



THE CROSS AND THE CHURCH

Biblical Research Library

Roger E. Dickson



Pearls are the result of years of pain and struggle. A small foreign particle becomes lodged in the muscle of an oyster shell. Over many years the oyster seeks to weaken 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. His millennia of patience and struggle with mankind eventually give birth to the pearl of salvation that came with struggle and death on a cross outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago. Finding this pearl of great price will relieve one of all the pain of sin that we bring on ourselves.



Africa International Missions
Copyright 1995, 2013
Cape Town, South Africa

Cover theme: *MUCH WATER* (West coast of South Africa - R.E.D.)

CONTENTS

THE PROBLEM WITH SIN

Creation And Law

Chapter 1 – Page 6

The Right To Choose

Chapter 2 – Page 7

Sin And Separation From God

Chapter 3 – Page 8

The State Of Man

Chapter 4 – Page 9

The Bible

Chapter 5 – Page 10

Finality Of God's Word

Chapter 6 – Page 11

Binding Religious Traditions

Chapter 7 – Page 12

Our Dilemma With Sin

Chapter 8 – Page 15

GOD'S SOLUTION FOR SIN

Blessing Of The Seed

Chapter 9 – Page 18

Crushing Of Satan

Chapter 10 – Page 18

God's Grace And Man's Religions

Chapter 11 – Page 21

Establishing A Covenant Relationship With God

Chapter 12 – Page 23

RESPONDING TO GOD'S GRACE

A New Covenant And Law

Chapter 13 – Page 26

Establishing A New Law

Chapter 14 – Page 27

Responding To Grace

Chapter 15 – Page 29

Grace Causes Action

Chapter 16 – Page 30

Invitation To Freedom

Chapter 17 – Page 31

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL

Obey The Gospel

Chapter 18 – Page 33

What Is The Gospel?

Chapter 19 – Page 34

Good News For Problems

Chapter 20 – Page 36

Obedience To The Gospel

Chapter 21 – Page 38

THE COMMUNITY OF GOD’S PEOPLE

The Head Of The Church

Chapter 22 – Page 41

Origin Of The Church

Chapter 23 – Page 42

The People Of God

Chapter 24 – Page 45

Finding God’s People

Chapter 25 – Page 48

Worship And Service

Chapter 26 – Page 48

Searching For God’s People

Chapter 27 – Page 53

LIVING AS A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

A Fellowship Group

Chapter 28 – Page 55

Making A Commitment

Chapter 29 – Page 60

THE CROSS AND THE CHURCH

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 have a conscience that moves us to do that which is good. 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 better and beyond this world.

All of us have come to one common conclusion. We know that within man there is not the ability to determine a final authority of what is moral and right. Societies have tried their best for thousands of years to make laws that will keep man 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 our religious nature. We doom our society because we often refused to allow God into the forming of our morals.

Those who realize that it is not within man to determine his own destiny have come to the conclusion that there must be a God beyond this world who is the origin of this world. 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 came through Ath-

ens who had encountered the Son of the one true and living God on a Damascus road. 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.*"

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 men encountered the Son, they concluded that if one has seen the Son, he has seen the Father.

Satan has blessed and 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 the eternal God who seeks to bless us with eternal existence. This is our quest. We want to know the heart of what God would require of His creation in order that we live forever in His presence. You have now been blessed with a road map. So sit back, and enjoy this wonderful journey of discovery in the pages that follow.

THE PROBLEM WITH SIN

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 hinders our hopes and makes us question our destiny. This is the problem of sin. All of us struggle in our relationships both with God and our fellow man. In our struggle to please God, we stumble. There are many who do not know what the will of God is, and thus, sin without knowing that they sin. However, there are those who know His will but still sin. People sin either willingly, or ignorantly in their struggle to please God.

We also have struggles in our lives with other people. God has given directions for us to guide our behavior with others. However, we often ignore these directions, and thus, we cause harm to others and embarrassment to ourselves. We sin. Life, therefore, is a struggle. This is why God gave us the Bible. He gave it to us to give hope to those who are struggling in life and realize that they need help to please God.

Sin causes us to have a bad conscience or a feeling of guilt. In order to deal with this guilt, many religious people who do not know the Bible, have simply developed their own solutions to take care of their sin. As a result, there are many religions in the world today that have been developed by religious people in an effort to deal with the problem of sin. Unfortunately, God does not accept man's worship or religious inventions that are created by the imaginations of those who know little or nothing about the Bible.

God is our creator. The fact that He is our creator means that He is the one who must tell us how to worship and serve Him. We must allow Him to tell us how to have a relationship with Him and one another. This means that we must focus on God's law and our problem of sin against His law. 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 and thus revealed in the Bible. 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 are we to do in reference
to God, our creator?
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 thus the product of the God who created all things.

Since we are God's creation, we should be concerned about what the duty of man 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 death (Jn 3:16). But for those who have not submitted to God, there is the destiny of eternal destruction (2 Th 1:7-9).

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

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

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 beings that 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 created this present environment. 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, therefore, 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 activity or 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 laws, however, both Adam and Eve broke God's 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 person-

ally 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; 1 Tm 2:13,14; At 2:40; 3:19; 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 FROM GOD

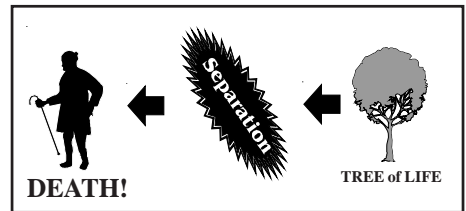
Concerning the event when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden, the Bible states, *“Therefore, as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin, and so death passed to all men because all have sinned”* (Rm 5:12).

SPIRITUAL DEATH: When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, their sin caused spiritual **separation** between them and God. They thus personally suffered **spiritual death**, that is, they were spiritually dead because of their separation from God. All men since the days of Adam and Eve also suffer 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 own personal sin, not because of Adam's sin. Adam was personally responsible for the guilt of his own sin. We are also personally responsible for our own sin today.

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

PHYSICAL DEATH: Not only did Adam spiritually die before God when he

sinned, he was also driven from the Garden of Eden, *“lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”* (Gn 3:22). Consequently, **physical death** entered into the world. 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).



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). Therefore, 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 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, there is hope of reconciliation! Even when Adam and Eve sinned, God gave hope in order that all of us be restored to a correct relationship with God, for God knew that we would all sin as Adam. This hope for an eternal solution for sin was first given to Adam and Eve and recorded in Genesis 3:15.

Genesis 3:15

And 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 you remember this particular prophecy. This is the Bible's first announcement of the **great news** that God had in His plan of redemption to save us from our sin. Even before the creation of the world God had a plan to redeem man from sin, for He knew that because of our weaknesses we would sin (See Rv 13:8). Genesis 3:15 is a prophecy of God's intentions to set into action His plan of salvation. It is a prophecy of Jesus who would come and crush Satan's head by His death on the cross

for the sins of man.

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 STATE OF MAN

Honest people will 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). But why and how do men sin?

It is necessary that we have moral laws by which to live with one another. It is important to understand that we could not be left alone in a world of human relationships to develop our own moral laws. Throughout history people have tried to establish moral laws by which to direct society. But when we are left to ourselves to direct our own ways, social decay is usually 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, we would make laws that would eventually lead to social confusion and corruption. God knew that we would do this to ourselves. He thus took the initiative to give us moral laws that would di-

rect our paths.

But the problem with 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 God's laws. And breaking God's laws 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 laws, he cannot by any means or methods of himself be reconciled to God.

MAN'S DILEMMA

- **Inability to keep law perfectly so as to save oneself.**
- **Inability of good works to atone for sin.**

Here is our dilemma. First, **we cannot keep law perfectly so as to save ourselves, for everyone of us has 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 condemns us to sin. We are thus driven to find something other than law in order to be reconciled to God.

Secondly, **we cannot do good works so as to make atonement for the sins we commit**. We cannot be saved by good works, **lest we boast one against another** (Ep 2:9). God simply does not accept our good works as a sacrifice 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 condemned state in sin. In this state, 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: Ep 2:1-10; Rm 3
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: All sin: Gl 3:22; Rm 3:23; 11:32;
 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 THE BIBLE

In order to find a solution for sin, we must turn to the instructions of the One against whom we sin. We thus turn to God who has revealed in the Bible the solution for our sin. We must strictly follow His instructions. We cannot invent our own religious system for forgiveness of sins. We must go only to the Bible which is God's direction to us on how to deal with 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 the revelation of God to us for our direction in life.** It is the guiding measure by which we must direct our lives according to the will of God. 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). We should thus hunger and thirst after God's word (Mt 5:6). We must yearn for nourishment from the word of God (1 Pt 2:2).

God's word can change our lives because it is of God. *"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).

God expects us to obey His word. Obedience to God’s word in our lives will result in great **spiritual growth** in our lives. 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 Jesus, is the Bible. Therefore, Paul stated, *“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 to know Jesus. This knowledge builds us up. This is what obedience to God’s revealed word will do in your life. It will build you up. Here is what the apostle Paul says the word of God is in relation to our well-being:

1 Thessalonians 2:13

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.

The solution for a wayward 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 (Jn 10:10). The more we understand the word of God, the better our lives will be if we submit to what God has directed us to do. As a student of

the Bible, it should be our goal to better our lives by what we learn in the Bible.

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

FINALITY OF GOD’S WORD

When God gave the Old Testament law to the Jews, He warned them about adding to His law. He warned, *“**You will not add to the word that I command you, nor take anything from it, 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 men not to add to His word.

Revelation 22:18,19

*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.***

God could not have made His point more clear. **We must not add to His word religious laws that we invent for ourselves.** We must not add as requirements for our salvation the religious traditions of men. **Adding to God’s law is saying that His laws are not sufficient.** It is saying that God needs help

to determine what is best for man. But God says that His law is the "**perfect law of liberty**" (Jn 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). Since God's law is **perfect** and **complete**, then who are we to say that we need to add to it?

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 BINDING RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

In their efforts to find solutions for their problem of spiritual and physical death, many people have developed their own religious systems. But this is where many have deceived themselves. They think that because they are performing religious activities in their lives they are pleasing to God. Too often, however, these religiously sincere people never stop to consider whether the religious activity of their lives is pleasing to God. They think that simply because their religious practices bring them a good feeling and a clear conscience, such practices must be acceptable to God. **But the fact is that instead of finding a solution for sin, they actually sin by following after their own religious inventions that are often contrary to the will of God. They often create a religion after their own desires and not after the instructions of God's word.** They thus sin in rebellion against God's word by following after their own religious traditions instead of looking to the Bible for direction from God.

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, they are behaving in their religion according to the religious traditions of their fathers. Here is what Jesus said of this practice.

Mark 7:6-8

*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*

Jesus called their religious behavior after their religious traditions an act of hypocrisy. It was hypocrisy because they were practicing **their own religious rules and rituals** in order to make themselves acceptable to God. But Jesus called such **vain** worship. It was useless in an effort to please God. **It was useless religion because they were teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.**

Some religious traditions are not wrong, as long as they are recognized as tradition, and thus, **not binding on the consciences of men as necessary for salvation.** However, when we make traditions to be religious law, 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 the religious world today.

It seems that religious people throughout the world today are more interested in keeping their religious tradi-

tions than in keeping the word of God. 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 word of God in order to keep our religious traditions? Are we rejecting the word of God in order to keep our religious traditions?

Let’s be specific. This matter is so important that we must not miss the point of what Jesus is saying. Religious traditions originate from our religious history. It is not wrong to do things in a traditional manner. However, when the traditional manner of doing something becomes the only way it can be done, then it becomes a religious tradition that is bound on the consciences of men. If we cause division among believers because of our religious traditions, then such traditions have become binding law in our minds. In other words, if we think that the traditions should be kept in order to please God, then we are considering them to be law.

At this point in one’s apostasy from the word of God, the traditions start taking the place of the commandments of God. Jesus said in Mark 7 that we first start this process of apostasy from God by **“teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”** (Mk 7:7). One then continues his apostasy from God by **“laying aside the commandment of God”** in order to practice traditions



(Mk 7:8). And finally, we reject **“the commandment of God that we might keep our traditions”** (Mk 7:9).

Each one of 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 that we must obey. **It is a serious thing to add to the will of God in a futile effort to seek God’s favor on our own terms.** The reason this is serious is that one’s religion may 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 hypocrites in their religious behavior because they rejected the commandment of God in order**

DIGRESSION INTO RELIGIOUS SIN



to keep their traditions. At the time they were obedient to their own reli-

gious traditions, but rebellious to the commandments of God. This is religious hypocrisy.

Consider also what Jesus said to some Jews who believed on Him, but their belief was so weak it would not move them to leave their traditions in order to follow Him. **“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘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. Therefore, to the same group of Jews Jesus said, *“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.”* (Jn 8:44).

In conjunction with religious traditions, some have been led astray by their own emotions and feelings. They have subjected themselves to following emotional experiences in religion instead of the word of God. 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 very 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 which He inspired to be written.

Religions that focus on human emotions and feelings, while ignoring the Bible, **are religions that lead one into self-deception.** Remember, strong emotional conviction in religion is not a guarantee that one is of the truth, and thus, 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). 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 such a strong religious leader in the city of Samaria that 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 obedience of God’s word. We must remember that it is not in man to direct his own steps to eternal life (Jr 10:23). Only God can do this through His written word.

The only way one can know for sure if he is doing what God would have him 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).

We must be challenged to search the Scriptures in order to determine if our religious practices are based on the word of God or on the will of man. 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 salvation and how we will seek to please Him in this life.

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

YES - NO If you discover something in the Bible that contradicts your present religious behavior, are you willing to correct such 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

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 OUR DILEMMA WITH SIN

Honest people know that they have a problem with sin. What many have done, however, is to seek out their own solutions to remedy their sin problem in order to have a good conscience toward God. In this effort to find solutions for sin and correct religious behavior, people have often forgotten two very important points. We cannot buy God's salvation, and thus, we stand condemned because we all sin.

We Cannot Buy God's Salvation 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 this debt? Certainly not! If you are physically strong, you would 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 pay 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 (Mt 18:23-35). There was no possible way he could repay his debt. When the man was brought to pay his account, he responded to the king by falling down on his knees. He begged for his deliverance. The king had mercy and subsequently forgave him his debt. This was grace given to one who could not repay.

So it is with our relationship with God. We cannot pay God for the forgiveness of our sins. **What we owe is more than what we can pay.** We are thus doomed. So how can we receive forgiveness? When we receive forgiveness, how can we repay God?

Some religious people believe 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. But the fact is, **one cannot live long enough in order to do enough good works to demand salvation from God. Neither can one so work as to pay God back for the salvation that He gives to those who walk by obedient faith.**

One is deceiving himself if he or she thinks we can buy our salvation from God with good works. God says we cannot do enough good works to adequately pay for the salvation 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, we have no chance of paying the bill.

The point is that we cannot put God in debt to give us eternal life. We cannot make God a **debtor**. Therefore, we will not be able to 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. So how can we receive that for which we cannot do enough good works to earn? The answer is **God's grace**.

One Cannot Earn God's Favor With Perfect Living.

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 obedience to law. However, one sin makes a **sinner**. James 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 good according to law, but break one law, the law condemns us as a sinner. 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 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 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 so as to live without sin. We are thus condemned by the law of God to be eternally separated from God because of our sin. We are condemned unless there is a solution for our problem of sin that is provided by God and not man. 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 inventing our own religion or our own methods to find forgiveness. **When dealing with sin against God the only solution is God's solution. The only source for discovering God's solution is 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 agents**, that is, 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 relationship with one another, God gave law. Law is necessary for men to live together. But law requires that we are responsible. It demands that we will be held accountable for breaking law.

With law came 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 religious people throughout the world who seek to please God after their own traditions. However, God does not accept our religious inventions that have been created after our desires to construct our own religions. 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 Christian as one of God's children

means that one is believing and conducting his or her life according to the word of God. One cannot claim to have faith in Christ if he refuses to base his faith on the word of Christ (See Rm 10:17).

Men have tried to invent their own religious works in order to have a good conscience before God. But everyone knows that we sin. Everyone knows that we cannot do enough good works to gain assurance that we will live forever. For this reason, honest and sincere worshipers of God seek after God. They seek God on His terms and according to His law. This is our challenge. We challenge you to continue to discover the great grace of God that was revealed through Jesus Christ. It is this grace that will bring us peace of mind and joy in heart. We challenge you to discover how God instructs us to worship Him according to His will. The Holy Spirit has revealed the will of God concerning how God seeks to be worshiped and served. Therefore, we must study the Spirit's instructions as revealed in the Bible. Only when we have discovered in the Bible the road map to eternal life will we have the peace of mind that we are right with God (See Ph 4:7). We feel assurance before God when we know we are following the will of God.

GOD'S SOLUTION FOR SIN

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. 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 solution for sin would come (Gn 3:15). Eternal life can be restored if we find that solution.

Throughout the Old Testament there

are hundreds of prophecies that speak of the coming Messiah who would make atonement for the sins of men. These are prophecies that speak of an opportunity to return to an eternal relationship with our Creator. These prophecies were of the Son of God who would die on the cross in order to reconcile us to God, the source of eternal life. The Son would come to give us a way to conquer that which all of us fear, physical death that terminates life (Hb 2:14).

**Chapter 9
BLESSING OF THE SEED**

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" coming who would bear the iniquities of the people (Is 53). The promise was not only to the descendants of Abraham, the Jews, but to **all families of the earth**. It was God's promise to all mankind.

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). He would crush Satan 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.

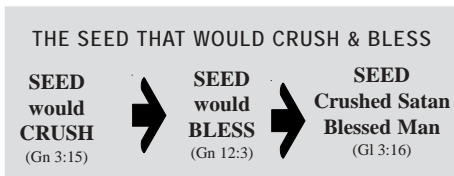
SCRIPTURE READING: Gn 12:1-3; 21:12; 22:18; Is 53; Gl 3
SCRIPTURE RESEARCH: Prophecy of cross: Is 53; Ps 22, Prophecy of Jesus: Ps 41:9; 22; Is 7:14; 9:6,7; 42:1-4 Jr 31:15; Hs 11:1; Mc 5:2; Zc 13:7, Reconciliation: Rm 5:10,11; 2 Co 5:19,20; Ep 2:16; Cl 1:20

**Chapter 10
CRUSHING OF SATAN**

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 will also understand that we must respond to God's gift of grace.

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

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 bring us back to God (Cl 2:13-15). In doing this He destroyed the works of the devil.

**THE 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 came to earth from heaven.

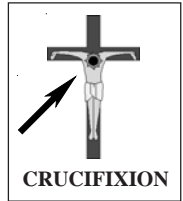
Jesus, as the Son of God, was first in heaven, but He *"came down out of heaven"* (Jn 6:51,62). He lived and was tempted as every man (Hb 4:15). He was the Son of God who *"made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of*



a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men ... 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 were healed"** (1 Pt 2:24). Jesus died for all of us! Through His atoning sacrifice, all men who are obedient to this good news will have the forgiveness of their sins. **This is great news!**



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 die on the cross in order to make an escape from sin possible for us.

Jesus had to shed His blood 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, Peter reminds Christians *"that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver or gold from your vain behavior received by tradition from your fathers, but 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).

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 foundation upon which our faith stands that we will be raised in the end (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 and obeyed Jesus will be resurrected to life, for only "in Christ" is there hope of resurrection to an immortal state of being (1 Co 15:22). Jesus' **resurrection**, therefore, is **God's answer to the physical death problem of man**. This is good news!

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 prin-

cipality 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).



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 and has all authority over all things for our benefit (Mt 28:18; 1 Tm 6:15; Hb 1:3).

E. Jesus is coming again.

Jesus is coming a second time (Hb 9:28). He is coming to destroy **the last enemy which 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).

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 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 given themselves to Jesus. It is bad news, however, for those who have not submitted themselves to Jesus. The disobedient will be raised for destruction when Jesus comes again. We are looking for the final 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 28:18; 13:3; 16:11; 17:2; 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 GOD'S GRACE AND MAN'S RELIGIONS

The gospel event that was explained in the previous study happened two thousand years ago. It was an event that manifested the grace of God to man. 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 mankind was dead in sin, God's grace was poured out through Jesus (Rm 5:8). Jesus brought a solution for our problem of sin.

God's story of grace is briefly explained in the Bible in Ephesians 2:1-10. Verses 4-9 specifically explain the marvelous grace of God.

Ephesians 2:4-9

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.

This is great news! God knew that we could not save ourselves. He knew that we could not keep His law perfectly so as to justify ourselves by law-keeping. In our frustration to keep His law perfectly, He knew that we would invent for ourselves religions that would be based on works in order to seek forgiveness of our sins through our own religious performances. However, God knew that we could never do enough good works to earn our salvation. So for this reason, He had to provide the solution for our sins because we all seek eternal life.

God knew our inability, our unrighteousness and our ungodliness. Nevertheless, because of His mercy He sent Jesus 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 religions that are 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 com-***

mands 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.

Colossians 2:20-23

*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.***

Now we must be challenged. 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 by going to the Bible? In other words, are we trusting in religious traditions simply because they have always been practiced by our forefathers? If we are, then we must reconsider our faith in relation to God's word.

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

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12

*... 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.

Remember, the Jews to whom Jesus first preached were religious. They believed in God. However, they had established their own religiosity. The Bible says that Jesus “*came to His own, and His own did not receive Him*” (Jn 1:11). The Jews did not receive Him 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 no need for any “religion” from God.

Will we be one of those religious people today to whom Jesus comes, but will reject Him because we are satisfied with our own religion? We must keep in mind that God's grace is not offered only to those who do not know Jesus. It is also offered to those who have devised their own religions in order to save themselves. It is offered to those who have been trapped in the world of man-made religions. God calls us out of such vain 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 into freedom from the bondage of man-made religion (Gl 5:1). In Him we can be free from human organizations, ceremonial religion, binding traditions of men, and authoritarian religious leaders who seek to assume lordship over God's people. Jesus calls us into the freedom of God's grace in order that we become obedient bond-servants of His will.

Those who accept God's grace on His conditions can have hope. Here's God's promise. ***“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 you accept Jesus through the conditions God prescribes in His word, you have the right to become a child of God. You have a right to come into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by obedience to the gospel. In this relationship you will be headed for heaven and eternal glory in the presence of God. This is the gift that God wants all people in the world to have. It is a free gift that we can have through our obedience to the gospel. This is great news!

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

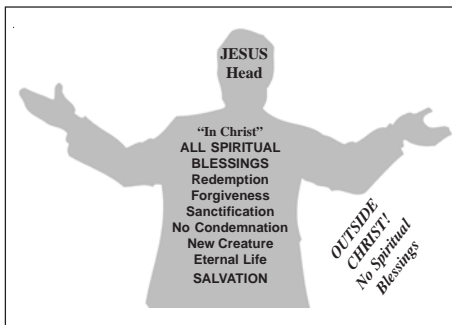
Chapter 12 ESTABLISHING A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

In order to be saved one must have a covenant relationship with Christ who saves. In the New Testament, the phrase “in Christ” is used to explain this relationship. When one is “in Christ,” he or she has a **spiritual covenant relationship** with God. 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 to 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 salvation.

When we are in an "in Christ" relationship with God, 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 be in submission to Jesus as our head. We cannot be outside Christ and expect to receive those blessings that are only in Christ. Illustrated in the chart below are those blessings that we have when we are in an "in Christ" relationship with Jesus.



There are no spiritual blessings **outside** Christ. If one is to have **redemption** and **forgiveness** of sins (Ep 1:7), he or she must be in Christ. Outside Christ there is no redemption or forgiveness of sins. If one is to be a **new crea-**

ture, he or she must be in Christ (2 Co 5:17). There are only old creatures outside Christ. If one desires to **live forever**, 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, he or she is **not in a state of condemnation** (Rm 8:1). If one desires to be **sanctified** 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, 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. The answer is in the Bible. When answered, everyone must also make another decision. When the Bible answers this question, we must be willing to accept the answer and apply such to our lives? If we are convinced that the Bible's answer is clear and necessary for your salvation, then we must follow the instructions of the Bible. It does no good for one's salvation to know what to do to come into Christ, and yet do nothing. Therefore, only a positive response to what the Bible teaches will benefit our eternal destiny.

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 action His plan to reconcile all men to 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 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. After accomplishing His work on the cross, all people were and are invited to come into a saving relationship with Him in His body, the church. His invitation still stands today.

In order to come under the controlling direction of Jesus, who promises us an abundant life in this time and eternal life to come, one must submit to Jesus as his head. Submission means there are conditions for being in Christ. **We cannot choose our own conditions by which to come into a covenant re-**

lationship with God. Man-made conditions and rules lead one away from God and accuse Jesus of not providing all that is necessary for our salvation. Neither can we depend on our own feelings and emotions. Human feelings and emotions 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 accept His grace. We must submit to His will in order to come into a saving relationship with Him in Christ.

God draws us to Himself by His love that was manifested on the cross of Jesus. His grace was the manifestation of His love. Jesus' offering of Himself on the cross was proof that God calls all men to Jesus through His grace (See Ti 2:11). He desires that all men respond to His loving grace. Remember 2 Peter 3:9: *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness. **But He is longsuffering toward you, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**"*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S GRACE

Section 3

The central message of the gospel is the historical event of 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 hope that all those who are in Christ will also be raised to eternal life when He comes again. This is the good news event that manifested the grace 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 every 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 have all spiritual blessings that are necessary for salvation one must be in a covenant relationship with

God. The Bible promises that in Christ we are redeemed from sin by Jesus' blood. It is in Christ that there is salvation (2 Tm 2:10). But how does one come into Christ?

In order to understand what God wants one to do to be saved, there are important points that we must understand. These points are often misunderstood. They are misunderstood by those who live in a confused religious world of man-made religions.

**Chapter 13
A NEW COVENANT & LAW**

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.

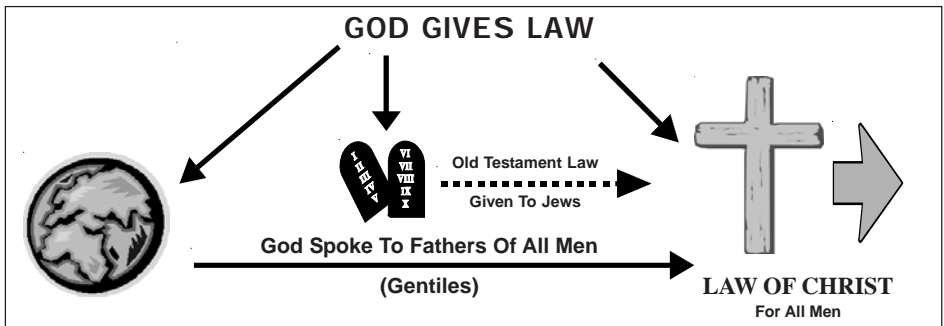
God chose Abraham in order to prepare the way for the Seed who would

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 thus 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 the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob to build a nation, the nation of Israel (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 Old Testament 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 observe, 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, 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 new covenant with all people who would submit to His will.

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 covenant 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 only

for Israel. However, Israelites could not keep the conditions of this covenant perfectly 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 the new covenant relationship with God. The old covenant and law that was exclusively made 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).

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 ESTABLISHING A NEW LAW

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

Jesus did not come to destroy the purpose for which the Old Testament 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 the people of God to Christ (Gl 3:24,25). It was a shadow of good things to come (Hb 10:1). What Jesus did do was fulfill the 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 Old Testament law (Gl 4:4,5).

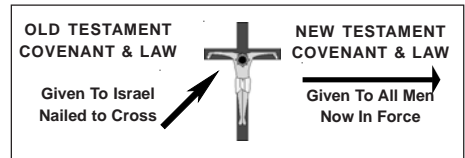
Jesus was the fulfillment of the law in the sense that the law was given to bring Israel to Christ. When the law fulfilled its purpose, therefore, what happened to the law was what the Bible says in Hebrews 10:9. “He [Jesus] said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ **He takes away the first [covenant and law] in order to establish the second [covenant and law].**” Christians today are not subject to the Old Testament law of feast days and animal sacrifices. The Bible plainly states the following:

Romans 7:4

Therefore, my brethren, you 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.

If anyone would try to go back under the Old Testament 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 is under law to save himself, and thus, without the grace of God, 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 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 grace and truth of Christ.



Jesus redeemed us from having to be justified by the law. Under the Old Testament law it was impossible “**that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins**” (Hb 10:4). But under the New Testament law we are under 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 sacrifice of Jesus. They do not have to seek justification by keeping of Old Testament laws as animal sacrifices.

Why the Old Testament Law?

1. The law was given as a headmaster (schoolmaster or tutor) in order to bring God's people to Christ (Gl 3:24,25).
2. The 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 law was given in order to manifest sin (Rm 3:20; 7:7).

4. The 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

Of Jesus the Bible says, *“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). These statements of the Bible talk about grace, God's loving initiative to deliver us from our predicament of sin and spiritual death.

Grace is an action on the part of a giver who gives us something that we do not deserve nor can we 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. To many, 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. 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 sacrifice; there had to be an initiative on God's part that would change the graveyard scene. God's actions that we have hope were actions of grace.

Keep in mind that God is the one who had to take the first step. As men, we could do nothing to change our fate of termination at the time of death. Eternal dwelling is God's realm of existence. And in order that we partake of this existence, it was necessary that God reach down 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 keep law perfectly, and thus, we suffered in sin.

God was not obligated to take the initiative to bring us into His presence by offering a sacrifice for the sin that separates us from Him. He was not obligated to take on the form of man in order to die and be raised again so that we also be raised to eternal life in the end. But the fact is, He did. And this is grace.

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. His grace

toward us moved Him into action to bring us into His realm of dwelling. In this sense, therefore, grace is a free gift. We did not deserve or earn it. 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 so as to earn such a sacrifice, then the sacrifice of Jesus would not be a free gift of God. It would have been payment to us for our goodness. But the Bible says, *"And if by grace, 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 should motivate 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 God that eventually ends 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 opportunity for us to dwell in His presence in 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

GRACE CAUSES ACTION

God's action of grace should move our faith 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. And remember, *"faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead"* (Js 2:17). Therefore, when one recognizes the precious grace of God that was manifested through the sacrifice of Jesus, **sincere people respond by obedience.**

Our faith must respond in our belief that God gave Jesus to be our Savior. Salvation by grace through faith means that God, because of His love for us, gave His Son Jesus 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 will. Our obedience, therefore, **is a response to His great love for first giving the gift**. 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 obedient response to God's grace to save him:

1 Corinthians 15:10

*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.***

The point here is clear. One is not saved by grace if he refuses to submit to the will of God. 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 God's love and grace. Jesus puts us to the test by saying, *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word"* (Jn 14:23). **We must prove our love of Jesus by keeping His word.** True love of God and Jesus obeys. **"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 be-

cause 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).

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. 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 men numerous religious laws and traditions that God had never bound (Mk 7:1-9). The people could not bear the burden of these laws, for no one could keep all of them. The people thus felt continually guilty because they could not practice all the religious laws of the religious leaders. So it is today.

The religious world binds on the consciences of men hundreds of laws and traditions that God never intended to bind as law. When one comes to Jesus, however, **he is set free from the burden of religious tradition.** He is free in the sense that he knows that religious traditions **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). Jesus, therefore, makes the following invitation to all who have been burdened with religious traditions:

Matthew 11:28-30

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.

As a Christian it feels great to be free from the burden of man-made religions. 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 give you freedom. You will be set free from having to keep religious traditions in order to feel pleasing to God. As free men in Christ, we must not go back to religion that is based on the traditions of men. The apostle Peter warned concerning some who sought to return to their own 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 bondage on the neck of those who have been set free from the burden of human religions. 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: Cl 2:11-23; Gl 4:21-31

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 being. 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 coming was the fulfillment of God’s promise. He was the manifestation of God’s grace 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 free to respond to God’s grace according to His will and not the will of man.

OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL

Section 4

We have now come to the central 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. Our understanding of His conditions will determine if we will spend eternity with Him in heaven to come. Therefore, we must prayerfully study through the material of this section.

Chapter 18 **OBEY THE GOSPEL**

Paul's reference to "**obedience of the gospel**" in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 is crucial to our understanding that the gospel, and our obedience thereof, are the beginning of our relationship with Jesus. His statements in this text are in the context of the final coming of Jesus. Since Jesus is the coming King before whom we must make peace (see Lk 14:31-33), then it is imperative that we understand how to make peace with Him as the King of kings.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9

*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"*

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

humanity.

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: **Is Paul saying that if one does not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that he cannot be saved?** If you answered "No", then you need to read the passage again. Jesus is coming to condemn to eternal destruction those who have not obeyed the gospel. The statement is right there in our Bibles.

Is preaching and obeying the gospel important? The importance of understanding and preaching the gospel is based on Jesus' mandate to "*go into all the world and **preach the gospel to every creature***" (Mk 16:15). And this is exactly what happened in the first century. Throughout the book of Acts the gospel is proclaimed in every recorded address of the disciples to the people. The gospel was the first thing that Paul preached when he went to every city of 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 most important event on which any Christ-centered life must be sustained. If one bypasses the gospel, he has bypassed Jesus. He is not living a Christ-centered life. He is dead in trespasses and sin.

Paul emphasizes the importance of preaching the gospel first because of

what he stated in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. He is definitely talking about Jesus' final coming. Jesus is coming with His angels in flaming fire. He is coming to take vengeance. He is taking vengeance on those who refused to have God in their knowledge, and thus, seek to find the one true and living God (See Rm 1:20). And those who have found God, but refuse to respond to the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, these He will punish with everlasting destruction. The punishment will be destruction forever away from the eternal life-giving God. The passage is talking about damnation forever.

One thing is clear from the above scripture. **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?"* Peter is here asking us a very direct question. He expects us to give the 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 God's grace that was manifested through the gospel event.

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:

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL? 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?

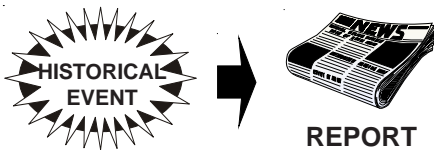
Suppose we asked the question, "What is the gospel?" What would be your answer? The most common answer is, "It is good news." This is partially right, but partially insufficient. "Good news" is the meaning of the New Testament Greek word that we translate with the English word "gospel." The gospel is 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 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 would not be the correct answer. Others might answer, "Jesus is the gospel." This would be a correct answer if we understand that Jesus was more than a man and more than a good teacher. But how is Jesus good news in our relationship with God, with life, and with the judgment to come? Knowing the answer to these thoughts will bring the abundant life about which Jesus spoke in John 10:10, *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."*

THE GOSPEL EVENT

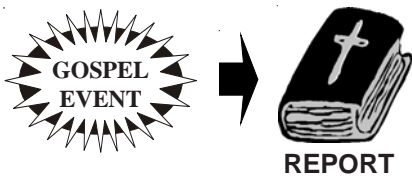
The gospel is actually an **event**, an event that happened in history. In a newspaper many events are reported.

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 witnesses or 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. Remember that an event is something that has occurred in history. But the report is something that is written **after** the event has taken place.

The gospel was an event. The New Testament is the inspired **report** of this event.



1 Corinthians 15:1-4 is one of several passages that explains 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 is using inspired words to talk about the gospel.** He says 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 states that we **“stand in”** the gospel, that is, the Christian’s entire emotional and spiritual being rests upon the foundation of its truth.

In verse 2 Paul continues, ***“... by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word 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 places 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 word of communication concerning the gospel. The Corinthians had not seen or experienced the gospel event. They had only heard of it from Paul. Therefore, they had to continue to believe what Paul had reported about it. Today, we must believe the report of the Bible. It is the only source through which we can gain knowledge of the gospel event that took place about 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 reports the gospel event. This was an event that took place in history that changed history forever.

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

THE GOSPEL

The good news (the gospel) is the event of the death of Jesus for our sins.

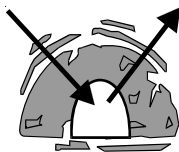
The good news is Jesus' burial.

The good news is Jesus' 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.”*

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. Secondly, he was raised with the same body that had to experience again the same sufferings of life and death. His mortal body had not 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. However, it was a **changed** body. The apostle John experienced Jesus' resurrected body but 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 believers that they will also experience such a resurrection if they obey the gospel. **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 in order to live forever.

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 PROBLEMS**

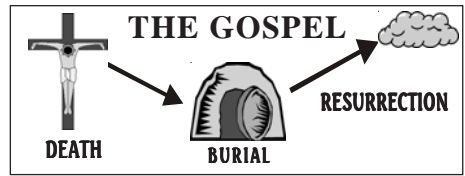
Remember that the gospel is good news. It is God's good news to all people concerning our basic problems we have with sin and eternity. But how is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus

good news for us today? The answer is simple. Remember, “... **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 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). 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 two problems for which every man needs 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. Without the gospel event 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 event answers our problem of spiritual death, **for Jesus died for our sins on the cross** (1 Co 15:3). He died in order to bring us back to God. **This is good 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 be made alive. They will live forever. **This is good news!**

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

Our second greatest problem is that **each one of us will eventually physically die**. Because we are eventually going to die, we need 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 to an eternal dwelling** (2 Co 5:1-8; 1 Th 4:13-18). **This is good news! It is good news to all those who are seeking eternal life.**

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 event (the death, burial and resurrection) is good news about our spiritual death problem. **Jesus died for our sins.** The gospel event 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? How can one connect with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that occurred about two thousand years ago? **How can one obey an event in history?**

Keep in mind also that we must come into Christ where there are all spiritual blessings. How then must one come into Christ where there is continual cleansing of sins, and thus, eternal life (1 Jn 1:7; 5:11)? In other words, **how must one obey the gospel event of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in order to come into Christ?**

The good news of Jesus was God's part in our salvation to bring us into the grace of God. What must every person now do in response to God's grace? Obviously, 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 Son of God,

how can he be **reconciled to God by the cross of Jesus**? How can one have hope of eternal life by the resurrection of Jesus? **Romans 6:3-6** is a clear and simple answer.

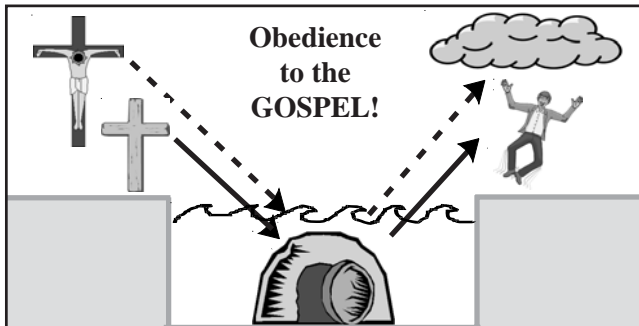
ROMANS 6:3-6

In the letter to the Romans, Paul was writing to Christians in Rome, and thus, reviewed 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 almost two thousand years ago. Nevertheless, how can one today be "baptized into His death"? Again, the answer is simple and given in **verse 4**.

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 Paul's explanation of how to be baptized into the death of Jesus by obedience to the gospel. Notice the preposition "with." By immersion in water (baptism) **one goes**

to the grave with Jesus. Something great, something spiritual thus happens in baptism. Jesus was buried. In



obedience to the gospel event, **we are also buried with Him**. In immersion we are coming into a spiritual union with Jesus. A covenant is being established. A personal relationship with God is beginning. Because of the seriousness of this teaching, Paul further explains in verse 5 what it means to be “baptized into His death.”

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

By immersion into Jesus one is united together in the likeness of Jesus’ death. Because Jesus died on the cross, of necessity, He had to go to the tomb. As Jesus went to the tomb almost two thousand years ago, so we can also 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 Jesus. In immersion one obeys the gospel, which is 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. Paul explains this in **verse 6**.

... 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 bondservants 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. 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 He 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 writes that we were “crucified with Him,” our crucifixion with Jesus took place two thousand years ago. It was because of our belief in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross that His atonement was 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 dies, finds a grave, and then experiences a resurrection with Jesus. We can always tell when one truly believes and repents. He is seeking a grave in which to bury the old man of sin. He seeks to be baptized.

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 people to deny the gospel event. He will lead people to deny the fact that one must obey the gospel through immersion for remission of sins. For this reason, we must not let anyone tell us that the gospel, and obedience to it, is not essential for establishing a covenant relationship with God in Christ.

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

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.")

THE COMMUNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Section 5

When one is immersed in water in obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, **God adds that person to the family of His people.** 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 body of Christ. **It is for this reason that wherever there is a baptized believer, the church 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 the church. 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 participatory assembly."

The church is an assembly of people who have been called out of the world in order to participate in the lives of one another. The church of God's people has been called out of the world through the obedience to the gospel of each person who has believed in Jesus. 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 obedience to the gospel, we are added to the 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 in 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 Christ. All Christians are the church of Christ.

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 Christ in his area that worships and serves God according to simple New Testament Christianity, then start a group. Start a group that serves God according to His directions in the New Testament. Because we have obeyed the gospel, we have been added to the church by God (At 2:47). Therefore, we must start assemblies of those disciples who have also obeyed the gospel. This is important lest one creates a religion after his own desires or the misguided desires of others. We must remember that God does not accept the vain worship of those who have constructed their own religious groups after the traditions of the fathers or the emotions of misguided religionists (Mk 7:1-9). He seeks for those who worship according to His will.

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 churches. In this context 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, the following chapters are set forth in order to help one discover the true church of Christ. These are important points that will help one either to discover the church of Christ in one's community or to start an assembly of God's people in one's own home.

Chapter 22

THE 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 out of our 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, no other person should religiously control one's life on earth other than Jesus.

Jesus exercises His control of His body by our voluntary submission to His word. We submit because we have accepted Him as the only way for our salvation (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 the judge (At 17:30,31). And they realize that the word of Jesus, not the traditions of men, will be the rule by which they will be held

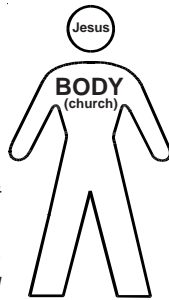
accountable (Jn 12:48). Therefore, one need not be fearful of those who would seek to bind on us the religious traditions of men. Jesus' control of our lives means **freedom from the doctrines and commandments of those who would intimidate or cause fear in our hearts that we follow them.** The Bible says the following to those who have obeyed the gospel:

Galatians 5:1

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

Since Jesus is the only head of the church, there can be no other head that would distract from His absolute leadership of the church. 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 and there can be no other authority that would compete with Him in our lives (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, therefore, that when we come to Jesus in order that our lives be corrected, we must submit to His control. He, not any man, must have our total commitment.

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 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 based on 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 was established on earth.** Therefore, when we determine when the reign of Jesus was established and officially announced, we will discover when His church of disciples was established, for it was established when people first responded to His kingdom reign.

We must study key Old Testament prophecies that point to the establishment of the kingdom reign of Jesus. According to our calendar today, the announcement of Jesus' kingdom reign was made in the city of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. Thus, the church of Christ was established on this day in A.D. 30 when men and women first responded by obedience to the gospel to the first official announcement of the kingdom reign of Jesus in heaven.

Daniel 2 is a record of a vision of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon that happened in the sixth century 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. Its breast and arms were of silver which 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 which 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.

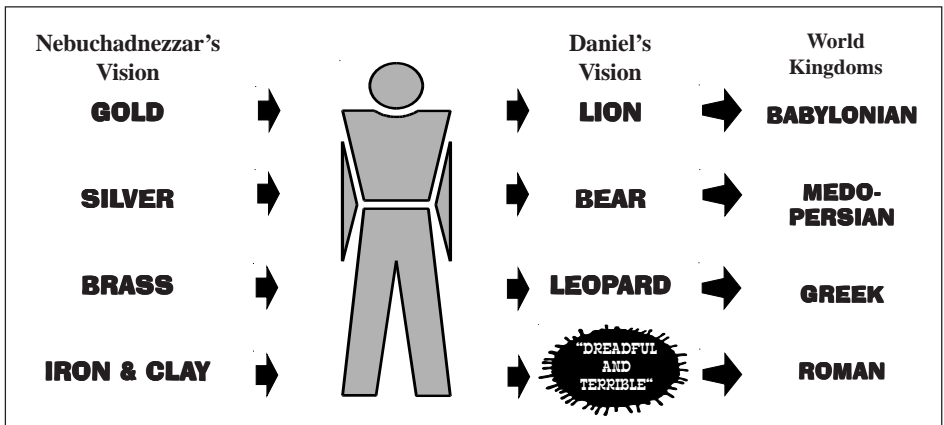
The same four kingdoms are represented, but with different figures. Babylon was the lion; Medo-Persia was the bear; Greece was the leopard; Rome was the beast that was “dreadful and terrible.” Daniel again prophesied that in the days of the Roman Kingdom God would set up a kingdom reign from heaven. 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 a kingdom, 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 into 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 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 their earthly ministries.

Neither the kingdom reign of Jesus nor the church was established in the days of John the Baptist or Jesus. During their ministries, both spoke of the

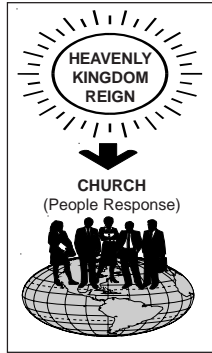
church as something that would come in the future. **Concerning the kingdom**, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death **until they see the kingdom of God come with power**" (Mk 9:1). **Concerning the church**, He said, "And I also say to 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 kingdom reign comes.** The kingdom is within the one who submits to the kingdom reign of Jesus from heaven.



Now when were the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament fulfilled? The answer is simple. 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 (At 2:29-35). A few days later on the Sunday morning of the Jewish **Pentecost of A.D. 30**, Peter proclaimed the message of the gospel, the death of Jesus for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection for our hope (At 2:29-33). 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 heard of the kingdom 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 were people who responded to the reign 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).

Now here is the point. Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father in order to reign as King (Ep 1:20-23). The first official announcement of this kingdom reign took place on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. About 3,000 people responded to this first official 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 with these first responses to the gospel. **The church began when men and women first responded to the first announcement of the kingdom reign of Jesus.** This happened on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 in the city of Jerusalem.

SCRIPTURE READING: Dn 2:14-45; 7:9-28; At 1,2

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

Chapter 24 THE PEOPLE OF GOD

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, therefore, is accomplished through those who have submitted to His kingship over all things.

The direction of the body of Christ, the church, 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 from heaven over all things. 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 kingdom 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).

God established leadership work in the church to be accomplished through the lives of designated men. These devoted workers in the church do not have the authority to establish laws that would be bound on the consciences of men. Their designation is for the purpose of nurturing by teaching, life examples, and ministering as servants to the needs of those who have voluntarily submitted themselves to the direction of Jesus (Hb 13:17).

All leadership of the church must be based on the leadership principles that Jesus set forth in His instructions to the disciples. Jesus gave His fundamental principle of leadership in the following statement:

Mark 10:42-45

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.

Whenever we discuss the subject of leadership in the church, therefore,

we are discussing those who have dedicated themselves to be bondservants to the needs of those who have submitted to Jesus (See 1 Co 16:15,16).

EVANGELISTS

Evangelists, function in two special works. Their primary function is **to proclaim the good news of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection to the lost**. Secondly, 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). The Bible says to evangelists to *"be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, **do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry**"* (2 Tm 4:5).

It is not the work of the evangelist to rule over the church. Evangelists are to minister the word of God to the world, both in teaching and by the example of their lives. The apostle Paul wrote to the young 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).

SHEPHERDS

Jesus has given leadership responsibilities among His people to a designated group of men who are commonly referred to as **elders** or **shepherds**. Depending on your translation of the Bible, throughout the New Testament these men are also referred to as **bishops, overseers, pastors** or **presbyters**. These are all the same designated group of leaders. **Different words are used to describe them simply to iden-**

tify the nature of service they do 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 instruction through the revealed 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 a **plurality** of elders designated for the church in any one area (At 14:23). There was never the situation where one elder functioned with a single group of disciples.

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 in the work of a shepherd.

Shepherds have the responsibility of caring for the flock that can personally know them (1 Pt 5:2). They are to offer their spiritual presence, teaching and example to those with whom they normally 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 Pet 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 church. They look out over the flock of God in order to make sure that spiritual and physical needs are cared for among God's people (Hb 13:17). It is their re-

sponsibility 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 to the members. However, if there are godly men who do not have the physical qualifications that are given in the New Testament, they cannot be publicly designated as elders of the church. 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 **servicing special needs of the people** (Ph 1:1). As the elders, they also are to fulfill specific physical qualifications and spiritual qualities before they are designated to special works. These qualifications and qualities are stated in **1 Timothy 3:8-12**. Through their special ministries, they function to mature and edify the church in the area of special ministries.

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

FINDING GOD'S PEOPLE

The disciples of Jesus in the New Testament are referred to with words and phrases that describe **ownership** and the disciples' relationship with God. These words and phrases either identify the owner to whom members of the church have given allegiance or explain the organic nature of the body of Christ. Such words and phrases were never meant to be proper names or titles of the church so as to divide disciples from one another. The following phrases are commonly used in the New Testament to refer to the worldwide 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 church, 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 in the New Testament to describe 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 those teachings and functions of the church that are mentioned in the Bible. Those names that are used in the religious world that often divide disciples should be discarded. Those who seek to establish unity will always give up traditional names 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 name to the disciples of Jesus. There is no unique name used in the New Testament to either identify the church or her members. God knew that unique names would divide disciples from one another, and thus, He sought to maintain the unity of the body by using terms and phrases that refer only to the nature or work of the church. For this reason, it would be wrong to use a particular reference to the disciples of Christ in a manner that would divide them from one another.

SCRIPTURE READING: 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

WORSHIP & SERVICE

Jesus made a very important statement in John 4:23. *“But the hour is coming and now is, when **the true worshippers 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 God should be worshiped.** The choice is His for He is our Creator and the One who is worshiped.

Many religious people today are worshiping God according to their own inventions. But if we worship God after the doctrines and commandments 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 Him and His word, 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 should worship God in truth, he preached to them the one true and living God (At 17:23-31).

There are also those who worship God according to their own religious ceremonies and creeds. About such the Bible says, **"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 2:23). Yes, it is important to worship God according to what He desires, **not according to what we individually desire.**

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 according to the knowledge of His word. Those who are ignorant of the Bible seek to worship God according to their own rules and regulations, or even for their own pleasure. They thus worship God in vain.

Worship should never be an effort to entertain ourselves. Worship is the outpouring of a heart that recognizes the awesome nature of God. How can we think about entertaining ourselves when contemplating the awesome greatness of God?

WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

It is great news that Christians today do not have to worship God in ignorance or after the ordinances of the Old Testament. 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). They have been freed from having to ignorantly worship God according to their own desires and the traditions of men. Christians today have the advantage of God's direction in worship through His inspired word.



The Christian's worship and service to God today is on a daily basis and according to the directions of His will, the New Testament. 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 and service 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” to God. 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 given in service to God. Therefore, he worships daily in service to others. Wherever a Christian may be at any time or anywhere, he has the privilege of worshipping God.

All Christians are priests of God. Christians *“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 worship and service of God:

Christians Daily Study And Proclaim God's Word

The early Christians determined to preach God's word on a daily basis. *“And daily in the temple, and in ev-*

ery house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (At 5:42). They *“went everywhere preaching the word”* (At 8:4). Because Christians have been saved by the grace of God, they have great news for all the world. It is their work, therefore, to preach daily the gospel 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

Christians Daily Sing To God And Admonish One Another

As the community of God, the Bible exhorts Christians to be *“speaking 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 be known for their daily teaching of one another with their voices 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

Christians Give Themselves To 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”* 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

Christians Daily Give And Do Good In Praise Of God

In worship and reverential submission to God, the disciple is not his own. He has been bought with a price. That price was the offering of the 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). 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 for others. They give as a natural expression of loving God and one another. They should 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.** The Bible says, *“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

Christians Commune With Jesus And One Another

Though worship of God is individual, on the first day of the week, Sunday, Christians seek to bring their worshipful spirits together in order to praise God with other worshipers. They come together to remember Jesus and the grace of God that was poured out for them when Jesus died on the cross (Ti 2:11). An important part of this Sunday assembly is the communion of disciples with one another and Jesus around the Lord's Supper during a love feast. The early Christians came together on Sunday in order to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus by partaking of the Lord's Supper upon the foundation of a love feast (At 20:7; see 2 Pt 2:13; Jd 12). Christians partake of the Lord's Supper which was instituted by Jesus. Matthew 26:26-28 reveals the following concerning what Jesus wants us to remember in the Lord's Supper:

Matthew 26:26-28

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.”

Concerning the **bread** of the Sup-

per, 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 it represented the blood of the new 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 new covenant** which God has made with 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 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 two spiritual truths. These truths are that He sacrificially gave His fleshly body (the bread) and poured out His blood (the fruit of the vine) for our salvation (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 to the world that Jesus died for their sins as an atoning sacrifice.

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).

Making bread for the Supper is easy.

MAKING THE BREAD

One can easily make the unleavened bread for the Lord's Supper. Simply use some flour and mix with a little oil, and possibly an egg. Add a little water and mix together. Bake in a pan or oven until done. Bake enough for a sizeable portion for each member who partakes of the bread.

PREPARING THE CUP

Grape juice can be used for the fruit of the vine. Some churches boil raisins in order to extract the juice. When wine is available, churches usually mix it with water in order to be able to distribute it to serve more people. It is often mixed at a ratio of one cup of wine to four cups of water.

UNITY OF THE CHURCH

Another important remembrance of the Supper is to consider the oneness of the body of Christ. All those who have obeyed the gospel are blessed with unity in Christ. Our common obedience to the gospel has brought us into a common salvation, and thus unity, our blessing from God (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 church. We are one universal church because we have obeyed the one gospel by immersion into the body of Christ. 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 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 God's word, 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 from our sins (1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). The submissive nature of the disciple's life is worship to God. The Bible says, "*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 to all those**

who participate in the assembly.

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 SEARCHING FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

So how can one find the true disciples of Jesus in his community? One can 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 a religious group may partially teach and practice some of the identifying characteristics of the New Testament church. However, a church may not be the true church if people have either added to the word of God or subtracted from its teachings. Obeying only part of what God requires of us is not acceptable to God. A disciple of Jesus is true when he or she believes and obeys the will of God as revealed in the New Testament.

We must remember that people are religious, but not all religious people are disciples of Jesus. We must be careful, therefore, for men have added false teachings and religious practices to their religiosity. They have brought themselves into the bondage of the doctrines and religious traditions of men. They have often subtracted from God's plan. False teachings are being taught throughout the world. Therefore, one

must beware lest he or she be 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). Remember the following warnings:

1 Timothy 4:1,2

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.

2 Timothy 4:3,4

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.

Be careful! Be not deceived! One would be foolish to believe that every person who claims Christ as the Son of God or claims to be following the Bible is actually practicing what the Bible says one must do to be saved. We must identify true disciples in our community and test their beliefs by the word of God. We must identify the true disciples by what they believe, practice and teach. What is practiced and taught must be according to the word of God.

It is important that we do not add to God's word (2 Jn 9; Rv 22:18,19). It is important that we do not teach or believe a different gospel (Gl 1:6-9). It is our plea, therefore, that everyone search the Scriptures in order to discover other disciples of Jesus in our communities who have also obeyed the gospel. The only way we can do this is through prayer and 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

LIVING AS A DISCIPLE OF 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. This is one of the most challenging functions of one's life as a disciple. It is challenging because every baptized disciple must begin sharing the gospel with others, as well as seeking to assemble baptized disciples in order to stir up 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 and the church of God's people.

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 sons 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 denominational 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 group. He does not add the obedient to something that is contrary to His revealed word. We are added to the universal church that is united by the members' common obedience to the gospel.

As members of the one church, we are obligated to teach others what we have learned in the Bible. In other words, one cannot obey God's plan of obedience to the gospel in order to be a disciple, and then continue to worship and serve God according to the traditions of men (Mk 7:1-9). We must act now, both in our own response to God's word, and our teaching the gospel to others.

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

If one is the only baptized disciple in his or her community, then it is time to act. **It is time to start a meeting of disciples in one's own house.** This is what God would expect. This is what

thousands of New Testament disciples did in the first century, and this is what thousands are doing today throughout the world in order to restore Christianity.

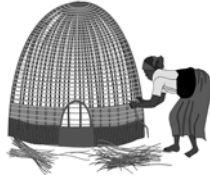
Chapter 28 A FELLOWSHIP GROUP

The early disciples 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 A.D. 323. But in the first century, Christians met in their homes when they established assemblies throughout the world. Here are some historical statements of the New Testament:

- *And daily in the temple, **and in every house**, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (At 5:42).*
- *I kept back nothing that was profitable, and teaching you publicly **and from house to house** (At 20:20).*
- *Greet the church **that meets in their [Priscilla and Aquila's] house** (Rm 16:5).*
- *Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, **with the church that is in their house** (1 Co 16:19).*
- *Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nympha and **the church that is in her house** (Cl 4:15).*
- *To our sister Apphia, Archippus our fellowsoldier, **and to the church in your house** (Pl 2).*

The church in the first century met in the houses of the members! One of the first things to learn about the fellowship of the church is that it does

not make any difference where you assemble for worship and mutual edification. God is not concerned about places of meeting. In fact, 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:



John 4:21-23

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 worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him.

Christians do not have official places of worship. Since worship is focused on God by individuals, one can worship 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, every baptized disciple must take a lead in beginning an assembly to worship God in his or her home or other appropriate meeting place. Remember, it is our responsibility to serve God in truth. It may be that our house is the best place to meet in our community. Here are some suggestions to begin an assembly of disciples in one’s house.

LEADERSHIP

When beginning 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 of disciples. However, as soon as possible we 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, the entire church was involved in making decisions that affected the entire church (At 15:22).

In the beginning of the assembly in a community, one will have to take a lead in ministry. In 1 Corinthians 16:15,16, Stephanas and his household took the lead in establishing the disciples in Corinth. However, **they took the lead by devoting themselves to serve other people.** Leadership, therefore, is service to others, and examples for others to follow (Jn 13:1-17). People will follow those who lovingly humble themselves as examples to serve the needs of others (Mk 10:43,44). This is how disciples are identified. When faithful men and women set themselves to serve the needs of the community, first by preaching the gospel, and then by servicing the needs of the people, others will follow. Therefore, as a leader, **“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

ASSEMBLIES OF DISCIPLES

The New Testament 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 people are a community of disciples who have obeyed the gospel. They are not identified by where they meet. The church in any area exists regardless of the assembly of the disciples. Therefore, **wherever God's people are, the church exists**, regardless of how people assemble, or how many assemblies exist in a village or city. A church is not defined by the ability of all the members to meet together at the same place. The church initially exists in any community before there is any assembly of baptized disciples (See At 2:41-47). We must keep in mind that the church is identified by people who have obeyed the gospel, not by the assembly of the baptized.

When we establish a meeting of the members in our houses, the church will 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 places there are no public buildings to rent. Therefore, members will have to continue to multiply the assemblies when the assemblies become too large for each house. However, **we must keep in mind that regardless of how many assemblies we have in a particular area because of space and distance from one another, all the members are still one church. People define the church, not the assembly of the people.**

The church of the New Testament was first universal. In reference to city churches, 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 cities met in many different houses throughout the city, God still considered the disciples of a particular city to be one church. Regardless of how many houses in which we must meet when we grow as a church, 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 in one area do not have to meet together at the same place and time on Sunday. This 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 into one place. What is important is that members meet with as many members as possible 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 des-

ignated by the disciples of Jesus in order to prevent people from confining their worship to a special place and time.

MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT

One of the purposes for the assembly of Christians is to stir up love and do good works.

Hebrews 10:24,25

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

The assembly of the disciples of Jesus must be an occasion for **stirring up love** in one another's 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 everyone to participate and get to know one another.

During the assembly, the members must also be **stirred up to do good works**. In order to do this, works must be identified. Each member must claim a work to be accomplished. And then, each member must be responsible for accomplishing that work.

There will always be those who do not want to do any work (See Js 2:14-26). These will stay away from assemblies that require disciples to claim good works that must be done. 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 identified and accomplished.

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 the worship of all members is stated in 1 Corinthians 14:40. "*Let all things be done decently and in order.*" This at least means that the members do not come together for public entertainment to please their own desires. Neither does it allow members to emotionally lose control of themselves in the assembly.

When Christians come together to worship, they do not come together to please themselves or to carry on with their own inventions of worship. We must remember that worship is directed to God and 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 Sunday assembly 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 with 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 church has decided to accomplish as a group (1 Co 16:1,2). It is also a time when Christians can join together in group prayer (At 4:23-31). The Sunday assembly, therefore, should be a time of great fellowship and encouragement to all the members.

When worshipful disciples come together in assembly, they naturally worship God as a group. One individual member, therefore, does not use the occasion to show pride or call attention to himself or herself. One does not use the occasion to exalt himself or herself before others. God is the focus of our attention in our assembled worship. Our worship, therefore, must be directed toward God and according to His desires, not the desires of any one member.

There are no directions 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 what we want to do when we come together as a group in order to worship.

SACRIFICIAL GIVING

Contributing money or things to help others and to help evangelists preach the gospel to the lost is a Christian privilege. It is a way one can express his or her love of God and others. We must take every opportunity to do good (Gl 6:10). Therefore, as givers we must be ready at all times to give when occasions arise for which sacrificial giving must come from us. There are many examples of Christians giving to special needs in the New Testament.

- **1 Corinthians 16:1-4** is an example of Christians giving money to fulfill a special need. The Corinthians were helping poor Christians who were suffering from famine in the area of Judea.

- **2 Corinthians 8:1-4** is an example of churches 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.

- **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 distributing what was given to help the widows of the church.

There are many things for which the disciples can join together in order to accomplish. 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). They can also join together as members to buy Bibles, pay the rent for a meeting hall, or make payments for a church building. The important thing to remember is that **Christians must make sacrificial contributions, and they must make such contributions cheerfully** (2 Co 9:6,7). 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).

EVANGELISM

As disciples of Jesus, we should desire that others join with us in our journey to eternal life. We should thus teach what we know to others. However, when

we teach and preach the word of God, 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).

Matthew 5:10-12

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.

Regardless of persecution and mocking, we must evangelize our communities. Jesus commanded that we preach the gospel to everyone (Mk 16:15). He taught that we 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. The early disciples went everywhere preaching the word of God (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 both the Philippian and Thessalonian churches. The Philippian disciples were only a few weeks old in

the faith when they started sending 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 the word of God, 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. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching"** (2 Tm 4:2).

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

Chapter 29 MAKING A 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 hearts, 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 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 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.

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

God demands 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 keep the commandments of Jesus.

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 for Him (See Rv 14:13).

A FINAL PLEA

If you have not obeyed the gospel, **find someone immediately to immerse you into Christ in order that you come into contact with the blood of Jesus.** After this, go out and tell others about what you have done. Speak to them of 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 you obey the gospel, you 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).

You must not allow opposition to stop you. 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. Rejoice that you 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). You are headed for eternal dwelling in the presence of the eternal God. God is working for you in all things in order to bring about that which is good (Read Rm 8:31-39).