father"* (Jn 10:18).

If we believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, then this belief becomes the gospel upon which our lives stand. We will be raised when Jesus comes again (1 Th 4:14). In fact, when Jesus comes again, *"all who are in **graves** will hear His voice and come forth"* (Jn 5:28,29). However, only those who have believed on Jesus and obeyed the gospel will be resurrected to life, for only "in Christ" is there hope of resurrection to an immortal state of existence (1 Co 15:22). **Jesus' resurrection,**



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therefore, is God's answer to the physical death problem of man. This is the gospel of hope!

D. Jesus ascended to heaven.

Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection. God manifested great power when He resurrected Jesus *"from the dead and set Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church"* (Ep 1:20-22). This is gospel news!



ASCENSION

Jesus is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father. He is functioning as our high priest. He is our high priest *"who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens"* (Hb 8:1). Because Jesus is in heaven, Christians *"have a **Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world"*** (1 Jn 2:1,2). As our **Counselor**, Jesus is at the right hand of God making intercession for us (Rm 8:34; Hb 7:25). He is now King of kings and Lord of lords. He has all authority over all things for our benefit (Mt 28:18; 1 Tm 6:15; Hb 1:3). **This is the greatest news that has ever been proclaimed!**

E. Jesus is coming again.

Jesus is coming a second time (Hb 9:28). He is coming to destroy **the last enemy that is physical death** (1 Co 15:26). He will destroy physical death forever by our resurrection from the dead (Jn 5:28,29).

Jesus is coming again to judge the world. It is through Jesus that the Father will **judge** all. *"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Co 5:10). **The righteous will go into eternal heaven** (Mt 25:46; Rv 21:4). **The wicked will be cast into destruction** (2 Th 1:7-9). The earth and the elements of the world as we now know them will be destroyed (2 Pt 3:10,11). At that time there will be the end of time. The Son will then submit all things to God. *"And when all things are subjected to Him [Christ], then will the Son Himself also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all"* (1 Co 15:28). **This is gospel news!**



Jesus crushed Satan's work in every way. He came to earth to save sinners and to teach us a better way of life (Jn 1:29; 10:10). He died on the cross to deliver us from sin, thus saving us from spiritual death. He was resurrected from the dead so that we might have proof and an example of being resurrected from physical death at His final coming.

In this way He crushed Satan's power of physical death.

Jesus is coming again to finalize His victory over death by the resurrection of the righteous from the dead. This is great news for those who have obeyed the gospel of Jesus. It is bad news, however, for those who have not obeyed the gospel. The disobedient will be raised for destruction when Jesus comes again. Christians, however, are looking for the coming of Jesus. Because of their faith, Christians are *"looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God"* (2 Pt 3:12).

SCRIPTURE READING: Satan overcome: Cl 2:13-22, Resurrection: 1 Co 15; 2 Co 5:1-8; 1 Th 4:13-18
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Authority of Jesus: Mt 13:3; 16:11; 17:2; 28:18, Ep 1:20-22; 1 Pt 3:21,22, **First coming:** Jn 1:1-14; 8:58; 14:5,24; 20:28; Rm 9:5; 2 Pt 1:16; 1 Jn 5:20, **Judgment:** Jn 12:31; 2 Co 5:10; 2 Tm 4:1; Hb 9:27; 1 Pt 4:17; Jd 6, **Atonement on cross:** Jn 1:29; 1 Co 15:3; Gl 1:4; Hb 9:28, **Resurrection:** Jn 5:28,29; 11:24,25; 1 Co 15; 1 Th 4:13-18, **Exaltation of Jesus:** At 2:29-36; Ph 2:5-11; Hb 1:1-3, **Priesthood of Jesus:** Zc 6:12,13; Hb 2:17; 4:14; 5:6; 7:11-28; 9:11, **Kingship of Jesus:** Dn 2:44; 7:13,14; Zc 6:12,13; Rm 5:17; 1 Tm 1:17; 6:15; Rv 19:16

Chapter 11

GRACE VERSUS RELIGION

The gospel of Jesus was revealed over two thousand years ago. It was an event that manifested the grace of God to the world. Jesus said, *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"* (Jn 3:17). In this way, therefore, *"the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men"* (Ti 2:11). Though all people were dead in sin, God's love was

poured out through Jesus (Rm 5:8). Jesus brought a gospel solution for our problem of sin.

The gospel of grace that was revealed through Jesus is briefly explained in the Bible in Ephesians 2:1-10. Verses 4-9 explain this marvelous revelation of God's love for us.

The Gospel Of God's Grace

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. And He raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ep 2:4-9).

This is great news! God knew that we could not save ourselves. He knew that we could not keep His law perfectly in order to justify ourselves by perfect law-keeping. In our frustration to keep His law perfectly, He knew that we would invent for ourselves religions that would be based on systems of attempted self-justification through self-sanctifying religious rites and good works. However, God knew that we could never do enough good works to earn our salvation. So for this reason, He had to provide a gospel solution for our sins because we all seek eternal life.

God knew our inabilities, our unrighteousness, and our ungodliness. Nevertheless, because of His mercy He sent His Son into the world. Listen to what the Bible says: *“For when we were still without strength, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God manifests His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rm 5:6-8). That's grace! And that's great news!*

God sent His Son to save us even though we did not deserve to be saved. God first extended His hand to take us out of the confusion of our own religious inventions. He sent Jesus to the Jews who were lost in their misguided religiosity. Jesus is still pleading today to everyone who is lost in the confusion of their self-made religiosity that is vain in the sight of God (Mk 7:6-9).

One may be “very religious” as those in the city of Athens in Greece. However, to such religious people Paul stated, *“And the times of this ignorance God has overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (At 17:22,30)*. If one is satisfied with man-made traditional religion, then here is what the Bible says concerning self-made religions:

Self-Made Religion

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the elementary principles of the

world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to ordinances? "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle." All these concern things that perish with the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men. These things have indeed a show of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and neglect of the body, but not in any value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh (Cl 2:20-23).

These words must challenge us. The Bible says, "*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith*" (2 Co 13:5). We might think that we are living an acceptable life that is pleasing to God. However, can we prove our religious beliefs and behavior to be that which is acceptable to God? Can we prove our beliefs with the Bible? In other words, are we trusting in our religious heritage simply because such was practiced by our forefathers? If we are, then we must reconsider our faith in relation to God's invitation through the gospel.

The following are terrifying words of the Holy Spirit. We must read them continually, and then ask ourselves, "Have we too been deceived?"

Deception Of Wickedness

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. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion so that they should believe a lie (2 Th 2:10-12).

Remember, the Jews to whom Jesus first preached were religious. They believed in God. However, they had established their own religion after the traditions of their fathers (See Gl 1:14). Jesus "*came to His own, and His own did not receive Him*" (Jn 1:11). The Jews did not receive the Son of God because they had already rejected the word of God (Mk 7:9). Since they had already rejected the word of God, it was easy for them to reject Jesus. Since they had already created their own religion (see Gl 1:13), they felt that they did not need the gospel of Jesus.

Will we be one of those religious people today to whom Jesus comes, but we will reject Him because we are satisfied with our own religion? We must keep in mind that God's grace is not only offered to those who do not know Jesus, but it is also offered to those who have devised their own self-sanctifying religiosity in order to save themselves. It is offered to those who have been trapped in a world of man-made religions. God calls us out of such self-sanctifying religions in order to enjoy the freedom of His grace. He calls, "***Come out from among them and be separate,***' says the Lord. '*And do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you*'" (2 Co 6:17).

Jesus calls us out of the bondage of man-made religion into the freedom of the gospel (Gl 5:1). In Him we can be free from religious institutions, ceremonial religion, binding traditions of men, and authoritarian religious leaders who seek to as-

some lordship over God's people. Jesus calls us into the freedom of God's grace in order that we become obedient servants of His will.

Those who accept God's grace on His conditions can have hope. *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name"* (Jn 1:12). If one accepts Jesus upon the basis of the conditions that God prescribes in His word, then he has the right to become a child of God. He or she has a right to come into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by obedience to the gospel. In this relationship we are all headed for heaven and eternal glory in the presence of God. This is the good news that God wants all people in the world to know and obey. This is a free gift of God to all.

SCRIPTURE READING: Jn 1:1-51; 3:1-21; Rm 5
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: *Salvation in Christ:* Lk 19:10; Jn 1:29; At 4:12; Rm 5:8,9; Hb 9:28; 1 Pt 2:24; *God's love:* Jn 3:16; Rm 5:8; 1 Jn 3:1; 4:9-11, *Child of God:* Rm 8:16; Gl 3:7; 4:5; Ph 2:15; Hb 2:10; 12:5; 1 Jn 3:2

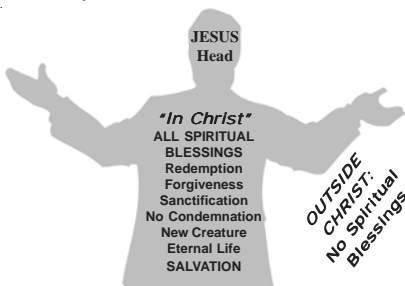
Chapter 12 GOSPEL RELATIONSHIPS

In order to find our way into eternal life, we must establish a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, the phrase "in Christ" is used to explain this gospel relationship. When one is "in Christ," he or she has a **spiritual covenant relationship** with God that is based on the gospel. This is the same as being in the body, the church, for the

church is the body of Christ (Cl 1:18).

Jesus is the **head** of the body (Ep 5:23). The word "head" is used figuratively to mean "control" and "center of reference." As our physical head controls our entire body, and is the center of reference for our function as a body, so **Jesus desires to control our lives and be the center of reference for all our beliefs and behavior.** In this way He brings an abundant life to us because He will always lead us in the right direction (Jn 10:10). When one is in the body of Christ, therefore, he has established a submissive relationship with Jesus, the Head. When we submit to the Head of the body, the Head gives spiritual blessings that result in eternal life.

When we are "in Christ," we have all **spiritual blessings** that come with the covenant that God makes with us. The Bible says, *"Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"* (Ep 1:3). In order to have all these spiritual blessings, we must submit to Jesus as our Head. We cannot be outside Christ and expect to receive those bless-



ings that are only in Christ. Notice in the preceding chart all the spiritual blessings one receives when he or she is "in Christ."

There are no spiritual blessings **outside** Christ. If one is to have **redemption** and **forgiveness** of sins (Ep 1:7), then he or she must be in Christ. Outside Christ there is no redemption or forgiveness of sins. If one is to be a **new creature**, then he or she must be in Christ (2 Co 5:17). There are only old creatures outside Christ. If one desires to **live forever**, then he or she must be in Christ (1 Jn 5:11). There is only eternal death outside Christ. Outside Christ all are under condemnation. However, if one comes into Christ, then he or she is **not in a state of condemnation** (Rm 8:1). If one desires to be **sanctified** (cleansed) of all sin, then he or she must come into Christ (1 Co 1:2). All these spiritual blessings add up to **salvation** (2 Tm 2:10). This salvation is only in Christ. Since all spiritual blessings are in Christ, then there is only one question that must be asked and answered.

HOW CAN ONE RECEIVE ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS THAT ARE ONLY IN CHRIST?

Everyone must answer this question. When answered, everyone must make a decision. When the Bible answers this question, we must be willing to accept the answer and do what the Bible says in order to come into Christ. If we are convinced that the answer is clear and

necessary as to how one comes into Christ, then we must follow the instructions of the Bible. It does no good to know what to do to come into Christ, and then, do nothing. Therefore, only a positive response to what the Bible teaches will benefit our coming into a relationship with God in Christ.

SCRIPTURE READING: Ep 1:3-14

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: **Redemption:** Rm 3:24; 8:23; 1 Co 1:30; Gl 3:13; 4:5; Ti 2:14; Hb 9:12; 1 Pt 1:18, **Forgiveness:** Mt 6:12-14; 18:21-35; At 13:38; 26:18; 1 Jn 1:9; 2:12, **Condemnation:** Mt 23:14,33; Mk 3:29; Jn 3:19; 5:29; Rm 3:8, **Eternal life:** Jn 5:24-26,39; 8:12; 10:28; 11:25; 17:2,3; Rm 2:7; 1 Tm 6:12; Ti 1:2; 1 Jn 5:11-13, **Sanctification:** 1 Co 1:30; 6:11; 7:14; 1 Th 4:3; 1 Tm 4:5; Hb 2:11; 10:10; Jd 1, **Salvation:** At 4:12; Rm 1:16; 2 Co 6:2; Ph 2:12,13; Ti 2:11; Hb 2:3; 1 Pt 1:10-12

When Adam sinned, God set in motion His gospel plan to reconcile all men unto Himself. Abraham was chosen as the one through whom God would build a nation from which the promised Seed of woman would be born. When the time came for all prophecies to be fulfilled concerning God's gospel plan of salvation, God sent forth Jesus into the world (Gl 4:4). As the Son of God, Jesus came to be the sacrificial offering for our sins. He now invites all men to come into a saving relationship with Him in His body, the church.

In order to establish a relationship with Jesus who promises us an abundant life in this time, and eternal life to come, one must submit to the headship of Jesus. Submission means that there are conditions for being in Christ. **We cannot choose our own conditions by which to**

come into a covenant relationship with God. Man-made conditions and rules lead one away from God and a denial of His gospel plan to save believers through His offered Son. Neither can we depend on human feelings and emotions that lead one away from God by concentrating on one's self (Jr 10:23). For this reason, all must submit to God's directions as to how we must be obedient to the gospel.

God draws us to Himself by the manifestation of His heart on the cross. His grace that was revealed through the sacrificial offering of His Son manifested His love for us (Jn 3:16). The gospel of the cross was proof that God seeks to call everyone into a covenant relationship with

Him (See Ti 2:11). He desires that all people respond to His loving grace. We must remember 2 Peter 3:9: *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness [indifference]. **But He is longsuffering toward you, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**"*

Since you have come this far in your discovery, **you have discovered the Priceless Pearl, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.** This is the time to determine what to do with that which you have discovered. We must remember that the Priceless Pearl, according to Jesus, is worth more than all that we have on this earth (Mt 13:44,45). It is worth more than all the treasures of this world.

RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL

Section 3

The historical event that revealed the gospel was the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins. Jesus was buried in a tomb, but raised Sunday morning on the third day in order to give us the good news that all those who are in Christ will also be raised to eternal life when He comes again. This is the revealed mystery of the gospel that manifested the heart of God (Ti 2:11). In 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 the Bible teaches that when Jesus comes again, those who have not obeyed the gospel *"will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power."* It is for this reason that ev-

ery person must discover the gospel and obey it in order to escape the coming destruction. So one must ask himself, **How does one obey the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in order to escape the coming destruction?**

In order to answer this question, and to access all spiritual blessings that are necessary for salvation, one must be in a covenant relationship with God when Jesus comes again. The Bible promises that in Christ we are redeemed from sin by Jesus' cleansing blood. It is in Christ that there is salvation (2 Tm 2:10).

In order to understand what God wants one to do to be in Christ, there

are important points that must be understood. These points are often misunderstood by those who live in a confused world where people seek to sanctify themselves through the performance of religious rites.

Chapter 13
THE GOSPEL COVENANT

Before God gave any written law to man on earth, He spoke directly to the **fathers of tribal families**. He gave His spoken laws to these fathers in order that His will be taught to the entire extended family (Hb 1:1). One of these extended family fathers was Abraham. Of all the fathers of faith in the world at the time, Abraham was God's choice through whom He would bring into the world the Seed, which promise was first made to Adam and Eve (Gn 3:15). The fulfillment of this promised Seed would result in the spiritual blessing of all humanity through Abraham.

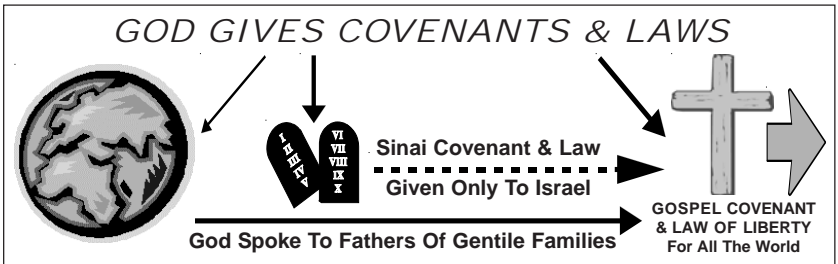
God chose Abraham in order to prepare the way for the Seed who would come into the world through him and the nation of Israel. God promised Abraham, *"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the*

families of the earth will be blessed" (Gn 12:3).

God established a personal covenant with Abraham concerning the promise that He would fulfill in Abraham's descendants. The fulfillment of the promise would come almost 2,000 years after the promise was made. In order to preserve a part of humanity through whom the Seed of blessing would come, God chose to build a nation through Isaac and Jacob, the sons of Abraham (Gn 12:1-3; 15:5).

Many years after Abraham died, and after God brought the children of Israel out of Egyptian captivity, He established a covenant with Israel as a nation. The law of this covenant was given as a condition for keeping the covenant. Therefore, **the Sinai law was given specifically to the nation of Israel** to be their condition for maintaining the covenant (Ex 24:1-4). Moses said to Israel, ***"The Lord did not make this covenant with your fathers, but with us [Israel], those who are here today, all of us who are alive"*** (Dt 5:3).

Concerning the law of the covenant, God said to Israel, *"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments that I teach you to ob-*



serve, that you may live, and go in and possess the land that the Lord God of Your fathers is giving you. **You will not add to the word that I command you, nor will you diminish from it, so that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you**" (Dt 4:1,2).

Until God gave a written law on Mt. Sinai to Israel through Moses, all men were under the moral laws of God that He gave through the fathers of the tribal families. After Mt. Sinai, however, the nation of Israel came under a different law, which law was the condition for their keeping of God's covenant that He established specifically with them (Dt 5:1-5). The Gentiles, however, remained under the system of spoken law that had existed from creation (Rm 2:14,15).

In **Jeremiah 31** God promised that a new covenant would come. *"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah"* (Jr 31:31). This promise of a new covenant, that was made through the prophet Jeremiah, was fulfilled centuries later in Christ, through whom God established a gospel covenant with all people who would respond to His love for humanity.

Jeremiah 31 is quoted in the New Testament in **Hebrews 8**. It is in the context of Hebrews 8 that the Hebrew writer affirmed that Christians are now under a new covenant, for the old Sinai covenant, with its law, was taken away. The Bible says, *"But*

*now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a **better covenant**, which was established on better promises"* (Hb 8:6).

The first covenant and law was given only to Israel. However, the Israelites could not keep perfectly the conditions of this covenant because of man's common problem. **All men sin and fall short of the glory of God** (Rm 3:23). Therefore, the Bible says, *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. **Because finding fault with them, He says: 'Behold, the days are coming ... when I will make a new covenant'"*** (Hb 8:7,8).

We are now in the days of a new covenant relationship with God. The Sinai covenant and law that was made exclusively with and for Israel has passed away (Hb 8:13). Under the new covenant are new conditions. There is a new law. It is of this new law that the Bible states, *"But he who looks into **the perfect law of liberty** and continues to abide in it, not being a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, **this man will be blessed in his deed"*** (Js 1:25). This is the gospel law of liberty that sets one free from sin and spiritual death.

SCRIPTURE READING: Gn 12:1-3; 18:17-19; 22:15-18; Gl 3:15-18

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Covenant & law: *With Abraham* - Gn 15:18, *With Israel* - Ex 19:4-6; 24:8; 31:16; Dt 4:13; 5:1-5; Ne 8:1; Mt 4:4; Rm 3:1,2, *With all God's children* - Jr 31:31-34; Hb 8:1-13; 10:11-25; 12:24; 13:20, **References to the law:** Ne 8:1,18; 9:13,14; Lk 2:22-24; Jn 1:17; 7:19; 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; Rm 3:9-19; 7:1-7

Chapter 14

GOSPEL LAW OF LIBERTY

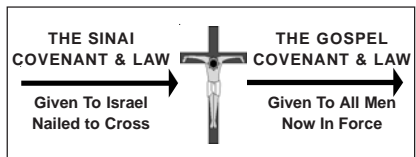
With the passing of the Sinai covenant between God and Israel came the passing of the Sinai law. The Sinai law and covenant passed away when Jesus died on the cross in order to bring into force the gospel covenant and law (Hb 9:16,17).

Jesus did not come to destroy the purpose for which the Sinai law was given. He said, *“Do not think that I came to **destroy** the Law or the Prophets”* (Mt 5:17). The purpose of the law was to bring to Christ those who are of the faith of Abraham (Gl 3:24,25). It was a shadow of good things to come (Hb 10:1). What Jesus did do was to fulfill the Sinai law. He stated, *“I did not come to **destroy but to fulfill**”* (Mt 5:17). This is the key to understanding the purpose of the Sinai law (Gl 4:4,5).

Jesus was the fulfillment of the law in the sense that the law was given to bring Israel to Christ. When the law fulfilled its purpose, therefore, what happened to the law was what the Bible says in Hebrews 10:9: *“He [Jesus] said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ **He takes away the first** [covenant and law] **in order to establish the second** [covenant and law].”* Christians today, therefore, are not subject to the Sinai law of feast days and animal sacrifices. Through their obedience to the gospel, they are free from these restrictions. They are dead to the Sinai law in order to be married to Jesus Christ (See Rm 7:1-4).

We Are Dead To The Sinai Law!
*Therefore, my brethren, you [Christians] **also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ**, that you may be married to another, even to Him [Jesus] who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God (Rm 7:4).*

If anyone would try to live under the Sinai law, or any religious law, in order to be justified before God by the merit of law-keeping, the Bible warns, *“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; **you have fallen from grace**”* (Gl 5:4). This is actually bad news because when one seeks to keep law perfectly in order to save himself, there is no forgiveness of sins (Hb 10:1-4). But under Christ there is grace. The Bible says that *“the law was given through Moses, **but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**”* (Jn 1:17). *“Therefore **the [Sinai] law was our headmaster to bring us to Christ**, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, **we are no longer under a tutor**”* (Gl 3:24,25). Christians today are under the gospel of grace and truth. They are not subjects of the Sinai law.



Jesus redeemed us from having to be justified by perfect law-keep-

ing. Under the Sinai law it was impossible **“that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins”** (Hb 10:4). But under the law of liberty we are in a covenant relationship with God who says, *“Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more”* (Hb 10:17). God said this because of the sacrificial blood of Jesus for all men. The Bible says that *“we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**”* (Hb 10:10). **This is great news!** Christians, therefore, are sanctified by the eternal sacrifice of Jesus. They do not seek to self-justify themselves by keeping the Sinai law, or to find forgiveness of sins through animal sacrifices.

Why the Sinai Law?

1. **The Sinai law was given as a headmaster (schoolmaster or tutor) in order to bring God’s people to Christ** (Gl 3:24,25).
2. **The Sinai law was given in order to morally and socially direct and preserve the nation of Israel until the Seed came** (Ex 20:1-17).
3. **The Sinai law was given in order to manifest sin** (Rm 3:20; 7:7).
4. **The Sinai law was given in order that Christians have an inspired source of learning and edification under the new law of Christ** (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

SCRIPTURE READING: Rm 7:1-6; Gl 4:21 - 5:2; Hb 10:1-18

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Abolishment of law: Gl 4:4,5; Ep 2:14-16; Cl 2:14; Hb 9:11-25; 10:9,10, **Sacrifice:** Hb 9:15; 10:4, **Better things:** Hb 7:19,22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:35; 12:24

Chapter 15

RESPONDING TO GRACE

The Bible says of Jesus, *“For the law was given through Moses, **but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**”* (Jn 1:17). *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, **teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age**”* (Ti 2:11,12). Because of God’s loving initiative through the gospel to deliver us from our predicament of sin and spiritual death, we are motivated to live a godly life.

Grace is an action on the part of a giver who gives us something that we do not deserve, nor are able to earn. This is what we call **“unmerited favor.”** Unmerited favor means favor or acceptance that is not earned. God’s grace toward us means that He acted in order to give us something that we did not earn, nor did we deserve.

Here’s the point: We were lost without hope of living forever. When friends physically died, all of us stood around their graves, sadly feeling that this was the end of our loved ones. We felt that life was terminated at a grave site where there was no hope. But God did not create us for such a devastating end. In order that we have hope, God acted on our behalf (Ti 1:2). His actions have given us the opportunity to have hope for eternal dwelling in a heavenly environment. In order for us to have such a hope, there had to be a sacrifice;

there had to be an initiative on God's part that would change the graveyard scene. Because of our destiny of death, God took action by revealing the gospel of life.

Keep in mind that God is the one who had to take the first step. As mortal men, we could do nothing to change our fate of termination in death. Eternal dwelling is God's realm of existence. And in order that we partake of this existence, it was necessary that God reach out and take us into this realm of dwelling. How and what God did to accomplish this was an action of grace on His part, for we who are limited to this physical world could do nothing to escape the confines of this world. Our limitation to the world confined us to live after our human inability to save ourselves from a dreadful end.

God was not obligated to take the initiative to bring us into His presence through the eternal offering of His incarnate Son. The Son of God was not obligated to take on the form of man in order to die and be raised again so that we also might be raised to eternal life. But the fact is, He did. This is love. This is the heart of God.

The Bible says, "*But God manifests His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rm 5:8). What a beautiful thought and action on the part of God. God's loving grace toward us moved Him into action to bring us into His realm of dwelling. In this sense, therefore, the cross of the Son of God was a manifestation of the heart of God. We did not deserve or earn

this free gift. Grace is not something we earned through good works.

The Bible says, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast*" (Ep 2:8,9). If God had sent Jesus into the world because we had worked in order to earn such a sacrifice, then the sacrifice of Jesus would not have been a free gift of God. It would have been payment of debt to us for our goodness (Rm 4:4). But the Bible says, "*And if by grace [we are saved], then it is no longer by works; otherwise grace is no more grace*" (Rm 11:6). The fact is that God gave the gift regardless of our sinfulness. He loved us before we loved Him (1 Jn 4:19). The Bible says, "*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (1 Jn 4:10).

Our recognition of God's action of grace should move us to respond to His grace. When our faith obediently responds to God's grace, grace reigns "*through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Rm 5:21). **When we see the grace of God on the cross where Jesus died for our sins, faith in God's action motivates us to obediently respond.**

When our faith responds according to how God says we should respond, then we are brought back into a relationship with Him that will eventually end in eternal dwelling with Him. This is the thought behind what

the Bible says in Romans 5:1,2: *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”*

God has extended through Jesus Christ the gospel opportunity to dwell in His presence for eternity. This was an action on the part of God that we did not deserve. We did not earn it. It was thus an action of grace.

SCRIPTURE READING: Rm 3,4,5; Gl 3,4; Ep 2
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: God's love: Rm 5:8; Ti 2:11,14; 1 Jn 4:10,19, **Grace:** 2 Co 8:9; 12:9; 13:14; Ep 1:7; 2:8,9; 4:7; Js 4:6

Chapter 16 THE HEART OF GOD

Grace that comes from the heart of God should move our hearts into action. The Holy Spirit states, *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God”* (2 Co 4:15).

Dead faith never profits anything in reference to our salvation, for even the demons believe and tremble (Js 2:19). Though their belief moved them to tremble, it was still lacking, for it did not move them to obedience. We must remember that *“faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”* (Js 2:17). Therefore, when one recognizes the loving heart of God that was revealed through the eternal sacrifice of His Son, **he or she will re-**

spond to this good news.

Our faith must respond to our belief that God gave His Son to be our Savior. Salvation by grace through faith means that God, because of His love for us, gave His incarnate Son in the flesh to save us (Jn 3:16). But we must accept this free gift through **obedient faith**. God offers the free gift, but we must accept it by our obedience to His offer. Our obedience, therefore, **is a response to His great love in offering the free gift of His Son.** In other words, we love because He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19). And because of our love for Him, we want to thank Him by being obedient to His will. Jesus said, *“If you love Me, **keep My commandments**”* (Jn 14:15). We are thus the friends of Jesus if we do what He says (Jn 15:14). This is exactly what Paul meant when he stated the following concerning his personal obedient response to God's grace to save him:

Gratitude Inspired Obedience

*But by the grace of God I am what I am. And His grace toward me was **not in vain**, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, **but the grace of God that was with me** (1 Co 15:10).*

One is not saved by grace if he refuses to receive God's offer of grace. He is not saved if he refuses to respond to God's love. There is a condition attached to our salvation by grace. The condition is our response to the heart of God's love. Jesus

tested our hearts by saying, *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word”* (Jn 14:23). **We must prove our love by keeping His word.** Sincere love of God and Jesus moves one to respond to the will of God. ***“This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments”*** (1 Jn 5:3). ***“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments”*** (2 Jn 6).

What profits in our relationship with God, therefore, is **faith working through love** (Gl 5:6). We can thus know those who are God’s people because of their loving response to His grace. The Bible says, ***“But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him”*** (1 Jn 2:5). Living the gospel means living according to the word of God.

SCRIPTURE READING: Jn 14; Rm 5:1-11; Js 2:14-26
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Obedient faith: Rm 1:5; 6:17; 16:26; 1 Th 1:3; 2 Th 1:11, **Love and commandments:** Mt 22:37-40

Chapter 17

INVITATION TO FREEDOM

Most religious people have burdened themselves with countless religious traditions and ceremonies. They are as Jesus said to the Jewish religious leaders, ***“For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers”*** (Lk 11:46). The Jewish religious leaders bound on the consciences of the people numerous religious rules that God had never bound (Mk 7:1-9).

The people could not bear the burden of these rules, for no one could keep all of them. The people always felt guilty because they could not practice all the man-made rules of the Jews’ religion. **One knows he is living according to religion when he is always burdened with guilt.**

The religious world binds on the consciences of men hundreds of laws and traditions that God never intended to bind. When one comes to Jesus, however, **he is set free from the burden of religion.** He is free in the sense that he knows that religious rules **will not be the standard by which he will be judged.** The only standard by which one will be judged is the word of Christ (Jn 12:48). The Christian need not fear being judged by the religious traditions of men. Jesus, therefore, makes the following invitation to all who have been burdened with religious traditions and ceremonial performances:

Freedom From Religion

Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Mt 11:28-30).

Those who live by the gospel feel great about being set free from the burden of religion. Paul wrote, ***“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free,***

and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gl 5:1). Coming into Christ will set one free from the burden of religion. The gospel sets us free. As free men in Christ, we must never return to religion that is based on the traditions of men. The Holy Spirit warned concerning some who sought to return to self-made religiosity: *“Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”* (At 15:10). Once in Christ, no one can place a yoke of religion on the neck of those who have been set free from the burden of human religiosity. Therefore, ***“beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy and vain deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, and not according to Christ”*** (Cl 2:8). When one is set free in Christ, he or she must stay free from the bondage of human religiosity.

SCRIPTURE READING: Gl 4:21-31; Cl 2:11-23
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Freedom in Christ: Rm 8:1,2; 1 Co 7:21,22; Gl 4:26,31; 1 Pt 2:16

The greatest promise that God made to mankind that sparked hopes in the hearts of those who were sons

of Abraham by faith was the promise that in Abraham He would bless every family of the world. In order to preserve a portion of humanity for the fulfillment of this promise, God chose Abraham, through whom the nation of Israel came into existence. God subsequently established a covenant with Israel. He also gave conditions, or laws, for keeping this covenant.

When the promise was fulfilled, Jesus established a new covenant. He is now our High Priest, functioning as our Counselor before the Father. His first coming was the fulfillment of God’s promise to both Adam and Abraham. He was the manifestation of God’s heart to all men. God worked through Jesus to reconcile all men to Himself. By faith we must therefore respond to the grace that was revealed on the cross. We must respond by learning and obeying the conditions that God has established as to how we must come into a covenant relationship with Him today. When we respond to God’s grace, we are set free in Christ. We are free from the burdens of religious traditions that bring our consciences into bondage. We are set free to walk the gospel of God’s grace according to His will.

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL

Section 4

We have now come to the central message of this book. This is the most important message that we must hear and do in order to take advantage of God’s grace. It is very

important that we thoroughly understand God’s conditions for our response to His grace. We must respond to the grace of God according to His instructions. It is not

our choice as to how we would respond. It is only our choice as to whether we will respond to the Bible or to religion.

Chapter 18 GOSPEL OBEDIENCE

Reference to “**obedience of the gospel**” in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 is crucial for our understanding that the gospel, and our obedience thereof, is the beginning of our gospel relationship with Jesus. Obedience to the gospel in this text is in the context of the final coming of Jesus. Since Jesus is the coming King before whom we must make peace before He comes (see Lk 14:31-33), then it is imperative that we understand how to make peace with Him as our judge.

Jesus Is Coming Again

For it is a just thing with God to repay tribulation to those who trouble you, and to give you who are afflicted rest with us when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power. (2 Th 1:6-9).

Frightening? We must never forget that it is the LORD Jesus Christ who will be our final judge. This is

King Jesus who is coming as the just judge of all those who have lived on earth.

The coming King Jesus is the One into whose hands God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have given all rights to be our judge (At 17:30,31). “*For we must all appear before **the judgment seat of Christ**, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, **according to what he has done**, whether good or bad*” (2 Co 5:10).

Now here is a very important question every reader of 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 must ask and answer: **Does the text say that if one does not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that he cannot be saved?** If you answer “no” to this question, then you need to read the passage again. Jesus is coming to judge those who do not know the heart of God, and thus do not respond in obedience to the gospel.

Knowing the preceding truth helps us understand the urgency of Jesus’ mandate to “*go into all the world and **preach the gospel to every creature***” (Mk 16:15). This is exactly what happened in the first century. Throughout the book of Acts, in every recorded address of the disciples, the gospel was proclaimed. The gospel was the first thing that Paul preached when he went to every city on his missionary journeys (1 Co 15:3,4). From Jesus’ mandate, to the example of the evangelistic outreach of the early disciples, the gospel was made the central message to which people must obediently

respond. If one bypasses the gospel, he has bypassed the heart of God. He is not living a Christ-centered life. He continues to be spiritually dead in sin.

The evangelistic example of the early disciples reveals the importance of preaching the gospel because of what is stated in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. Jesus is coming again. He is coming with His angels in flaming fire. He is coming to take vengeance. He will take vengeance on those who refuse to know the heart of God, and thus be moved to obey the gospel (Jn 17:3). Those who have found God, but refuse to respond to the heart of God, will be punished with everlasting destruction. The punishment will be just because those who do not respond to the gospel have rejected the heart of God.

One thing is clear from the preceding revelation. **One must obey the gospel in order to escape the coming judgment of Jesus.** This Bible truth is declared in a similar manner in 1 Peter 4:17: *“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?”* This is a very serious question. It is a question that demands a correct answer. And the correct answer is that those who do not obey the gospel have no chance for eternal life because they have not responded to the heart of God that was revealed through the gospel.

This certainly brings us to a

challenging quest. We must ask and answer two questions that arise from reading 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 and 1 Peter 4:17. Our answer to these questions will determine our eternal destiny. Here are the two questions:

1. **WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?**
2. **HOW CAN ONE OBEY THE GOSPEL?**

SCRIPTURE READING: 2 Pt 3; Jd 14-16

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: **Heaven:** Rm 8:18,23; 1 Co 15:50; 2 Co 4:17; 5:1-10; Hb 11:10,16; 13:14; Js 1:12; Rv 14:13; 21:4; 22:5. **Hell:** Mt 7:13,14,21-23; 13:41,42; 18:8; 23:33; 25:41-46; Hb 6:2; 10:29; Rv 19:20; 20:10,14,15; 21:8

Chapter 19

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

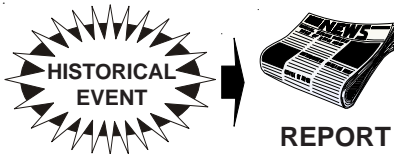
What would be your answer to the above question? The most common answer is, “It is the good news.” This is partially right, but partially insufficient. “Good news” is the meaning of the New Testament Greek word that we translate with the English word “gospel.” The gospel is good news. But it would be better to ask, **“What is the good news?”** This question will often bring mixed responses.

To the preceding question, some would reply, “The gospel is the teaching of Jesus.” But this is not the correct answer. Some also respond by saying, “The Bible is the gospel.” Again, this is not a correct answer. Others might answer, “Jesus is the gospel.” This would be a correct answer if we understand that Jesus was more than a good man and more than a good teacher. We want to

know how Jesus is good news in our relationship with God, and in reference to the judgment to come. Therefore, it is crucial to know Jesus and His gospel mission to offer the abundant life about which He spoke in John 10:10: *“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”* We seek to know how life can be more abundant through Jesus.

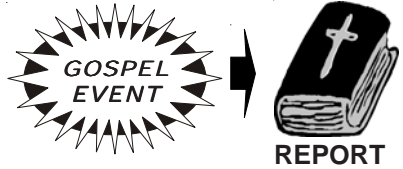
GOSPEL REVELATION

The gospel was actually an historical **event** that revealed the mystery of God’s love plan for our salvation (Ep 3:3-5). In a newspaper many events are reported. Each particular event occurred before the newspaper was written and printed. A reporter either personally experienced a particular event, or interviewed witnesses who had personally experienced the event. From the testimony of the witnesses, or one’s personal experience, a reporter writes a report about each event that is reported in the newspaper.



The report is not the event. When we read the newspaper, we believe the reported events because we trust the reliability of the reporter. We must remember that an event is something that occurred in history. But the report was written **after** the event took place. So it is with the

revelation of the gospel. **The gospel was revealed through an event.** The New Testament is the inspired **report** of this event that revealed the mystery of the gospel. The New Testament is our “newspaper” to understand the gospel.



1 Corinthians 15:1-4 is one of several statements that explain what we are saying. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to report in verse 1, ***“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand.”*** Now these words were written by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, these words are not the gospel. In other words, **Paul was using inspired words to explain the gospel event.** He wrote that the gospel can be **declared**, that is, one can stand up and declare it to all men. The gospel can be **preached**. Words are used to preach and declare the gospel. The “words” are the **medium** through which the gospel is reported. The words are not the gospel. The gospel can also be **received**, that is, it can be accepted as true. Paul also stated that we **“stand in”** the gospel, that is, the Christian’s entire emotional and spiritual life rests upon the foundation of the truth of the gospel.

In verse 2 Paul continued, “... **by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word** [of the report of the gospel] **which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.**”

Now herein is something very interesting. One is saved by the gospel. But notice here that the Holy Spirit placed a subjunctive “if” in relation to salvation by the gospel. The “if” emphasizes a **condition**. The condition is that one must continue to believe the truth of the gospel. The Corinthians had not personally experienced the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. They had only heard of this event from Paul. Therefore, they had to continue to believe what Paul had reported about the gospel. Today, we must believe the gospel report of the Bible. It is the only source through which we can gain knowledge of the gospel that was revealed over two thousand years ago.

In these first two verses of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul did not explain the gospel. He only talked about the gospel. However, in verses 3 and 4 he reminded the Corinthians of the gospel that he had preached to them. This was an event of history that changed history forever.

Death, Burial, Resurrection

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

This is the gospel! Jesus sacrificially died on a cross for our sins! He was actually raised from the dead to give us hope! **This is the good news!**

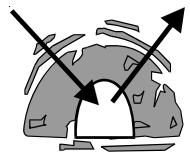
THE GOSPEL

- **The good news is the sacrificial death of Jesus for our sins.**
- **The good news is Jesus’ burial and resurrection to give us hope of eternal life.**

1 Corinthians 15:20 explains the resurrection: “*But now Christ has been raised from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who are asleep.*” This is good news!

Jesus was not the first one to be raised from the dead. Jesus had previously raised Lazarus. However, Jesus’ resurrection was different from Lazarus’ resurrection in two ways: First, Lazarus had to die again. Second, Lazarus was raised with the same body that had to experience again the same sufferings of life and death. His mortal body had not yet put on immortality; his perishable body had not yet become imperishable (1 Co 15:50-55).

On the other hand, **Jesus was raised never to die again. Jesus was raised with the same body**, but it was a **changed** body. The apostle John experienced Jesus’ resurrected body. However, he did not fully understand it, for he later wrote, “Beloved,



now we are children of God, and **it has not yet been revealed what we will be**. But we know that when He [Jesus] appears, **we will be like Him**, for we will see Him as He is” (1 Jn 3:2; see Ph 3:21).

Jesus is the **firstfruits** of all those who die in Christ. His resurrection to never physically die again is the guarantee to those who obey the gospel that they too will experience such a resurrection. **The Christian will be raised with a changed body as Jesus**. He will be raised never to die again. This is the glorious hope of the Christian. This is the glorious hope of those who seek eternal existence. **This is good news!** It is great news about conquering physical death. The gospel of the resurrection is the guarantee that we will live forever.

lems we have with sin and eternity. But how is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus good news for us today? The answer is simple. Remember that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rm 3:23). Also remember that the result of sin is separation from God. The Bible says, **“But your iniquities have separated you from your God”** (Is 59:2). Therefore, when we think about sin, **we must also think about separation from God**. And what must one think about when he is separated from God? The Bible says, **“For the wages of sin is death”** (Rm 6:23). Therefore, when we think about separation from God, we must think about death and eternal destruction.

When we think about death, we must recognize our two greatest problems. Both involve death. The following are the two problems for which every person must have good news:

SPIRITUAL DEATH is the result of being separated from God because of our personal sins against God. This is what the Bible means in Romans 5:12: **“Death spread to all men because all sinned.”** God says that every man has sinned against Him. Without the sacrificial offering of Jesus on the cross, one is **“dead in trespasses and sins”** (Ep 2:1). Remember that this is man’s first and greatest problem! Therefore, we must be **reconciled** (brought back) to God. The gospel answers our problem of spiritual death, **for Jesus**

SCRIPTURE READING: Mt 27,28; Mk 15,16; Lk 23,24; Jn 19,20

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: The gospel preached: At 2:29-38, **Hear the gospel:** Mt 13:9-23; Mk 1:14,15; 16:16; Jn 3:16; 5:24,25; 6:45; 8:24; 20:30,31; At 10:43; 13:38,39; 15:7; Hb 11:6; Rv 3:20, **Believe the gospel:** Mt 7:21; Lk 6:46; Jn 6:29; 8:24; 12:42,43; 20:30,31; At 13:38,39; Rm 10:16,17; Hb 11:6, **Respond to the gospel with repentance:** Mk 1:14,15; 6:12; Lk 13:3; At 2:38,46,47; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20; 2 Pt 3:9, **Respond to the gospel with confession:** Mt 10:32,33; Lk 12:8; Jn 9:22; 12:42; At 19:17,18; Rm 10:9,10; 1 Tm 6:12; 1 Jn 2:23; 4:2,3,15, **Cases of response to the gospel:** At 2:30-47; 8:5-13, 26-39; 9:10-19; 10:24-48; 16:13-15, 25-34; 18:8; 19:1-5

Chapter 20 GOOD NEWS FOR SERIOUS PROBLEMS

Remember that the gospel is good news. It is God’s good news to all people concerning our basic prob-

died for our sins on the cross (1 Co 15:3). He died in order to bring us back to God. **This is great news!**

PHYSICAL DEATH also resulted from sin, the sin of Adam. Remember that we must suffer the **consequences** of Adam's sin. As a result of his sin, we were all **separated from the tree of life** (Gn 3:22-24). Therefore, it is appointed unto all of us that we must physically die (Hb 9:27). The Bible says, *"For as in Adam all die"* (1 Co 15:22).

But again, the gospel is good news concerning our second greatest problem, the problem of physical death. The Bible says, *"Even so in Christ all will be made alive"* (1 Co 15:22). Therefore, **in Christ** Christians will live forever. **This is good news!**

We must remember that our first great problem is our **spiritual separation from God** that resulted from our **personal sins** against God. **The gospel is good news because Jesus came to cleanse our personal sins against God** (1 Co 15:3).

Our second greatest problem is that **each one of us will eventually end up in a grave**. Because of this destiny, we need some good news. Jesus was raised to never die again. He was raised with an

eternal, imperishable body. **Those who have obeyed the gospel and are in Christ will also be raised when He comes again. They will be raised to go home with the Lord in an imperishable body** (2 Co 5:1-8; 1 Th 4:13-18). **This is good news! It is good news to all those who are seeking more than this world.** It is great news for those who want to live.

SCRIPTURE READING: Ep 2:1-10; Cl 3:1-11

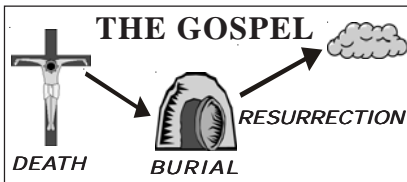
RESEARCH SCRIPTURES: Gospel: Mk 1:14,15; 8:35; 10:29; 16:15,16; At 15:7; 20:24; Rm 1:16; 10:15,16; 1 Co 4:15; 9:12,19; Gl 1:6-9; 2 Th 2:14, **Hope:** Ps 78:7; 119:42-81; At 26:6,7; Rm 8:22-25; Ti 1:2; Hb 6:18,19; 7:19

Chapter 21

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL

The gospel of the death of the incarnate Son of God for our sins is good news about our spiritual death problem. **Jesus died for our sins.** The gospel is good news about our physical death problem. **In Christ we will be raised from the dead.** But how does one connect with the gospel event? How can one connect with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that occurred over two thousand years ago? **How can one obey an event of history?**

We must keep in mind that all who would be saved must come into Christ where one enjoys all spiritual blessings from God. As we live the gospel, God has promised great things (2 Pt 3:13; 1 Jn 1:7; 2:25). **God wants us to have all His blessings in Christ as we live the gospel we have obeyed.**



The good news of Jesus was God's part in our salvation to bring us into His grace. It is now the responsibility of every person to take advantage of what God offers through Jesus. Therefore, we must first **believe** the gospel. Jesus came preaching, "*The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel*" (Mk 1:15). One must believe the gospel before he will respond to the gospel.

If one believes that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, then how can he be **reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus**? How can one have hope of eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus?

ROMANS 6:3-6

In Romans 6:3-6, through the apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit wrote to Christians. He wanted them to review their past obedience to the gospel. **Verse 3** is a question, "*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*" But Jesus died in Jerusalem. He died over two thousand years ago. Nevertheless, one can be "baptized into His death" today. Romans 6:4 explains how this is done.

Buried Into His Death

Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also might walk in newness of life.

It would be hard to miss this clear explanation of how to be baptized into the death of Jesus. Notice the preposition "with." By immersion in water (baptism), **one goes to the grave with Jesus**. Something great and spiritual happens in baptism. Jesus was buried. In obedience to the gospel of His death for our sins and resurrection for our hope, **we crucify ourselves through repentance and are also buried with Him**. Through immersion, one comes into a spiritual union **with** Jesus. A gospel covenant is established. A personal relationship with God is beginning. Because of the seriousness of this teaching, the Holy Spirit further explained in **verse 5** what it means to be "baptized into His death." He does not want this point to be misunderstood. In order to come into Christ, and into a covenant relationship with God, one must be baptized into Christ.



United In Death & Resurrection

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection.

Through immersion into Jesus one is united together in the likeness of Jesus' death. Because Jesus died on the cross, of necessity He had to be buried. As Jesus went to a tomb over two thousand years ago, so we also can go to a tomb of water together with Him today. Subsequently, we are raised with Him in order to walk in newness of life. **This is great news!** In immersion, therefore, we are buried with Jesus. We are also raised with Him. In baptism one connects with the gospel, by being buried in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

However, before one goes to the grave with Jesus, he or she must also go to the cross with Jesus. There must be death before there can be a burial. And there must be a burial before there can be a resurrection to life. The Holy Spirit explained this in **verse 6**:

Crucifixion Of The Old Man

Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer be servants of sin.

Here again is the preposition "with." Jesus was crucified. We must also be crucified **with** Him. The old man of sin must die. Our old man of

greed, selfishness, drunkenness, cheating, lying, etc. must die on a cross of self-denial with Jesus (See Cl 2:1-17). Paul wrote concerning his personal crucifixion: "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*" (Gl 2:20). **In order to live with Christ, one must be crucified with Christ.** Before one can be buried with Him in the waters of baptism, the old man must die. The Bible says, "**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).

Something wonderful is revealed in Romans 6:6 that is often missed. The verb "was crucified" is passive tense. In other words, our old man of sin was **acted upon** by another. And who was the One who "acted upon" our old man of sin? It was Jesus! When Jesus took Himself to the cross (Jn 10:17,18), He took us with Him. He took the sins of all the "old men of sin" of the world with Him to the cross. Therefore, when Paul wrote that we are "crucified with Him," our crucifixion with Jesus took place two thousand years ago. When we believe in Jesus' atonement for our sins on the cross, and then are buried with Him in baptism, the cleansing power of His blood is activated in our lives. So when one believes in Jesus, he believes that his old man of sin dies with Christ. He then is buried and raised from the dead to walk in newness of life. Belief means nothing, therefore, unless one rec-

ognizes that he is a spiritually dead person. He then must crucify himself, and then find a grave of water into which the old spiritually dead man can be buried. He then will be resurrected as a new man in Christ.

We must always remember that what God wants us to believe and do in order to be saved is the first thing Satan will attack in order to keep us out of heaven. Since we must believe the gospel and obey it in order to be saved, then we must assume that Satan will lead some people to deny the fact that one must believe and obey the gospel for the remission of their sins. For this reason, we must not let anyone tell us that the gospel, and obedience to it, is not necessary in order to establish a gospel covenant relationship with God in Christ.

SCRIPTURE READING: Rm 6:1-7; 1 Co 15:1-4; Cl 3

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: **Baptism:** Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16; Jn 3:3-5; At 2:38; Gl 3:26,27; 1 Pt 3:21, **Baptism in water:** Mt 3:11; Jn 3:23; At 8:36; 10:47, **Baptism is a burial in water:** Rm 6:3,4; Cl 2:12 (The Greek word that is translated baptize, is *baptizo*. The word means "to dip," "plunge," or "immerse.")

GOD'S GOSPEL FAMILY

Section 5

When one is baptized in response to the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, **God adds that person to His worldwide family.** About three thousand people were first immersed in Acts 2 in A.D. 30, thus beginning the body of Christ for the first time in history (At 2:41). Every member of the body then was *"praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved"* (At 2:47).

Wherever in the world one obeys the gospel, God adds that person to the universal body of Christ. **It is for this reason that wherever there is a baptized believer, the church of God exists.** When one does what

God says he or she must do in order to be saved, God is the one who adds that person to His people. It is not our option to join a church of our choice. It is only our choice to obey what God has said to do in order that He add us to His people.

The word "church" comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*. The word means a "called out assembly" of people. The church is the universal assembly of God's people who have been called out of the world through the gospel. The church of God's people has been called out of the world through the members' belief in Jesus as the Son of God and their obedience to the gospel. God *"calls you into His own kingdom and glory"*

(1 Th 2:12). However, God calls us through the appeal of the **gospel** “for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Th 2:14).

When we accept the call of God through the gospel by our obedience to the gospel, we are added to the worldwide family of God, the church. As obedient disciples, we are God’s priests (1 Pt 2:5,9). We are priests because we have given our lives as a total sacrifice to Jesus (Rm 12:1,2). When the word “church” is used in the New Testament in reference to Christ’s work through His people, **we must think about people**. The church is not a building. It is the community of people who have given themselves to Jesus Christ in their obedience to the gospel.

If one obeys the gospel according to the will of God as set forth in the preceding chapters, then he or she must seek out God’s people in his or her community. We mention here some things for which to look when searching for God’s people. If one cannot find the church of God in his area that worships and serves God according to simple New Testament principles, then one should start a group of the gospel-obedient. One must fellowship with those who worship and serve God according to His will. Because we have obeyed the gospel, we have been added to the church by God (At 2:47). Therefore, we must fellowship with those disciples who have also obeyed the gospel. This is important lest we create a religion after our own desires or the misguided

desires of others. We must remember that God does not accept the vain worship of those who have invented their own religious groups after the traditions of their fathers or the emotions of misguided religionists (Mk 7:1-9). God seeks those who worship according to what He desires, for He is our Creator.

As obedient disciples who have been baptized for remission of sins, we must heed the Bible’s exhortation of Colossians 2:20-23 in reference to man-made religions. In this text God says, “*Therefore, if you died with Christ from the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances? Do not touch. Do not taste. Do not handle*” (Cl 2:20,21). We must remember that man-made religions “*have indeed a show of wisdom in self-made religion, false-abasement and neglect of the body, but not of any value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh*” (Cl 2:23).

Because of the vast number of man-made religions in the world today, the following chapters offer some help in discovering the church of gospel-obedient people. These are important points that will help one either discover the family of God in one’s community or start an assembly of God’s people.

Chapter 22

HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Head refers to **control** and **center of reference**. As our physical

head is the **center of reference** to our body from which all parts of our body are controlled, so Jesus wants to spiritually control our lives. He wants to deliver us from following after the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes, or the pride of life (1 Jn 2:15,16). The Bible says that Christ **“is the head of the church. And He is the Savior of the body”** (Ep 5:23). **“He is the head of the body, the church”** (Cl 1:18). As the only head of the church, Jesus demands absolute control over those who submit to His will. He can have no competition in the area of headship. For this reason, those who live by the gospel of Jesus are directed in their lives by the headship of Jesus.

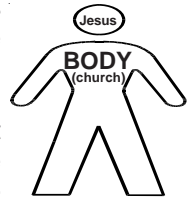
Jesus exercises His control of His body by our voluntary submission to the gospel. We submit because we have accepted Him as the only way into eternal glory (Jn 14:6; At 4:12). Submitted disciples realize that they must face final judgment (accountability) for their behavior on earth (Hb 9:27). They realize that Jesus will be their judge (At 17:30,31). And they realize that the word of Jesus, not the traditions of men, will be the standard by which they will be held accountable (Jn 12:48). Therefore, one need not be fearful of those who would seek to bind on us the religious traditions of men. Jesus' control of our lives means **freedom from the religious laws and rites of those who would intimidate or cause fear in our hearts that we follow them.** The gospel sets one free from the

intimidation of religious rules. The Bible says the following to those who have obeyed the gospel:

SET FREE, STAY FREE!

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage (Gl 5:1).

Since Jesus is the only head of the body, then there can be no other head that would distract from His absolute headship of His disciples throughout the world. God, the Father, has *“put all things under His [Jesus’] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church”* (Ep 1:22). Jesus has all authority. There can be no other authority among His disciples that would compete with Him (Mt 28:18). He is Lord of lords and King of kings (1 Tm 6:15). His authority extends even beyond that which is of this world. The Bible says, *“For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living”* (Rm 14:9). Jesus *“has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him”* (1 Pt 3:22).



How much more authority and power can one have than all authority and power? Any church that would establish another head of the church other than Jesus is actually distracting from the headship of Jesus over

all things. It is important to believe that when we come to Jesus in order that our lives be corrected and directed, we must submit to His control. He, not any man, must have our total commitment.

some key prophecies that pointed to the establishment of the kingdom reign of Jesus. According to our calendar today, the announcement of Jesus' kingdom reign was first made in the city of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. Thus, the church of King Jesus was established on this day in A.D. 30 when men and women first responded in obedience to the gospel to the first official announcement of the kingdom reign of Jesus in heaven.

SCRIPTURE READING: Ep 1:20-23; Ph 2:5-11; Cl 1:9-18
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Jesus' authority: Mt 7:29; Mk 1:22-27; Lk 5:24; 20:2-8; Jn 5:22,27; 13:3; 17:2;
Jesus will judge: Mt 16:27; 25:32-46; Jn 5:22; At 10:42; 17:30,31, **Jesus is King:** Is 9:6,7; Jn 18:36,37; 1 Co 15:20-28; Rv 3:21, **Jesus is high priest:** Hb 4:14-16; 7:25,26; 8:1,6; 9:24

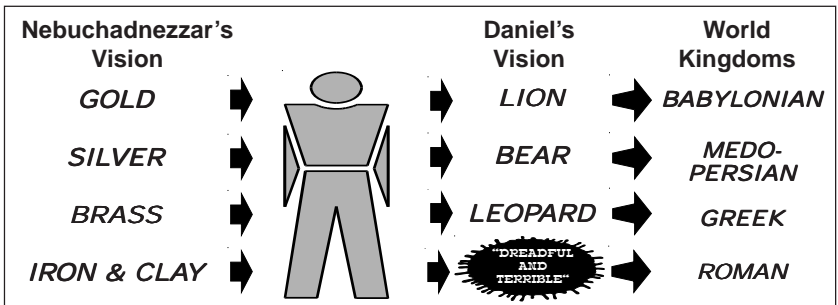
Chapter 23 ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

The establishment, or origin of the church of Christ, is related to the establishment of the kingdom reign of Jesus. **When people in the first century first responded to the kingdom reign of Jesus in heaven, the church of Jesus Christ came into existence on earth.** Therefore, when we determine when the reign of Jesus was established and officially announced, then we will discover when His church of disciples was established, for it was established when people first responded to the gospel.

It is important to understand

• Prophecy of Daniel 2 & 7:

Daniel 2 is a record of the vision of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. This vision occurred over six hundred years before Christ. In the vision, the King saw a great image. The image was a prophecy of **four world kingdoms** (See Dn 2:36-45). The image had a head of gold. This head represented the **Babylonian Kingdom** over which Nebuchadnezzar reigned. The breast and arms of the image were of silver that represented the **Medo-Persian Kingdom**. The image also had a belly of brass that represented the **Greek Kingdom**. The last kingdom was represented by feet and legs of part iron and clay. This



was a representation of the **Roman Kingdom**. In verse 44 Daniel interpreted, “*And in the days of **these kings** [the Roman kings] **the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. And the kingdom will not be left to other people. It will break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms. And it will stand forever.***” The kingdom reign about which Daniel prophesied would be established in the days of the Roman kings.

Daniel 7 is a record of Daniel’s vision that is a parallel vision to Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of Daniel 2. The same four kingdoms are represented, but with different figures. Babylon was the lion; Medo-Persia was the bear; Greece was the leopard; Rome was the beast that was “dreadful and terrible.” Daniel again prophesied that in the days of the Roman Kingdom God would set up a kingdom reign from heaven. In the days of the fulfillment of this vision, Daniel spoke of the ascension of the “Son of Man” to the Ancient of Days (God). After this ascension, there was given to the Son of Man “**dominion and glory and sovereignty, so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him**” (Dn 7:13,14).

• **Prophecy of Isaiah 2:1-5:**

In this prophecy Isaiah spoke of the house of God being established. He spoke of the word of God going from Jerusalem. He prophesied that all nations would flow unto the house of God (See also Mc 4:1-3).

• **Prophecy of Joel 2:28-32:**

Joel prophesied the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days. God would no longer pour out the Holy Spirit on the prophets alone. He would pour out His Spirit on “all flesh” (At 2:16-21).

• **Prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34:**

God promised that He would establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah. This new covenant would bring all the obedient of all nations into a new covenant relationship with God (Hb 8:6-13; 10:15-18).

These and many other prophecies concerning Jesus have all been fulfilled. When John the Baptist came in the first century, he preached, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is **at hand***” (Mt 3:1,2). When Jesus came, He also preached, “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel**” (Mk 1:14,15). “At hand” means near or soon. In other words, the kingdom about which both John and Jesus spoke, and of which the prophets prophesied, was soon to be established in reference to the personal ministries of John and Jesus.

Neither the kingdom reign of Jesus, nor the church, were established in the days of either John the Baptist or Jesus. During their ministries, both spoke of the church as something that would come in the future. **Concerning the kingdom**, Jesus said, “*Truly I say to you, there*

are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death **until they see the kingdom of God come with power**" (Mk 9:1). **Concerning the church**, He said, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock **I will build My church**, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). Both the kingdom reign of Jesus and the church, therefore, were yet in the future in reference to Jesus' earthly ministry.

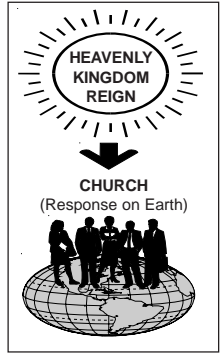
The words "kingdom" and "church" refer to two different things in reference to God's rule and people. "Kingdom" refers to **God's reign and rule from heaven**, whereas "church" refers to **the response of people to kingdom reign**.

Jesus said, "**The kingdom of God is within you**" (Lk 17:20,21). "**My kingdom is not of this world**" (Jn 18:36). Therefore, the kingdom of Jesus is not physical as the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman kingdoms. It is spiritual. Here's how. Jesus asked the disciples to

pray, "**Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**" (Mt 6:9, 10). **When the will of the Father is done on earth in the hearts of men as it is done in heaven, then**

the kingdom reign of Jesus in heaven is revealed through the church of gospel-obedient people on earth.

We must also understand the time when the prophecies of the kingdom were fulfilled. They were fulfilled when Jesus ascended to the Father to receive glory, dominion and kingdom reign. This happened in the first century and was recorded in Acts 1. Jesus ascended to the right hand of God about a week before the Pentecost of A.D. 30 (At 2:29-35). On the Sunday of the Jewish **Pentecost**,



FULFILLMENT OF KINGDOM & CHURCH PROPHECIES

A.D. 30 – Day of Pentecost – Jerusalem

PROPHECY

FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 2:1-5
Micah 4:1-3

Daniel 2:44

Daniel 7:13,14
Joel 2:28-32

Jeremiah 31:31-34

In the Last Days
Lord's House Established
All Nations Added
Word from Jerusalem
Judge Nations
Peace on Earth
Days of Roman Kings
The Stone
Coming in the Clouds
"Afterward" - Last Days
Spirit Poured Out
New Covenant

Hebrews 1:1,2
1 Timothy 3:15
Mark 16:15,16
Luke 24:47
John 12:48
2 Thessalonians 3:16
Luke 3:1-4
Romans 16:20
Acts 1:9-11
Acts 2:1-4
Acts 2:16-24
Hebrews 8:6-18

Peter proclaimed the message of the gospel: the death of Jesus for our sins, His burial, His resurrection for our hope, and His ascension to reign at the right hand of God (At 2:29-35). Peter then proclaimed, *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that **God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ**”* (At 2:36).

When men and women first heard of the existing reign of Jesus, **they responded with submission.** Listen to what happened after Peter’s first historical announcement of the kingdom reign of Jesus: *“Now when they heard this, **they were cut to the heart.** And they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what will we do?’”* (At 2:37). In Peter’s audience there were those who responded to the gospel of Jesus. In order to answer their response, Peter instructed them, *“**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).

Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father in order to reign as King (Ep 1:20-23). The kingdom reign of Jesus existed **before** the existence of gospel-obedient saints. The first announcement of Jesus’ kingdom reign took place on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. About 3,000 people responded to this first announcement by allowing the will of God to be done on earth in their hearts as it is done in heaven (At 2:41). Therefore, the church began

in Acts 2 when people first responded to King Jesus. **The church began when men and women first responded to the first official announcement of the kingdom reign of Jesus.** This happened on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 in the city of Jerusalem two thousand years ago.

SCRIPTURE READING: Dn 2:14-45; 7:9-28; At 1,2
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Kingdom prophecies: 2
 Sm 7:12,13,16; Ps 45:6,7; 110:1; Is 9:6; 22:22-25; Jr
 23:5,6; Zc 6:12,13

Chapter 24

GOSPEL-OBEDIENT PEOPLE

The Lord Jesus Christ is the universal head of His body, the church (Cl 1:18). He rules in the hearts of His disciples through the authority of His written **word** (Jn 12:48). His control and direction for His body is accomplished through those who have voluntarily responded to the gospel of His atoning sacrifice on the cross, His resurrection and His kingdom reign over all things.

The center of reference of the body of Christ is thus from heaven. God never intended to set up on earth any authorities that would either take the place of or challenge the lordship of Jesus. Any religious body that would either challenge or set aside the authority of Jesus by establishing their own religious laws is being rebellious to the sovereign reign of Jesus. Jesus warned, *“He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. **The word that I have spoken, the***

same will judge him in the last day” (Jn 12:48).

Gospel leadership among the members of the body is revealed through the lives of those who live to serve (See Mk 10:44,45). These devoted workers do not have the authority to establish laws that would be bound on the consciences of God’s people. Their designation as leaders is to nurture the body through teaching, evangelism, the example of gospel living, and ministering as servants to the needs of those who have voluntarily submitted themselves to the direction of Jesus (Hb 13:17).

All leadership among the disciples must be based on the leadership principles that Jesus set forth in His instructions to the disciples. The following are some of these fundamental principles:

Leadership Through Service

You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you, will be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first will be bondservant of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mk 10:42-45).

Whenever we consider leadership among the disciples, therefore, we are discussing those who have dedicated themselves to be servants to the spiritual needs of those who have submitted to living the gospel (See 1 Co 16:15,16).

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION

Evangelists function in two special works: First, their primary function is **to proclaim to the lost the good news of Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection and reign**. Second, they work **to edify the church** through the teaching of the word of God. The Bible exhorts evangelists, *“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching”* (2 Tm 4:2). Evangelists must *“be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist”* in order to fulfill their ministry (2 Tm 4:5).

It is the work of the evangelist to set a gospel example for others to follow. They are to minister the gospel to the world, both in teaching and by the gospel example of their lives. The apostle Paul wrote to the evangelist Timothy, *“Let no one despise your youth. But you be an **example** to the believers in word, in behavior, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Until I come, give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching”* (1 Tm 4:12,13).

GOSPEL SHEPHERDS

Leadership responsibilities among the people of God is given to a designated group of men who are commonly referred to as **elders** or **shepherds**. Depending on one’s translation of the Bible, throughout the New Testament these men are also referred to as **bishops, overseers**, or **presbyters**. These are all references to the same desig-

nated leaders. **Different words are used to identify them by the nature of their service for the flock of God.**

Shepherds do not have the authority to make religious laws for the church, for God has delivered to the church all necessary instructions through the word of God (2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:3; Jd 3).

When elders were designated in the first century church, there was always a **plurality** of elders designated for all the members in any one area (At 14:23). Though the disciples met in different houses, the elders always worked as a group to service the needs of the members who lived throughout the community.

Before shepherds are designated, they must have certain physical qualifications and spiritual qualities. These qualifications and qualities are set forth in **1 Timothy 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:7-9**. These qualifications and qualities are given in order to guide the disciples in designating those men who are spiritually qualified to function as their shepherds.

Shepherds have the responsibility of caring for the flock of members who can personally know them (1 Pt 5:2). They are to offer their spiritual presence, teaching and gospel lifestyle as an example to those with whom they associate.

The work of elders is shown in the following New Testament instructions: ***“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, serving as overseers ... being examples to the flock”*** (1 Pt 5:2,3). ***“Therefore, take heed***

to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God” (At 20:28). It is the work of shepherds to function in counseling and caring for the flock of God. They must look out over the flock of God in order to make sure that spiritual and physical needs are serviced among God's people (Hb 13:17). It is their responsibility to teach the flock.

Disciples in a particular region may not have a plurality of qualified men to function as a designated group to shepherd the flock of God. However, this does not mean that they are without the benefit of godly counseling and spiritual direction that is offered through mature disciples. There are always godly members who can give spiritual counseling and direction for young and inexperienced members. However, if there are godly men who do not have the physical qualifications that are given in the New Testament, then they cannot be publicly designated as shepherds of the flock. Nevertheless, they can fulfill their Christian responsibility of helping others through times of trial, as well as, ministering in the work of teaching the word of God (1 Co 16:15,16; Gl 6:1,2).

SPECIAL MENSERVANTS

Special servants, or deacons, are designated for the purpose of **serving special needs of the body** (Ph 1:1). As the shepherds, they also are to fulfill specific physical qualifications and spiritual qualities before

they are designated for special ministries. These qualifications and qualities are revealed in **1 Timothy 3:8-12**. In their designation as deacons, they function to mature and edify the members through the example of gospel service to the needs of the flock.

SCRIPTURE READING: **Servant leadership:** Mk 10:35-45; Jn 13:1-17; 1 Co 16:15,16, **Elders:** At 20:28-32; 1 Tm 3:1-7; Ti 1:7-9; 1 Pt 5:1-3, **Evangelists:** 1 & 2 Timothy; Titus (These three New Testament books were written specifically to the evangelists Timothy and Titus.)

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: **Principle of servanthood:** Mt 20:20-28; Mk 9:33-37; 10:35-45; Lk 22:24-30; Jn 13:1-17, **Work of servanthood leaders:** 1 Co 16:15,16; Hb 13:17, **Elders:** At 15:4,5,23; 20:17,28; Ep 4:11; Ph 1:1; 1 Th 5:12,13; 1 Tm 3:1-7; 5:1,17-19; Ti 1:7-9; Js 5:14,15, **Evangelist's life:** At 20:22-24; 21:8; Rm 1:15; 1 Co 9:25-27; 2 Co 4:1,2; 10:12-16; 1 Th 3:2; 1 Pt 4:11 (See 1,2 Tm; Ti), **Evangelist's work:** Rm 10:14,15 (See 1,2 Tm; Ti)

Chapter 25 SEARCH FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

The disciples in the New Testament are referred to with words and phrases that describe **ownership** and the disciples' **relationship** with one another, and with God through their obedience to the gospel. These words and phrases either identify the owner to whom members have given allegiance or explain the organic function of the members. These words and phrases are not proper names or titles that should divide disciples from one another. They are references that are commonly used in the New Testament to refer to the worldwide collective body of those whom God has called out of the world through their voluntary obedience to the gospel:

- **The church of God** (1 Co 1:2)
- **The body of Christ** (Ep 1:22,23)
- **The church of Christ** (Rm 16:16)
- **The house of God** (1 Tm 3:15)
- **The flock of God** (1 Pt 5:2,3)
- **The bride of Christ** (Rv 21:9)
- **The church of the Lord (God)** (At 20:28)
- **The household of God** (Ep 2:19)
- **The temple of God** (1 Co 3:16)

As with phrases that define the organic nature of the global body, individual members are referred to in the New Testament with terms that describe the nature or ownership of the saints. The following is a brief list of descriptive terms that are used to describe the members of the body:

- **Disciples** (At 11:26)
- **Christians** (At 11:26; 1 Pt 4:16)
- **Saints** (Rm 1:7; Ep 1:1; Ph 1:1)
- **Children of God** (Rm 8:16; Ep 5:8)
- **Sons of God** (Gl 3:26)
- **Brethren** (Ph 4:21; 1 Pt 2:17)
- **Servants** (Rm 16:1,2)
- **Priests** (1 Pt 2:5,9; Rv 1:6)

It is always a good principle to use Bible references to describe Bible teachings and the function of the organic body. Man-made titles and names that are used in the religious world often divide the disciples and exalt one disciple over another. These titles should be avoided. Those who seek to establish unity will always give up titles in order to base unity among Christians on the names and principles of the Bible.

We must always keep in mind

that God did not intend to give a specific title to any disciple. There is no unique name used in the New Testament to either identify the church or the members. God knew that unique names and titles would divide disciples from one another, and exalt one disciple over others (Mk 10:42,43). Jesus sought to maintain the unity of His body by using a variety of terms and phrases that refer to the nature or work of the members. For this reason, it would be wrong to use a particular reference to the disciples of Christ in a manner that would divide the members.

SCRIPTURE READING: Mk 10:35-45; Cl 1:9-18

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Ownership of the church:
At 20:28; 1 Co 6:20; Ti 2:14, **Glorify God, not man:** Jn 12:28; 16:14; 17:5; Rm 1:21; Gl 6:13,14; Cl 3:17; 1 Pt 4:16; Rv 4:11

Chapter 26

GOSPEL WORSHIP & SERVICE

Jesus made a very important statement in John 4:23: *“But the hour is coming and now is, when **the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him.**”* It is very important how we worship God. **God is our Creator and it is He who gives directions as to how He wants to be worshiped.** Therefore, **it is not our choice as to how we would worship God.** The choice is His for He is our Creator who seeks to be worshiped according to His desires.

Many religious people today are worshipping God according to their

own desires. But if we worship God after the religious ceremonies of men, then we worship God in **vain**. Jesus said, *“**And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men**”* (Mk 7:7). If we worship God in **ignorance** of God and the gospel, then we also worship Him in vain. The apostle Paul addressed such worshipers in Acts 17. He said to them, *“**The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I declare to you**”* (At 17:23). In order that these to whom Paul spoke would worship God according to the truth of the gospel, he preached to them the gospel of the one true God (At 17:23-31).

The world is filled with those who worship God according to their own religious performances and ceremonial rites. The Bible speaks of such worshipers: *“**These things have indeed a show of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and neglect of the body**”* (Cl 2:23). It is important to worship God according to what He desires, **not according to our own desires.**

Unfortunately, when it comes to worship and service of God, many are as those about whom Paul wrote whose worship and service was rejected by God: *“**For I testify of them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God**”* (Rm 10:2,3). We must seek the righteousness of God that was re-

vealed on the cross of His Son. Those who do not know the gospel will seek to worship God according to their own rules and ceremonies, or even for their own pleasure. They do not worship in thanksgiving of the gospel.

Worship should never be an effort to entertain ourselves. Worship is the outpouring of a heart that walks in thanksgiving of the gospel. True worshipers do not consider entertaining ourselves when meditating on the awesome eternal sacrifice and suffering of the cross.

GOSPEL WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

It is great news that Christians today are not obligated to worship God in ignorance of the gospel or after the ordinances of the Sinai law. Animal sacrifices are no longer necessary in worship to God. Christians today have been freed from the necessity of offering the blood of bulls and goats that could not take away sins (Hb 10:1-4). The gospel has freed us from ignorantly worshiping God according to our own desires and the religious rules of men. Christians today have the advantage of God's direction in worship through His inspired word.

In response to the gospel, the Christian's worship and service to God today is on a daily basis and according to the directions of His will.



Worship of God is not confined to buildings or particular locations, for God *“does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands as though He needed anything”* (At 17:24,25).

Worship of God is not confined to a particular time or day. The Bible says, *“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service”* (Rm 12:1). The Christian has presented his entire life as a “living sacrifice” in response to the gospel. Paul wrote of himself, *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Gl 2:20). The total life of the Christian is a gospel sacrifice. Therefore, Christians worship daily in living the gospel. Wherever a Christian may be, and at any time, he has the privilege of worshiping God.

All Christians are priests of God. They *“are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* (1 Pt 2:5). They are a *“chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a special people”* to God (1 Pt 2:9). As priests, **Christians are on duty at all times.** Their whole life is given in service to God. The following are some of the important things Christians do in their daily gospel worship and service of God:

Gospel Living Through Daily Study And Proclamation Of The Gospel

The early Christians determined to preach the gospel on a daily basis. ***“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”*** (At 5:42). They ***“went everywhere preaching the word [of the gospel]”*** (At 8:4). Because they had been saved by the gospel of grace, they had great news for all the world. It was their work, therefore, to preach the gospel daily to every person in the world (Mk 16:15).

SCRIPTURE READING: Mt 15:1-9; At 17:16-30; 2 Tm 4:1-3
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: **Worship:** Gn 22:5; Ps 45:11; 95:6; Mt 2:2; At 24:14; Hb 10:24,25; Rv 4:10; 14:7; 19:4; **Preach:** Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16; Rm 10:8-15; Ep 3:8,9; 4:11,12; 1 Tm 4:13, 2 Tm 2:15

Gospel Living Through Daily Song And Admonition Of One Another

As the community of God, Christians are exhorted to speak to ***“one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”*** (Ep 5:19). ***“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”*** (Cl 3:16). Christians should with their voices be known for their daily teaching of one another in song. They should use the medium of songs to voice their praises to God.

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: At 16:25; Rm 15:9; 1 Co 14:15; Hb 2:12; Js 5:13

Gospel Living Through Daily Prayer And Fasting

The Bible says to ***“pray without ceasing”*** (1 Th 5:17). Disciples of Jesus should not be ***“anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving,”*** they must let their requests be made known to God (Ph 4:6). Christians direct their prayers **to the Father**, for it is He who answers our prayers (Jn 14:13).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus said, ***“But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days”*** (Mk 2:20). In this statement, Jesus spoke of Himself going away to reign in heaven. He has since gone into heaven, and thus, **His disciples now fast**. The disciples now fast often during their intense prayers to call on God to work in their lives (At 13:1-3). They give themselves to fasting (1 Co 7:5).

SCRIPTURE READING: Mk 2:18-20; At 4:23-31
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: **Prayer:** At 2:42; 12:5,12; 1 Co 14:14-17; Cl 3:17; 4:12; 1 Tm 2:8; **Fasting:** Mt 17:21; Lk 2:37; At 13:1-3; 14:23

Gospel Living Through Daily Good Works Of Gratitude

In his worship and reverential response to the gospel, the disciple is not his own. He has been bought with the price of the cross. This price was the offering of the incarnate Son of God on the cross for our sins. Therefore, the Bible says, ***“For you have been bought with a price.”***

Therefore, glorify God in your body” (1 Co 6:20). Christians walk in gratitude of the gospel. Since the Christian is not his own person, he realizes that what he has is from God. Therefore, the Christian uses his possessions (money or material things) in a sacrificial manner to provide for himself and his family, and to do the work of God. Christians give in gratitude of the gospel. They daily give in a sacrificial manner to any spontaneous need that may arise. **God is a giver, and those who would claim to be godly, must also be givers.** “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, **especially to those who are of the household of the faith**” (Gl 6:10).

SCRIPTURE READING: At 2:44,45; 4:34-37; Ph 4:10-20
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Giving: 1 Co 16:1-3; 2 Co 8:1-4; 9; Gl 2:10, **Doing good:** Lk 10:30-37; Js 1:27; 4:17; 1 Jn 3:13-18

Gospel Living In Communion With Jesus And One Another

Though worship of God is individual, on the first day of the week, Christians seek to bring their worshipful spirits together in order to praise and thank God. They come together to remember Jesus and the gospel of grace that was poured out for them when Jesus died on the cross (Ti 2:11). An important part of this assembly is the communion of disciples with one another and Jesus around the Lord's Supper and during a love feast. As with the Passover meal of the Jews, the early

Christians came together to celebrate the gospel of Jesus by partaking of the Lord's Supper (At 20:7; see 2 Pt 2:13; Jd 12). They partook of the Lord's Supper that was instituted by Jesus. In writing to a Jewish audience, Matthew reminded his readers that Jesus changed the meaning of the bread and fruit of the vine of the Jewish Passover meal:

The Gospel “Passover”

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt 26:26-28).

Concerning the **bread** of the Supper, Jesus revealed that His disciples must remember Him when they eat of the bread. “**This is My body which is for you. This do in remembrance of Me**” (1 Co 11:24). Concerning the **fruit of the vine**, Jesus said that in His kingdom it represented the sanctifying blood of the gospel covenant that the disciples have with Him. He said, “**This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me**” (1 Co 11:25).

The **bread** of the Supper represents the **body of Jesus**. The **fruit of the vine** represents the **blood of the gospel covenant** that God has made with all Christians. The **bread**

that Jesus used when the Supper was instituted was bread that represented life, for God provided manna (bread) to sustain the nation of Israel during their forty-year wilderness wanderings when they came out of Egyptian captivity. It was the unleavened bread of the Jewish Passover Feast (Ex 34:25; Lv 25:5-8). The **fruit of the vine** was juice from grape vines (Mk 14:24,25). The New Testament does not say that either the bread or fruit of the vine turn into the literal body and blood of Jesus. Neither does it say that Jesus' body and blood are present in the elements. The bread and fruit of the vine are simply **representative** of Jesus' body and blood.

Jesus used these two physical things—bread and fruit of the vine—to represent important spiritual truths. These truths are that He sacrificially gave His incarnate body (the bread), and poured out His blood (the fruit of the vine), in order to give us life (Ep 1:7; 1 Pt 1:2,19). When we partake of the Supper, we remember Jesus. We proclaim Jesus. The Bible says, *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes”* (1 Co 11:26). When Christians partake of the Lord’s Supper, they are preaching the gospel of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

The disciples of Jesus must search their hearts at the time they eat and drink of the Supper. *“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup”* (1 Co 11:28).

The disciples do not always have bread and fruit of the vine in order to celebrate the Supper of the Lord. Many disciples live in arid places of the world where bread or fruit of the vine simply do not exist. The Holy Spirit certainly had these circumstances in mind when He wrote to the Corinthian disciples through Paul. He wrote, *“... as often as you drink ... as often as you eat ...”* (1 Co 11:25,26). When there is no bread or fruit of the vine available, we would suggest a few moments of quiet meditation in memory of the gospel of the Lord. The Lord’s Supper is in memory of the gospel that set us free, and thus, this would be a time in our assembly when we should read those scriptures that speak of our freedom from both sin and religion. It is a time to remember the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL UNITY

Another important remembrance of the Supper is to consider the oneness of the universal body of Christ. All those who have obeyed the gospel throughout the world are blessed with unity in Christ. Our common obedience to the gospel has brought us into a common fellowship with one another (Jd 3). In partaking of the Supper, we are celebrating our blessing of oneness in Christ. The Bible says, *“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ? For though we are many, we are one bread and one*

body, for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Co 10:16,17).

When we partake of the bread, therefore, we must remember the unity of the universal body. We are one universal church because we have obeyed the one gospel. God has added us to the one universal church (At 2:47). The Bible says, *“For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of that one body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”* (1 Co 12:12,13).

DYNAMIC GOSPEL LIVING

Disciples present their entire lives in reverential worship and service to God (Rm 12:1,2). Their worshipful attitudes are expressed in their daily proclamation of the gospel, the singing of spiritual songs, praying, doing good to others, and giving to others to the glory of God. These living responses to the grace of God manifest our thanksgiving to God for saving us through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). *“Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Co 10:31). *“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him”* (Cl 3:17). **Therefore, when worshipful Christians assemble on Sunday to partake of the Lord’s Supper, a dynamic spiritual fellowship of praise to God happens that is very encouraging.**

SCRIPTURE READING: Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:14-20; 1 Co 11:23-29

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: At 2:42; 20:7, **One body:** 1 Co 12:12-31; Ep 4:4-6; Cl 1:16-18

Chapter 27

FINDING GOSPEL PEOPLE

One can identify other disciples of Jesus by simply knowing the identifying characteristics of God’s people that are recorded in the New Testament. Since the church exists wherever there is one who has obeyed the gospel, then the church of disciples is first identified by those who have been obedient to the one gospel that has been revealed to us through Jesus Christ (Jd 3).

We must realize that religious people may partially teach and practice some of the identifying characteristics of the body of Christ. However, they may not be members of the body if they have added to the gospel other religious rites (Gl 1:6-9). Also, obeying only part of what God requires does not identify one to be a Christian. A disciple of Jesus is one who believes and obeys the one gospel of Jesus.

We must remember that people can be religious, but not all religious people are disciples of Jesus. We must be careful, therefore, for many people are religious on the foundation of practicing the religious rites of their church heritage. They have brought themselves into the bondage of the doctrines and religious traditions of men. In doing this, they have often ignored portions of the full gos-

pel of God's plan of redemption. False teachings are always taught throughout the world. Therefore, one must beware lest he or she is deceived by the religiosity of misguided people. All teachings must be tested by the word of God (See 1 Jn 4:1; Rv 2:2). The Bible says, "**Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you are disqualified?**" (2 Co 13:5). We must not forget the following warnings:

Departing From The Faith

Now the Spirit clearly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron (1 Tm 4:1,2).

Turning From The Truth

For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires. And they will turn their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables (2 Tm 4:3,4).

Be careful! Be not deceived!

One would be foolish to believe that every person who affirms Jesus to be the Son of God, or claims to be following the Bible, is actually living what the Bible says one must live in order to be saved. We must identify true disciples in our community and test their beliefs by the word of God. We must identify true disciples by what they believe, teach, and live in response to the gospel. What is practiced and taught must be according to the word of God (Mt 7:15-23).

It is important that we do not add to God's word (2 Jn 9; Rv 22:18,19). It is important that we not add religious rites and rules to the gospel, and thus promote another gospel (Gl 1:6-9). It is our plea, therefore, that everyone search the Scriptures in order to discover other disciples of Jesus in his or her community who have also obeyed the gospel. It is our mission to find others who are disciples of Jesus (See At 18:1-3; 19:1). When we find other disciples, then it is time for mutual Bible study of the word of God.

SCRIPTURE READING: At 20:28-30; 2 Pt 2:20-22
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Apostasy: Gl 3:1-5; 1 Tm 4:1-3; 2 Tm 2:18; 4:4,10; Hb 6:4-6; 10:26-31; Rv 2:4,
Deception: Ps 43:1; 55:23; Mt 24:11,24; 1 Co 3:18; 2 Co 4:2; 11:13; Ep 4:14; 5:6; Cl 2:8; 2 Tm 3:13

GOSPEL LIVING FOR JESUS

Section 6

Everyone must make a decision to obey the gospel. The obedient must then make a decision to share with others what they have learned

and obeyed. If one has truly obeyed the gospel in heart, then it is only natural to share the gospel with others. As a disciple, it is natural to share

the gospel and seek to be with gospel-obedient disciples in order to promote love and good works (Hb 10:24,25). Doing this means that we must take a stand for what the Bible teaches concerning the gospel.

In reference to being associated with that which is false, the Bible says such things as, *“And what union has the temple of God with idols? **Come out from among them and be separate**”* (2 Co 6:16,17). *“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house and do not give him greeting. For he who gives him greeting participates in his evil deeds”* (2 Jn 10,11). These are direct statements from the Holy Spirit that emphasize the seriousness of what one must do as a disciple in order to maintain purity of belief and behavior as a son of God.

When one obeys the gospel, and is added to the church by God, he or she is added to the universal church of God, not to a unique sect of religion that has been created after the traditions of men (At 2:47). God does not add us to false religious groups. He does not want us to continue to worship in error with a false religious sect. He does not add the obedient to something that is contrary to His revealed word. We are added to the universal family of God that is united by the members' common obedience to the gospel (Jd 3).

As members of the one church, we are obligated to teach others what we have learned from our personal study of the Bible. In other words,

one cannot obey God's plan of obedience to the gospel in order to be saved and then continue to worship and serve God according to the religious rites of men (Mk 7:1-9). We must act now, both in our own response to the gospel, and in teaching the gospel to others.

We must worship God with His people in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24). If there are other gospel-obedient people in one's community, **then we must worship God with this fellowship of disciples.** We must come out from among false religions and be separated from false teachings in order to worship God in spirit and in truth (2 Co 6:17,18).

The gospel of the cross, resurrection and current reign of Jesus first applied to our response to the gospel. Because we were motivated by the heart of God to be saved, we are also motivated to live according to the gospel (Ph 2:5-8). The gospel is our motivation to live according to the example of Jesus.

Chapter 28

GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP

The early disciples first met in their homes. In fact, they met in their homes until the first part of the fourth century. The first church buildings were not constructed until Constantine, Emperor of Rome, built the first building for an assembly in the early fourth century. But for centuries, Christians met in homes when they established assemblies throughout the world. There are many historical

statements in the New Testament that mention the meeting of the saints in their homes (See At 5:42; 20:20; Rm 16:5; 1 Co 16:19; Cl 4:15; Pl 2).

One of the first things to learn about the fellowship of the disciples is that it does not make any difference where the saints assemble for worship and mutual edification. God is not concerned about places of meeting, or our desire to create special places of worship. In fact, during His ministry, Jesus taught against establishing an "official" place of worship when He made the following statement to a woman from Samaria who questioned Him about locations of worship:

Meet Anywhere, Any Time

Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father.... But the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him (Jn 4:21-23).

Christians do not have official places of worship. Since worship is individually focused on God, **one can worship God anywhere and anytime**. Since God is everywhere, Christians can bring their worshipful spirits together anywhere it is convenient.

After one's obedience to the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, he or she may be the only disciple in his or her community. Therefore, if there

is no assembly of gospel-obedient disciples in one's community, then one should offer an opportunity for assembly in one's own home. We must not forget that it is our responsibility to serve God in truth. It may be that our house is the best place to meet in our community in order to pour out our hearts in worship. Here are some suggestions to begin an assembly of disciples.

GOSPEL LEADERSHIP

To begin an assembly of disciples, decisions must be made. Many decisions will rest on the shoulders of the one who is initiating the establishment of an assembly. However, as soon as possible one must bring all the disciples together in order to make decisions as a group. The group is led by mature disciples. It is unwise for groups of disciples to be controlled by the decisions of only one person, or new converts. In the New Testament, all the disciples were involved in making decisions that affected the entire church (At 15:22).

In the beginning of the assembly in a community, gospel-minded people must take the lead. In 1 Corinthians 16:15,16, Stephanas and his household took the lead in ministering to the disciples in Corinth. **They took the lead by devoting themselves to serve others.** Leadership, therefore, is service to others. It is giving gospel life examples for others to follow (Jn 13:1-17; Ph 2:5-11). People will follow those who lovingly humble themselves as examples to serve the needs of others

(Mk 10:43,44). **Those who live the gospel are naturally followed by those who have obeyed the gospel.** When faithful disciples set themselves to serve the needs of the community, first by preaching the gospel, and then by servicing the needs of the saints, others will follow. Therefore, as a disciple of Jesus, **“do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of the faith”** (Gl 6:10; see Jn 13:34,35).

SCRIPTURE READING: Mt 20:20-28; Lk 22:24-30
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Leaders love the church: Mt 20:28; Jn 10:11; 13:34,35; 15:13, **Leaders give examples:** 1 Co 11:1; Ph 4:9; 1 Tm 4:12; 1 Pt 5:2,3, **Leaders give service:** Mk 10:45; 1 Co 16:15,16; Gl 6:1,2; Hb 13:17, **Leaders give vision:** Jg 5:2; Mk 16:15; At 20:24; Ph 3:14

GOSPEL ASSEMBLIES

The Bible does not teach that a church is established because all the members in a particular location are able to meet together at the same place on Sunday. The word “church” refers to people. The church is a community of people who have obeyed the gospel. They are not identified by where they meet, or what they do when they meet. We must remember that the church exists wherever God has added gospel-obedient believers to His universal body. **Wherever there are people who have obeyed the gospel, the church exists.** The church is not identified by the ability of all the members in a particular area to meet together at the same place. The church existed in Jerusalem **before** the 3,000 baptized believers could meet the following Sunday after the Pentecost Sunday of Acts 2 (See At

2:41-47). We must keep in mind that the church is identified by people who have obeyed the gospel, not by any rituals or ceremonies they might conduct in an assembly.

When we establish a meeting of the members, the church will naturally grow and become too large to meet in one house alone. When this happens, we start meeting in two or more houses of the members. In many cities, there are no public buildings to rent. Therefore, members must continue to multiply the number of assembly locations when the assemblies become too large for each place of meeting. **We must keep in mind that regardless of how many assemblies we have in a particular city or village because of space and distance from one another, all the members are still one church. The members do not define the existence of the church by their assemblies.**

The church of the New Testament was first universal. In reference to city assemblies, the church was referred to as the church in Corinth (1 Co 1:2), the church of Ephesus (Rv 2:1), or the church of Smyrna (Rv 2:8). Though the church in these cities met in many different locations, God still considered the disciples of the city to be one church. Regardless of how many facilities in which we must meet, we are still part of the one universal church.

There may be the opportunity to meet in a public facility as a school or rented building. If this is the case, then all the Christians can join together to

pay the rent for such a building. Some groups have even built their own buildings. We must keep in mind that it is not important where we meet. What is important is assembling the disciples together in small or large groups for mutual edification and encouragement. We must keep in mind also that all the members need not to meet together at the same place and time on Sunday in order to be one church in the area. All the members meeting together may not be practical because there is no building that will house all the members, or it may be too far to walk for some members to come together regularly into one place. What is important is that the members meet with one another for mutual edification.

We must refresh our memories concerning what Jesus said in John 4:21 when He spoke to the Samaritan woman. *“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father.”* Jesus’ point was that there would be no special places of worship for His disciples as the Jews had designated Jerusalem and the Samaritans had designated a special mountain. No special places of worship would be designated by the disciples of Jesus in order to prevent the members from restricting their worship to special places of worship.

GOSPEL ENCOURAGEMENT

Christians meet together in assembly in order to stir up love and good works.

Encouraging Gospel Living

And let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, but exhorting one another (Hb 10:24,25).

The assembly of the disciples of Jesus must be an occasion for **stirring up love** in our hearts. In order to accomplish this, close relationships must be established between members. Love grows when members begin to know one another in a personal manner (See Jn 13:34,35). Our assemblies, therefore, must be conducted in a manner that will allow members to participate and get to know one another (1 Co 14:26).

Members must be **stirred up to do good works**. Each member must be encouraged to use their gifts to minister to others. Assemblies should be occasions to encourage each member, to minister to others out of love for others (See 1 Co 13:1-13; Js 2:14-26). Those who do not want to work will often stay away from assemblies that focus on motivating one’s heart with the gospel. Regardless of how we conduct our assemblies, we must keep in mind that the directive of Hebrews 10:24,25 must be accomplished. Love must be generated and works must be stirred up by the gospel.

We worship God both in our hearts and in the behavior of our lives (Rm 12:1). Since God is the one we worship, we must worship Him according to His instructions. There are

few instructions in the New Testament concerning how the actual assembly of the disciples should be conducted, though we have some examples of how the early disciples assembled. A general principle for conducting an assembly that is directed specifically for worship is stated in 1 Corinthians 14:40: *“Let all things be done decently and in order.”* This at least means that the assembly of gospel-obedient disciples must not become an occasion for chaos. Assemblies must not be an opportunity for any member to emotionally lose control of themselves and cause confusion.

When Christians come together to worship, they do not come together to please themselves or to carry on with their own inventions of worship behavior. We must remember that worship is directed to God. It is He who instructs, *“The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him”* (Jn 4:23). The religious world is filled with those who seek to worship according to their own desires. However, the Father is seeking those who will worship Him according to the instructions of His word.

We must not forget that the assembly of the saints is for the edification of the disciples. It is a time of celebration, a time to remember the Lord's death for our sins and resurrection for our hope. It is thus a time to take the opportunity to celebrate the gospel around the Lord's Supper (At 20:7). It is an opportunity to speak

to one another in songs (Ep 5:19; Cl 3:16). It is an opportunity for discussing the word of God (At 20:7). It is a time to contribute to special needs that the members have decided to accomplish as a group (1 Co 16:1,2). It is also a time when Christians can join together in prayer (At 4:23-31). The Sunday assembly of gospel-obedient disciples, therefore, should be a time of great fellowship and encouragement for all the members.

When worshipful disciples come together in assembly, they naturally worship God as a group. One individual member, therefore, must not use the occasion to show pride or call attention to himself. One must not use the occasion to exalt himself above others. God is the focus of our attention in our assembled worship. Our worship, therefore, must be based on the principles of love that the Holy Spirit revealed in **1 Corinthians 13**.

There are no directions of order in the New Testament concerning how an assembly of disciples is to be conducted. God, therefore, expects us to use our common sense in order to determine what to do. We are thus free to make decisions concerning how to conduct ourselves when we come together in assembly.

GOSPEL GIVING

Contributing money or things to help others, and to help others preach the gospel to the lost, is an opportunity to reveal that we are living according to the gospel. It is a

way we can express our gratitude for the gospel. Therefore, we must take every opportunity to do good (Gl 6:10). As givers, we must be ready at all times to give when occasions arise for which sacrificial giving must come from us as Jesus sacrificially gave to us. In the New Testament, there are many examples of Christians giving to special needs.

- **Acts 4:32-37** is an example of Christians giving to help those in need in the city of Jerusalem.
- **Acts 6:1-7** is an example of Christians making a regular distribution to the widows of the church (See 1 Tm 5:8-11).
- **1 Corinthians 16:1-4** is an example of Christians giving money to fulfill a special need. The Corinthians were helping Christians who were suffering from famine in the area of Judea.
- **2 Corinthians 8:1-4** is an example of saints in many areas working together in fellowship with one another in order to give to others in need.
- **Philippians 4:10-18** is an example of Christians giving for the purpose of supporting evangelists (See 2 Co 11:7-9; 3 Jn 5-8).

Mentioned above are many things for which the disciples can join together in order to support. They can join together in order to support evangelists to go to unevangelized areas. They must take care of orphans and widows (Js 1:27). The important thing to remember is that **gospel-obedient disciples must make sacrificial contributions, and they must make such contributions cheerfully** (2 Co 9:6,7). This

is the spirit of the gospel, for Jesus sacrificially gave up heaven for us (See Ph 2:5-8). From the very beginning of the assembly of the disciples, contributions need to begin in order that the gospel be preached to the world (See Ph 4:15-17).

GOSPEL PREACHING

As disciples of Jesus, we should desire that others join with us in our journey to eternal life. We should thus teach others the gospel road map to heaven. However, when we preach the gospel, Satan will fight against us. There will always be those who will persecute those who work for Jesus. They will persecute the disciples of Jesus in order that they be discouraged about preaching the gospel to the lost. Regardless of persecution, however, we must remember Paul's words, "*For woe is me if I do not preach the gospel*" (1 Co 9:16). Paul had to preach the gospel because it was the gospel that he was living (Gl 2:20).

Persecuted For Jesus

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for in the same manner they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Mt 5:10-12).

Regardless of persecution and mocking, we must preach the gospel to our communities. Jesus commanded that we preach the gospel to everyone (Mk 16:15). He taught that we must go to all nations (Mt 28:19,20). This is exactly what the early Christians did. *“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”* (At 5:42). This is exactly what we must do also. The early disciples went everywhere preaching the word of the gospel (At 8:4). They did so because they sincerely believed that people must obey the gospel in order to be saved.

An example of evangelistic outreach was the work of the disciples in both Philippi and Thessalonica. The Philippian disciples were only a few weeks old in the faith when they started sending regular support to evangelists who preached in other areas (Ph 4:15-17). From the very beginning of their lives as disciples, the Thessalonians likewise sent forth word of the gospel, not only in their region, but also in every place (1 Th 1:5-10). The only qualification for preaching the gospel is knowing and obeying the gospel. Since everyone who has obeyed the gospel knows the gospel, then our knowledge makes us responsible to preach the gospel to others. For this reason, *“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season”* to preach the gospel (2 Tm 4:2).

SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Giving: Mt 19:21; At 20:32-35; 2 Co 9; Gl 2:10; 6:10; Ep 4:28

Chapter 29

GOSPEL COMMITMENT

The word “commitment” frightens many people because they know that God expects of them more than what they are often willing to give. But commitment to God should not frighten us. It will not if we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk 12:30). If we do love God, we must be committed to move into action for Jesus. Paul wrote, *“For the love of Christ compels us”* (2 Co 5:14). When one realizes what God has done for him through the gospel of His grace, he should do as Paul: *“His grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me”* (1 Co 15:10). Paul was moved into action because he realized the tremendous grace of God that was shown to him through the gospel of the cross of Jesus. Listen to his words in 2 Corinthians 4:15: *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.”* The more we appreciate the grace of God in saving us, the more we are moved to work for Jesus (1 Jn 4:19).

We must not forget the words of Jesus: *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in*

SCRIPTURE READING: Lk 10:25-37; At 4:32-37; 6:1-7; Ph 4:10-18; 1 Th 1:2-10; 1 Jn 3:16-23

heaven" (Mt 7:21). If one truly loves Jesus, he or she will take up the cross and follow Him (Lk 9:23).

The gospel inspires obedience. Jesus became the author of eternal salvation **only for those who obey Him** (Hb 5:8,9). If we love Him, **we will keep His commandments** (Jn 14:15; 1 Jn 5:3). Heaven, therefore, is prepared for those who love God so much that they are moved into action to preach the gospel to the glory of God.

We must totally surrender our lives to Jesus. We must commit ourselves to totally trust in God. God

loves all people and is not willing that any should perish (2 Pt 3:9). However, He is a just God. In other words, He will not bless those who curse Him by rebellious living. Jesus said, *"Whoever will confess Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. **But whoever will deny Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven**"* (Mt 10:32,33). Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to those who deny themselves in order to live and preach the gospel of His eternal offering for all people (See Rv 14:13).

THE GOSPEL OPPORTUNITY!

If you have not obeyed the gospel, **find someone immediately to immerse you into Christ in order to come into contact with the sanctifying blood of Jesus**. After this, go out and tell others about what you have done. Speak to others about the grace of God that was revealed on the cross and has given you freedom in Christ (Gl 5:1; Ti 2:11). Tell them how you responded to the grace of God by obedience to the gospel in baptism (Rm 6:3-6; Cl 2:11-13). Encourage others to join with you in this new life in Christ. When one obeys the gospel, he or she can tell others what Paul told us about his life: *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"* (Gl 2:20).

We must not allow opposition to discourage us. We must remember what Paul said to Timothy, **"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"** (2 Tm 3:12). Every disciple will suffer persecution. However, we must be as the apostles when they were persecuted. We must rejoice that we are *"counted worthy to suffer shame for His [Jesus'] name"* (At 5:41). The Bible encourages, **"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter"** (1 Pt 4:16). Fight the good fight of the faith (1 Tm 6:12). Gospel-obedient believers are headed for eternal dwelling in the presence of the eternal God. God is working for us in all things in order to bring about that which is good (Read Rm 8:31-39). **LIVE AND PREACH THE GOSPEL!**

GLOSSARY OF KEY WORDS

- Apostle:** One who has left home and is sent out by either Jesus or the church in order to accomplish a specific mission for either Jesus or the church.
- Atonement:** The offense is appeased that caused the separation of two parties in order that they once again come together.
- Christian:** To be “of Christ,” and thus identified in name as belonging to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- Covenant:** An agreement based on conditions between two parties where both parties enjoy the benefits of the covenant relationship as long as both parties comply with the conditions of the covenant.
- Disciple:** A follower of one whom the disciple has submitted himself to learn.
- Fellowship:** The joint partnership of those who have committed themselves to walk in harmony with one another in order to accomplish the purpose of their fellowship.
- Grace:** That which is given by another, but is not merited or earned by the one who enjoys the pardon of all transgressions.
- Greek Kingdom:** Alexander the Great died in 323 B.C., thus ending his Middle East control by the Greeks.
- Headmaster:** An educational tutor under whose care a student is entrusted in order that the student be brought to a required standard of education.
- Heart:** The emotional energy that motivates one into making a decision, and subsequently acting upon that decision. One who is motivated by the heart of God acts upon what God did for him at the cross.
- Incarnation:** The Son of God was first with God in spirit, but was revealed on earth in the flesh of man (See Jn 1:1,2,14; Ph 2:6,7).
- Inspiration:** Recording without error that which is either given by revelation, historically known, or personally experienced.
- Justification:** A legal term used when one was pronounced innocent of a crime for which he should have received just punishment. The defendant was thus set free because he was shown mercy by the judge.
- Medo-Persian Kingdom:** Conquered by Alexander the Great in 330 B.C.
- Mount Sinai:** The mountain to which Israel went after the nation’s initial freedom from Egyptian captivity. At this location, God establish a covenant with the nation, and then revealed the law of the covenant around 1445 B.C.
- Nebuchadnezzar:** King of Babylon who reigned from 605 to 562 B.C.
- Passover/Pentecost:** The Jews’ feast during which the nation celebrated their deliverance from Egyptian captivity. Pentecost was the day after (Sunday) of seven consecutive weeks from the Passover.
- Pentecost of A.D. 30:** Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. Jesus was born within two years before His death (Mt 2:16). Jesus was about 30 years old when He begin His ministry (Lk 3:23). His ministry was about three and a half years, and thus He was crucified in A.D. 30 when He was 33/34 years old. The church was established on the Pentecost of A.D. 30.
- Reconciliation:** Two parties are reunited with one another when atonement is made for that which caused their separation. The parties are thus brought into fellowship with one another and God.
- Redemption:** The redeemed are purchased for freedom. Redemption infers that one cannot pay for his own freedom, and thus, another party must pay the redemption price for freedom.
- Revelation:** Truth from God that is unveiled to man that man by no other means could have known.
- Rome:** The city of Rome, the capital of the Roman Kingdom, fell in A.D. 476.
- Sanctification:** Cleansed of that which made one impure. In our relationship with God, the impurity of sin was cleansed by the blood of Jesus, and thus we are justified righteous before God.
- Standard:** The measure by which one seeks to guide his life, or the measure or rule by which God seeks to direct the lives of those who have committed themselves to follow Him.

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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pf**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**