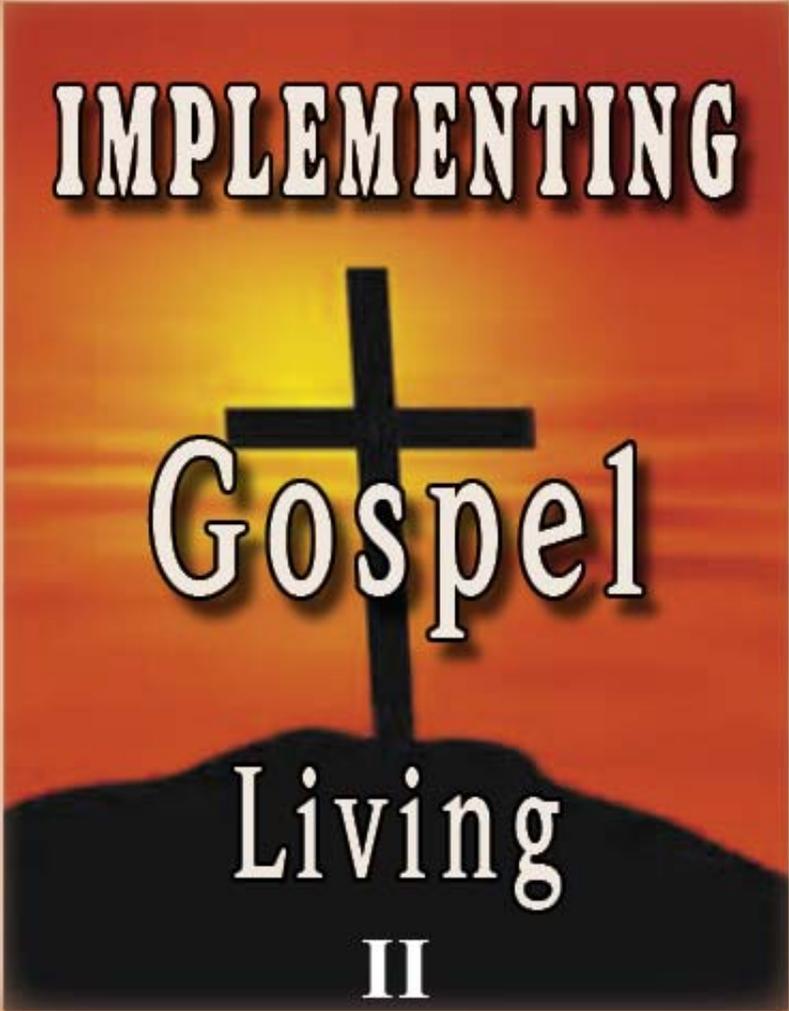


Inscriptions

IMPLEMENTING



Gospel

Living

II

DICKSON

Inscriptions: Implementing Gospel Living

Roger E. Dickson

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Scripture quotations from *International King James Version*

Preface

Opportunities for the application of Bible principles in our lives arise on a daily basis. It is often that we do not have a particular scripture for a particular occasion or trial that may come our way as we live according to the gospel of Jesus. However, there are always principles in the Bible by which we can make decisions, and thus, respond to circumstances that we face every day as Christians.

The series of editorials on our Facebook page called *Inscriptions* are written for the purpose of bringing to life, principles of the Bible that help determine our response to the world in which we live. A common request by those who read the series, is that the editorials be put in a book format that can be downloaded from our website. This we have done in this second volume of *Inscriptions*.

There is no particular order of the *Inscription* listings in this book, though we have tried to organize them together in order that the subject of each *Inscription* compliments another. Most of the editorials have been edited before coming into this book format, and some have been expanded. We make no apologies for any redundancy in the material because each *Inscription* was published independently on Facebook in order to deal with a particular challenge for daily gospel living.

Through the editorials of the *Inscriptions* we seek to bring the gospel into real life experiences. Because people have commonly created religions after a doctrinal identity, it has often been challenging for some to view Christianity as an experience of living. For this reason, we

have sought through the *Inscriptions* to challenge traditional doctrinal identities that are outside the authority of the Scriptures. We have done this through the practical application of the gospel in our lives. If there is ever a contradiction between the principle of the gospel, and the dictates of our religious behavior, then religion must be sacrificed for gospel.

Many religious people have difficulty understanding what is meant by gospel living. They have lived so long after the heritage of their own religiosity that they find it difficult to understand that living after the gospel inherently brings together those who are living the gospel. When we all live according to the principle of the gospel that was revealed through Jesus, we are drawn together. Denominational religiosity must vanish in the presence of those who live according to the gospel.

In Philippians 2:5 the Holy Spirit wrote through the hand of Paul, “*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus.*” After making this statement, He then proceeded to give an account of the gospel journey of Jesus from the form of God to the Man on the cross. What the Holy Spirit expects of us is to follow in mind this behavior of Jesus. If we can humble ourselves as Jesus, give ourselves for others as Jesus, then God will exalt us (1 Pt 5:6). With the mind of Christ revealed through our behavior, it is our responsibility to humble ourselves in gospel service as Jesus. It is God’s business to exalt us to reign with Christ in this life (Rm 5:17). If we live the gospel, He will exalt us to reign with Christ in life.

Through the *Inscriptions*, therefore,

we are challenging people to implement in their lives the gospel mentality of Jesus who came for us through the cross. When this aroma of Christ shines forth in our lives, it is then that we are living with Jesus. It is then that we have the “mind of Christ” in our daily behavior. And it is then that our light truly shines before the world as others perceive that He who lives in us is greater than he who lives in the world.

Living the gospel is the natural response of all those who have obeyed the

gospel of Jesus’ death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. And since there is no remission of sins without washing them away in a grave of water, then there can be no hope in a resurrection as Jesus came forth from the tomb. However, if we have obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, then there is motivation to live after the gospel of His death for our sin and resurrection for our hope. This is what gospel living is all about. It is as Paul reviewed for the disciples in Colosse:

If you then were raised with Christ—[and we were]—seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you are dead [Gl 2:20], and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life is revealed, then you also will appear with Him in glory (Cl 3:1-4).

Chapter 1

“MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN”

*“If anyone is not willing to work,
neither let him eat.”*

(2 Th 3:10)

When President Trump adopted the slogan, “Make America Great Again,” I presume that there were few people who really understood what he was saying, especially those of the younger generation of America, and particularly, those outside America. Trump is 70 years old, and his voting constituency near the same. All those old gray haired old-timers who stood behind him during the campaign rallies knew what the slogan really meant. If you are less than a half century old, and especially, if you are of the Millennial Generation (those who are just barely off their parents health insurance), then the slogan probably meant little to you. To some it simply meant more food stamps, welfare and government hand-outs, which means someone else is paying the bills. To the unemployed it meant continuing the legacy of being a job seeker or living on unemployment, and not a job producer. And to many, it might have meant not doing a job with which one is not pleased, or as the reality TV show, doing “Dirty Jobs” in order to survive. Therefore, those who are 70 and older were probably only those who truly understood what the slogan meant. Many of you will not like our definition—I am of that old-timer group. Now you must remember that when the chant was ech-

oed to make America great again, you must define the meaning according to those of us who were there when America was great. This means that you must be an American old-timer.

I can only relate to you my personal experiences when America was truly great. In the middle of the nineteenth century, my ancestors emigrated from where some of the first slaves in history originated. I cannot trace my ancestry back that far, but I can assume that some of my ancestors were slaves to the Roman Empire when Rome raided north Ireland for slaves for the Empire. After the Empire fell in A.D. 476, a thousand years later my ancestors sought for a new start and freedom in a new world.

So two Dickson brothers in their youth caught a ship in the middle 1800s and made their way to America, the New World. The two brothers lost contact with one another in New York City upon arrival, never seeing one another again. (To this day we do not know where the other brother went.) But my great grandfather Dickson fought in the US Civil War, and then headed for central Kansas to farm three quarters of land that had been granted to him for his service in the Civil War. It was a time to make America great.

When I was a young man growing up on that same dirt that my great grandfather settled, as a boy I could walk in the pasture behind our old farm house and

see old farming implements that were used by my grandfather and father. There was a horse drawn plow, wagon, field rake, and other implements. My grandfather and father stepped over horse manure as they carved out a future for our heritage in order to make America great. There were no government handouts. There was no one to fall back on, other than other neighbors who were doing the same. And since there were no food stamps or welfare, what the land produced was all there was to eat and to survive. In his youth, my Kansas father walked behind a horse to plow the land. It was not until 1935 that my grandfather and father owned the first engine-driven D John Deere tractor on steel wheels. It was a time when America was great and getting greater.

When America was great, I remember that my brother and I fought to drive the tractor to farm the land. (We still drove that old D John Deere tractor.) When I was 10 or 12, I kept begging my father to let me drive the tractor 14 hours a day to farm the land. My brother did the same. He was a year and a half older, and thus preceded me in being allowed to drive the tractor. It was a time when America was great. Hard work, sweat, sunburns, 16-hour days, bruises and callosities. It was America the great.

We loved to work, and especially, we loved to farm. As children in a farming family, we did not have to be asked to work. Work was the culture of life that had been handed down to us from our forefathers. When we were teenagers, we always knew what had to be done

on the farm. I remember when a particular field had to be plowed since it had just rained. So I hooked up the plow to the tractor at about 9:00 at night and headed for the field. I plowed all night under the lights of the tractor that gave only a limited environment of vision. When the sun was just coming up in the morning, I made my last plowed strip and the field was done. I put the tractor in high gear and headed home for bed. I pulled up the driveway, parked the tractor, and went straight to bed. I remember that at the usual time (6:00am) when our father awoke all of us for a day's work, my father came up to our bedroom, and said, "Well, it's about time to get up." I had had one hour of sleep. I sleepily responded, "I just finished that field." He had mercy and went downstairs. It was a time when America was great.

America was made great by hard work. It was made great when a civilization had a mind to work, and not ask for handouts from others. Community defined the "welfare" system. When one farmer had trouble, every farmer in the county made sure his fields were tended. A spirit of independence and hard work was what made America great. If the same culture of work is not revived in the present generation, America will not be made great again. Governments must remember that handouts will never make a nation great. Governments cannot tax themselves into prosperity. Nations are made great only when the citizenship has a mind to work and has a culture to help one another with a spirit of dignity to be better. This is the beauty of Christianity

for culture building. When love is implemented as the foundation for a culture, it is then that the culture becomes great again. But when love is lacking, then the culture is headed, as national Israel was in A.D. 70, for destruction (See Mt

24:12).

Research:
 Book 31: *Justified by Works*
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 2

FAKE NEWS

We were overjoyed when a South African friend forwarded on to us the following news:

“PRESIDENT TRUMP SIGNS AN EXECUTIVE ORDER TO ALLOW SOUTH AFRICANS TO TRAVEL TO THE UNITED STATES WITHOUT FIRST APPLYING FOR A VISA!”

The official-looking announcement from “the White House” went into detail concerning how easy it now was for a South African to arrive in America and acquire a tourist visa. All that was needed was to purchase a plane ticket, fly into an airport in America, and then, a tourist visa would be automatically stamped into one’s passport upon arrival. We emailed our South African friend that it was great news for South Africans going to America, for it had always been the policy that Americans could fly into a South African airport and immediately have a tourist visa stamped into their passports. But America had no reciprocity deal with South Africa.

The following day after receiving the great news, my South African friend

emailed me again. He said that someone explained that the executive order from the President was only FAKE NEWS! There was no such executive order and the news was false. We were all greatly disappointed.

When the comatose guards at the empty tomb of the crucified Jesus reported back to the Jewish chief priests in Jerusalem all that had transpired at the tomb early on the first day of the week, the dishonest priests told the nervous guards, “*You are to say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept’*” (Mt 28:12). FAKE NEWS!

Imagine how hard it was for the early disciples to overcome this FAKE NEWS as they reported from village to city throughout the world that Jesus was truly raised from the dead. Their claim was totally contrary to the FAKE NEWS of the day that was being spread like wild fire throughout the early world of the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, some who had initially believed in the resurrection of Jesus were also reconsidering this truth as reported by the early eye witnesses. The message of the early witnesses was totally contrary to the FAKE NEWS. The

early disciples were considered liars by the general public. They were the ones who were spreading fake news by saying that Jesus was resurrected. The social intimidation was harsh.

Because some disciples themselves started to question what they formerly believed concerning the resurrection, Paul wrote a defense statement from the Holy Spirit in order to defend the initial report of the early evangelists. He wrote to the Corinthian disciples that if they believed the FAKE NEWS that *“Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain”* (1 Co 15:14). If the FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards was correct, and the disciples actually stole away the body of Jesus, then *“we are found false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ”* (1 Co 15:15). If what the apostles reported was actually fake news, which news was contrary to the FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards, then they were guilty of reporting fake news that Jesus was raised. If this were true, then *“we are of all men most to be pitied”* (1 Co 15:19).

FAKE NEWS spreads fast. It does so because it fits into the natural course of events, and life itself. It is often what people truly want to believe. It would only be natural to believe that the disciples of Jesus, in order to defend their hero Jesus, would steal away His body, and then claim that Jesus was actually raised from the dead. After all, resurrections of the dead were not something that was natural. It would only be natural to believe that a report concerning the res-

urrection of a man was really “fake news.”

FAKE NEWS is often easier to believe because it is news that people want to hear and believe. Therefore, when one reports something that is contrary to the FAKE NEWS that seems so logical and natural to believe, then he or she is considered someone to be pitied by those who believe anything that is contrary to the FAKE NEWS.

The apostle Paul once stepped into an arena of inquisitive philosophers in Athens, Greece. He boldly proclaimed to these philosophers something that was contrary to the FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards that was surely circulated throughout Athens. He proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus to the philosophers. But the resurrection of Jesus was something that was proclaimed only by the “pitied people.” So the philosophers, many of whom were eager to believe the FAKE NEWS about the Christian body snatchers, *“heard of the resurrection of the dead”* that Paul proclaimed. However, *“some mocked”* (At 17:32). They mocked because it was more socially acceptable to believe the FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards.

Nevertheless, some of these philosophers reasoned concerning the evidence that Paul presented. They started to question the validity of the FAKE NEWS. So they said to Paul, *“We will hear you again concerning this”* (At 17:32). The honest intellectuals had enough sense to believe that there were some very inconsistent facts and logic about the FAKE NEWS. Christianity had

grown so fast throughout the Roman Empire that it was simply not logical to conclude that the disciples stole away the body of Jesus. The supposed act of body theft by the disciples just did not square with the circumstances surrounding the occurrence of events at the time. So they needed more information from which to make a decision.

Christianity rests upon the fact that the report of the priests and guards concerning the theft of the body of Jesus was in fact FAKE NEWS. The foundation of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. *“If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is vain. You are still in your sins. . . . those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished”* (1 Co 15:17,18).

In the early part of the 20th century, a British advertiser and writer by the name of Albert Henry Ross set out to prove that the myth of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was truly a myth. He subsequently conducted extensive research on the matter, having believed the FAKE NEWS that was reported by the priests and guards. But as some of the Athenian philosophers, Ross thought

that there was something that just did not sound right if the FAKE NEWS was true. He had a hard time believing that Christianity was simply based on the covert actions of some over zealous body snatchers.

So after a great deal of research and reasoning, Ross published a book concerning his conclusions. The book contained the evidence that led him to conclude that the FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards was actually dead wrong. He subsequently published in a book the evidences and logical conclusions that led him to believe that Jesus was truly raised from the dead. The book he wrote was entitled, *Who Moved the Stone?*, and was published under the pseudonym of Frank Morison. Since its first publication in 1930, the book has gone through ten reprints, the last being in 2006. It seems that thousands of other honest researchers have come to the same conclusion as Ross. The FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards was truly FAKE NEWS.

Research:
Book 27, Chapter 7: *The Bible and Faith*
Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 3

THE SOURCE OF A TRUE GIFT

My wife and I have a very precious copy of the Bible in our possession. The elders of the church where we grew up personally bought this Bible for us in 1966. They presented the gift to us when we were married. This Bible means a great

deal to us because we know that these elders personally sacrificed their own time and money to buy this Bible specifically for us. On the first page of the Bible are inscribed the words, “Presented to Roger & Martha Dickson by the Elders.”

Because the elders personally paid for the gift, we know that the free gift to us was given personally by them. They were the sacrificial source of the gift because they financially partnered with the people who printed the Bible. They did not ask for a free Bible from some other church in order to freely give us this Bible, and then claim that they were the true source of the Bible. Their gift was personal because they personally sacrificed for it.

The significance of this principle of being the sacrificial source of a gift is one of those biblical principles that is probably one of the most ignored in the Bible, if not commonly violated.

There were no printed Bibles when Paul rebuffed the Christians in Achaia in reference to circumstances surrounding this principle. He, and the other apostles, **were the Bibles** (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). They were the ones who sacrificed themselves in order that others be taught the truth of God.

As one of the “walking Bibles” of the first century, Paul rebuked the Achaian disciples, *“I robbed other churches, taking wages from them, in order to serve you”* (2 Co 11:8). The one who teaches the word of God to Christians has the right to receive financial support for this labors from those he or she teaches (1 Co 9:13,14; Gl 6:6). Therefore, the “walking Bibles” in the first century had the right to be paid as the medium through whom the Holy Spirit communicated the word of God. The apostles were the source of all truth, and thus, they were to be supported as

the “Bibles” who taught the people.

In the preceding case, the Christians in Achaia did not take ownership of their reception of the “walking Bibles” by supporting Paul, the only Bible to which they had access. As a result, they allowed others to assume the responsibility that they as Christians should have assumed themselves. Christians in Macedonia sent foreign support to pay for “the Bible” (Paul) that those in Achaia enjoyed (2 Co 11:9). In other words, **the Macedonian Christians paid for and gave a free Bible (Paul) to the Achaian Christians**. The Christians in Achaia allowed others to pay for their Bible. They thus involved Paul in “church robbery” in order that they might have a Bible for themselves.

The elders of our home church who presented us with a Bible did not ask someone else for a free Bible in order to give a free Bible to the Dicksons. **They financially partnered with the source of Bibles, and thus, sacrificed (paid) for the gift themselves**. They would not involve themselves in “church robbery” in order to give the pretense that they were giving a free Bible for which they had not sacrificed. They took ownership of the Bible by paying for it themselves, and then presenting it to the Dicksons as a gift from them.

Suppose Martha and I took our free Bible that was given to us at no sacrifice on our part, and then we gave it freely to someone else with the statement, “Martha and I want to give you this Bible.” We just lied! We had no ownership of the Bible because we did not pay for it. We were not the source of the gift.

Just as the Achaian Christians, **we had not paid for the gift ourselves.** If we allowed the recipient to assume that we paid for the gift of the Bible, then we would have left the recipient with the impression that we were the original source who had sacrificed (paid) for the Bible. We would have both lied and deceived the recipient into believing that we sacrificed for the gift in order to freely give to others.

Paul was very cautious never to boast in another person's sacrifices (or, labors) (See 2 Co 10:12-18). **The one who claims ownership of a gift that cost him nothing, but which he gives away free in his own name, is boasting in the sacrifices of others who paid for the gift.** With the help of the Macedonian Christians, Paul supported himself through tentmaking when he ministered the word of God to the Christians in Achaia (2 Co 11:7-9). But others in Achaia were now taking ownership of his sacrifice (labors). They claimed that the results of his sacrificial labors in teaching were the result of their own efforts. They were deceiving others by boasting in his labors.

As disciples of Jesus, we support the evangelist to go into all the world in order that he does not need to take up a contribution from unbelievers (3 Jn 7). However, as members of the body of Christ, we must take ownership of our own financial responsibilities in order to be responsible for those who teach us as believers. When one comes forth from the waters of baptism, he no longer has the right to receive teaching without

charge. It is now his or her responsibility to pay the one who sacrifices hours in study in order to teach the word of God (Gl 6:6). As Christians, we support our teachers. But also, we have the responsibility of sending preachers to unbelievers. We do this so preachers who are sent forth do not charge the unbelievers for the message of the gospel (Rm 10:14,15). This is what the new Philippian Christians did immediately after they were born again into Christ (Ph 4:15,16). We have always wondered why the new converts in Philippi immediately recognized this responsibility while they were still dripping wet from the waters of baptism.

We can never grow spiritually through the unspiritual behavior of taking ownership of that for which others sacrificed. If a Christian continually has his hand held out to receive something free, which he in turn freely gives in his own name, then those who give the free gifts enable the recipients to stagnate spiritually. There is no free ride to spiritual growth. It is paved with sacrifices (See At 14:22). If one is not willing to sacrifice as his Savior who sacrificed on the cross for him, then he will never be transformed into the living sacrifice which is pleasing in the sight of God (Rm 12:1,2). When we obey the gospel of Jesus, it is only natural to live by the gospel. And in living by the gospel, we live as Jesus who sacrificed for us.

We freely give because Jesus first sacrificed to freely give to us. However, that which we give can be a personal gift from us only if we sacrificed for it. We

thus expect nothing free in order to give to others as a gift from ourselves. We will take ownership for our own spiritual growth by sacrificing for the gifts we give. We seek to be the original source of our gifts. If a Christian asks for something free from another Christian in order to give as a free gift to another, then he has hindered his own spiritual growth, and possibly, deceived the recipient concerning the origin of the “gift.” If a Christian has received something free, then he is obligated to freely give to others. If one received a free Bible in the past, then he or she is obligated to freely give a Bible to someone else in the future.

Ever hear the term “regifting”? Regifting is when one gives you a gift, and then later, you give the same gift to another person while pretending that the gift originated with you. Such a practice is repugnant, and deceiving. Why would it not be the same in reference to Bible distribution? It is acceptable to give out free Bibles, but we must not deceive people into thinking that we personally paid for the Bibles that we are giving out to others free. Christians give honor to whom honor is due (Rm 13:7). Therefore, they are cautious to give honor to those people who made the sacrifices for the purchase or printing of the Bibles that we give out free to others.

We have paid for thousands of Bibles ourselves in order to give as we were given to by the elders. We can truthfully say when we present these Bibles to others, “**We** want to give you this gift of a Bible.” In this way, that one Bible

that was given to us over fifty years ago has been multiplied into thousands that we have printed and paid for ourselves in order to present to others. We are the original source of the Bibles we print because we paid for the printing. We have asked others to partner with us in making Bibles available. And thus, others have financially partnered with us in this printing and giving of Bibles, but we do not take credit or glory for the sacrificial gifts (labors) of these givers.

If one desires to grow spiritually, then he or she should go buy a Bible and give it freely to another. **We must not expect others to pay for our sacrifices.** This was a principle of David, a man after God’s own heart. On one occasion, Araunah offered to freely pay for David’s sacrifices to the Lord by giving him free cows and a free place to offer his sacrifices. But David responded, “**No, but I will surely buy it** [the threshing floor] *from you at a price. Neither will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God of that which did not cost me anything*” (2 Sm 24:24). David’s heart of God was revealed in that he knew he had to pay for his own sacrifices.

Jesus said to His disciples, “*Freely you have received, freely give*” (Mt 10:8). He gave freely to the disciples to go out and freely heal the sick. **But have you ever considered the tremendous sacrificial price Jesus paid in order to give them a free gift to freely give to others?** (See Ph 2:5-11). He was the original source of that which He freely gave. He had sacrificed heaven in order that He might freely give to them. And for

this reason, the early disciples **never** took ownership of that which they freely gave.

We have heard others bring judgment on organizations as the United Bible Societies for printing and selling Bibles. Those who had made such irrational and foolish judgments against the printing and selling of Bibles **are actually promoting the total eradication of Bibles from planet earth.**

Now think about this for moment. Those who complain about having to buy a copy of the Bible, either for themselves or to give to another, should consider that when the last printed Bible on earth is wasted away because of use, **then that would be the last Bible on earth.** When that last Bible was gone, **then all Bibles would be gone because no one would have paid the printer to print more Bibles.**

If the behavior and thinking of some self-centered Christians in Achaia had not been checked by the Holy Spirit through the “walking Bible” Paul, then today we would have no Bibles from which to quote. There would be no quotations from the Bible in all the world because there would be no Bibles.

The next time we ask another brother for a free Bible to freely give to another, we should remember that someone had to sacrifice in order to pay the printer to print the Bible for which we ask to be given to us as a free gift. What would become of all Bibles if everyone had the theology that Bibles must always be printed free and given away free? If the original source of the Bible from which we expect to be freely given a free

Bible, no longer makes the sacrifice to pay for the printing of the Bible, then all Bibles will eventually be gone!

We had a Christian brother who was a refugee in the country in which we now live. He made his living by receiving a few cents as a “car guard,” because as a refugee, he could not be employed. Without receiving a salary, he stood all day in the hot sun in a vehicle parking lot to watch over other people’s vehicles. He depended on the benevolence of a few cents from those whose vehicles he kept safe from car thieves.

One day our dedicated “car guard brother” showed up on Sunday morning with a new leather-bound Study Bible. He was ecstatic about his new Bible. We asked him how much it cost and he explained that it cost him about US\$100. After we recovered from our shock, we estimated that it probably took him at least a month of tips as a car guard in order to earn this amount of money. Nevertheless, he was so proud of his Bible, and thus, he was as David who said, “*O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all day long*” (Ps 119:97). Our “car guard brother” cherished the truth so much that he bought his own Bible. He did as Solomon instructed, “*Buy the truth and do not sell it*” (Pv 23:23). We do not think he would ever sell his leather-bound Bible to any other person.

Because of dedicated car guards as this, the Bible will continue to be printed, and thus continue to exist on this earth. Thank God for sacrificial car guards who are willing to take ownership of the word of God by buying a Bible. And for this

reason, we would encourage everyone to invest in their spiritual welfare by buying a Bible, their for themselves, or for someone else.

Research:
Book 57: *The Godly Giver*
Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 4

THE 18-YEAR OLD APOSTLE

Ever hear this statement: “The youth are the future leaders of the church”?

If you have either heard the statement, or made it yourself, then there is something you might want to consider in reference to Jesus and His selection of the twelve apostles.

It is supposed that the apostle John was the last Christ-sent apostle to die. It is traditionally believed that he died either during or shortly after his exile to the island of Patmos (See Rv 1:9). And it is supposed that he died an old man in his eighties. Let’s say he was 85 when he died—it is just a guess—since it is supposed that he wrote the visions of Revelation around A.D. 96, and died shortly thereafter

If John died in A.D. 97—again, just a guess—then we must count back to A.D. 30, the date, according to our calendar today, when the church was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. This would have been 67 years before his death in A.D. 97. When we subtract 67 from 85 (the age of his supposed death), John would have been 18 when he stood up with Peter and the other apostles on the day of Pentecost in A.D.

30 (See At 2:14).

Jesus began His ministry when He was about 30 years old (Lk 3:23). After a few months of ministry, He identified the twelve apostles, one of whom was young John (Lk 6:13). The duration of Jesus’ ministry was about three and a half years. So if John was about 18 in A.D. 30, then we could subtract at least 3 years from 18. This would make John about 15 years old when Jesus called him and the other eleven disciples to be His apostles. This would not have been unusual since a Jewish Rabbi in those days called their disciples when they were in their early or middle teens. So at the age of 15 John was called for a ministry that would change world history.

Now consider when John, and his older brother, James, during the middle of Jesus’ ministry, asked their mother to ask Jesus for special positions at the right and left hand of Jesus in His supposed earthly kingdom reign to come (See Mt 20:20-28; Mk 10:25-45). If the request occurred during the middle of Jesus’ ministry, then John would have been 16 or 17. Though growing up as a fishermen in Galilee, both of the brothers, as the sons of Zebedee, were known by the Jew-

ish leadership in Jerusalem (See Jn 18:15). Both had been influenced by religious leadership even when they were young boys.

In His admonition of James and John for their earthly thinking concerning what leadership would be in His kingdom, an unusual statement was made by Jesus in reference to their request to be at the right and left hand of Jesus. After Jesus said that they would indeed drink the cup of leadership responsibility and be baptized into the sufferings through which all leaders go, He said to both of the ambitious brothers, *“But to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared”* (Mk 10:40). Our question is, “Who is ‘the whom’ for which these positions were prepared?”

The answer is found in Luke 22 when a similar occasion about a year and a half later arose when the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest among them (Lk 22:24). It was the time of the last supper and the final hours of Jesus’ ministry on earth. On this night Jesus said to all the twelve apostles, *“And I grant to you a kingdom ... so that you [apostles] ... sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel”* (Lk 22:29,30).

At the time, none of the apostles truly understood what Jesus meant, though they understood what He said. “The whom” about whom He had admonished James and John on the Mark 10 occasion a year and a half before, would be **the apostles** of the Luke 22 promise. In other words, the 16/17 year old John of “the whom,” would at the age of 18, and

after spiritual maturing and after being empowered with the Holy Spirit, would be judging the twelve tribes of Israel on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 by preaching the judgment words of the Christ (Jn 12:48).

Now do you suppose that some old Jewish leader of the 120 in Acts 1, or possibly someone among the 3,000 who were baptized in Acts 2, said to the 18-year-old John on that day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, “John, you stay in there. You will be one of the future leaders of the church”?

If we would make that statement today, then we would be questioning the wisdom of Jesus in selecting a 15/16 year old young man, who, when he turned 18, would be one of the leaders upon whom Jesus would establish a foundation of truth to build His church (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). Yes, there was an 18-year-old young man standing up with the apostles on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 who was also proclaiming that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God.

This would possibly explain why Peter was given the keys of the kingdom to be the first to proclaim the gospel message on Pentecost (See Mt 16:18,19). To our knowledge from the Scriptures, Peter was the only apostle who was married at the time of the ministry of Jesus (See Mt 8:14,15). We would assume, therefore, that he was the oldest of all the apostles. And being the oldest, it would naturally have been him to whom Jesus would have given the responsibility to open the door into eternity through the first announcement of the gospel.

The other younger apostles accepted the privilege that Jesus had given to Peter. Therefore, the eleven began the preaching on the day of Pentecost. After their preaching, they called on Peter to give the conclusion and invitation to what they had already announced in reference

to Jesus being the Christ of Israel (See At 2:14).

Research:
 Book 15: *The Promise of the Holy Spirit*
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 5

THE SUNDAY AFTER

The A.D. 30 Pentecost of Acts 2 was the greatest Sunday of all history. The Jewish Pentecost was a glorious day of celebration that was observed by the Jews the day after seven consecutive weeks after Passover. Acts 2 is a historical description of what transpired on this unique Passover over two thousand years ago. What transpired marked the beginning of what Jesus had promised during His ministry. It was the fulfillment of what prophets had prophesied for centuries. In view of the “church of Israel” that had previously existed over fourteen hundred years before the A.D. 30 Pentecost (At 7:38), and the promise of Jesus about one year before this day that He would build His church (Mt 16:18,19), a new identity of “church” was established on this pivotal Sunday of a new era.

The week before this Pentecost Sunday, the initial disciples of Jesus were still in some confusion concerning what would mark the beginning of the new era about which Jesus spoke during His ministry that led up to this Pentecost Sunday. In their own ignorance, and their false expectations as nationalistic Jews,

the apostles had asked Jesus, “*Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” (At 1:6). On our side of the A.D. 30 Pentecost, we would judge this to be a somewhat foolish question. But at the time, Jesus kindly reminded these leaders, who would later lead His disciples in less than a week, that they should not be diverted to debates over issues: “*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has set by His own authority*” (At 1:7).

At the time the apostles made the preceding inquiry that was based on their Jewish nationalism, Jesus had been with them for forty days after His resurrection. During this time in Bible class He spoke to them “*of the things concerning the kingdom of God*” (At 1:3). However, their question revealed that they failed their final exam at the end of the forty-day Bible class. Nevertheless, one week after the failed exam, the Holy Spirit took over and connected all the dots and filled in all the blanks. All truth was revealed to them on the Sunday morning of the Acts 2 Pentecost (At 2:1,2; see Jn 14:26; 16:13).

We need to backtrack in preparation for this Sunday that marked the dawn of a new age. In preparation for the seven weeks of the Passover/Pentecost feast, Jews throughout the existing Roman Empire at that time came together in the city of Jerusalem. It was a glorious occasion when Jews reaffirmed their faith and nationalism. Thousands made the awesome journey from distant corners of the ancient world in order to come together for this annual event that lasted for fifty days.

For many, the journey to Jerusalem was too long to bring their own animals for sacrifices, so they bought their needed sacrifices upon arrival in Jerusalem. Some possibly assumed that a great deal of bread and wine were stocked in local stores in Jerusalem for the occasion, and thus they waited until they arrived to purchase these needed items in order to celebrate the Passover. Grain for making bread could also be purchased in local shops. Accommodation was booked in hotels throughout the city as an estimated one million plus Jews crowded into Jerusalem.

In the seven weeks that led up to the A.D. 30 Pentecost Sunday, all the Passover celebrations had been concluded. It was now time for the sojourners to prepare to go home after being shocked by the crucifixion of three men outside the city during what was to be a festive occasion. Hotel keys were being turned in, luggage packed, and reservations reconfirmed for the first “flights” out of Jerusalem on Monday morning. There was only one last event of the seven-week festivities to attend before

sojourners would vacate Jerusalem in order to return to their homes in distant lands. This was Pentecost and God had a special surprise on this Sunday for all those who had witnessed the ordeal of the crucifixions.

On the first Sunday of this new dispensation of history, God had a message that He wanted the sojourners to take back home to their local synagogues. So the Holy Spirit initiated the activities of the day with a great and mighty wind (At 2:1,2). Tongues as of fire from on high identified the apostles as the keynote speakers (At 2:3,4,14). The schedule of events began early on Sunday morning, and the day would end with an overwhelming experience that changed the world through the changed lives of all those who were present.

What made this Sunday so special was a public announcement of the gospel message, and the recruitment of additional messengers to proclaim this message throughout the world. The message was that the week before, the crucified and resurrected Master of the message, had ascended to the right hand of God to reign on the throne of David (At 2:14-36). The crucified Carpenter of Galilee was now Lord and Christ. He had fulfilled all prophecies in reference to the Messiah (At 2:36). And now, the proclamation was first made that in Him only there was salvation offered to all people throughout the world (See At 4:12). It was a simple, but glorious gospel message.

Recruitment of messengers started when repentant individuals who believed

the message and Master, asked what to do in order to sign up with the reigning King (At 2:37). The answer was simple: *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”* (At 2:38). The result was tremendous, for about 3,000 joined themselves to the King, and thus, upon their baptism for remission of sins, they were added by the Lord to the already existing group of about 120 disciples (At 1:15; 2:41,47). There were now about 3,120 individuals who composed the brotherhood of disciples of King Jesus. When *“the Lord added”* the approximate 3,000 baptized believers to the 120, and *“church”* officially began (At 2:47).

The addition of new members continued daily throughout the week as believing individuals obeyed the gospel through immersion in water in obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of the King that occurred seven weeks before. The 3,120 total on the Pentecost Sunday included only the initial members. We must also add their children, and those who submitted to King Jesus throughout the week. The number of individuals before the Sunday after now increased substantially. What we do know is that all the adult baptized believers existed as *“church”* before they had their first assembly the following Sunday after the Pentecost Sunday.

Now according to our often misguided understanding today of how we either define or behave as *“church,”* there would have been some tremendous challenges that we would suppose those initial members faced throughout the week

after the Pentecost Sunday, and the Sunday after. First, we must not forget that they became on that first Pentecost Sunday the church that Jesus built before the Holy Spirit ever used the word *“church”* in the book of Acts (See At 5:11). Second, they were *“church”* before the Sunday assembly after that initial Pentecost Sunday when they all joined themselves to Christ through baptism into Christ (See Gl 3:26-29). So before the Sunday after, we could, according to our thinking today, assume that furious planning began. We can only imagine the frustration. If we read our modern-day definition of *“church”* back into the historical events that transpired after that first Sunday on Pentecost, then we might assume that these first disciples had a very frustrating week. We would assume that they were in great confusion as to how they supposedly must organize for the Sunday after.

With the prejudice of our modern-day *“church righteousness,”* we might suppose that they scurried around Jerusalem, going from shop to shop, looking for some wine and bread in order that they might have the first Lord’s Supper. For certainly, according to our thinking today, they could not be validated as *“church”* until they partook of the Lord’s Supper in an assembly on the Sunday after.

And then some may have been worried about even being considered *“church”* unless all of them in their thousands first assembled somewhere in order to perform certain acts of worship that would identify them as *“church.”* This

meant that some were concerned about where they would meet for this officially acted-out “worship” in the community in order to be identified as “the church.” This posed a serious problem for some. They concluded that unless the 3,120 members, with all their children, and the added members throughout the week, could all come together at the same time and in the same place, they would be considered “churches,” and not one “church.” The community would think that they were divided if they did not all meet together in one place (See At 2:44).

So someone hurriedly arranged a “business meeting” in order to iron out democratically all the complications for the Sunday after, for now things were becoming hectic. During the “business meeting,” some of the first-time sojourners to Jerusalem inquired, “Where is the ‘church house’ in which we can all assemble together as one group, for surely Jesus and the Holy Spirit thought this thing through before they signed up thousands of us since last Sunday?”

Then someone responded, “What’s a ‘church house’? Is this a Roman thing? If I understand what you are saying, then there ain’t any such thing in all the world.”

Then another member suggested, “So where is the nearest civic hall?”

The reply was, “There aren’t any halls throughout all of Jerusalem.”

In desperation, others anxiously inquired, “Then where are the school halls?” The local residents replied, “There are no school halls.”

Then someone thought they had the

assembly dilemma solved. “We can meet in the temple courtyard.”

This idea was quickly squashed when a converted temple guard informed everyone, “There are temple guards at the temple to keep apostates like us out of that area. And specifically, there is a middle wall that bars any Gentiles among us from entering certain areas of the temple courtyard. And besides this, there is not enough area in the courtyard to accommodate several thousand people as we are this day. Also keep in mind that it’s hot out there in the open in the direct sun light, and cold and freezing in the winter. Do we really want to subject our children and elderly members to this? We need to seriously consider other possibilities.”

Now frustration set in because some assumed that if they did not assemble the Sunday after in the same place, then they would not be “church,” for they erroneously assumed that “church” was validated as such only by the assembly of a collective of individuals who had signed up with the King the Sunday before. How could they be “church,” they concluded, without first having an assembly in order to “perform” church rites that a “church” should do?

Others worried that they could not be validated to have been added to God’s people as members unless they also placed their membership with some assembly the Sunday after Pentecost. They felt that they needed to validate their own membership in conjunction with God’s addition of each one of them to His family upon their individual obedience to the gospel.

There was only one recourse in reference to assembly. And to some, this recourse certainly meant denomination-ism, for everyone could not meet at the same place and at the same time the Sunday after. Including the initial 3,120 disciples, plus their children, and the addition of other members throughout the week, there were at least about 5,000 people who had to assemble somewhere the Sunday after.

The problem was that only about 25 people could assemble in the average small house of the local members. This meant that there would be about 200 assemblies of the approximate 5,000 people throughout Jerusalem the Sunday after. Some were shocked with this possibility, because according to their thinking, this meant 200 supposedly autonomous, and thus, denominated “churches” in the city. To them, the disciples in the city would be “churches” and not “church,” because all the members could not meet at one place at the same time the Sunday after. And unfortunately, this also meant that the apostles and teachers among them would have to go from house to house among all these groups without “placing their membership” with any one particular group (See At 2:46; 20:20).

Now if they were going to meet in so many different houses, this sent the “church organizers” into a frenzy. They scattered throughout the city in search of pews and at least 200 pulpits. They reasoned that the “pulpit preachers” would have no way to subject their audience to mute spectators unless they could stand pompously behind an elevated pulpit in

someone’s dining room. And Bible class teachers for the children? It seemed to be an impossible task just to have that first assembly the Sunday after.

During that first week after the A.D. 30 Sunday, the women were also scurrying around Jerusalem from store to store looking for bread and wine for the Lord’s Supper. Every store keeper replied, “All the bread and wine was consumed during the Passover meal weeks before.” Others were looking for collection trays in order that contributions be made to also validate their existence as “church.” They reasoned that without a contribution every first day of the week, the disciples, who had been added by the Lord to them the Sunday before, and throughout the week, would not be identified as the church. And then there was a great concern as to where they would deposit their contributions on Monday morning. And songs? No one knew any “Christian songs.” Someone even suggested in frustration, “We can’t have ‘church’ without a guitar!” Regardless of all their confusion and frustrations, they all “split up” the Sunday after and assembled in about 200 houses throughout the city of Jerusalem.

In the house assemblies of the Sunday after there was certainly a great deal of disorder according to our standards, for no one had time to draw up an “order of worship” in order that all things be done decently and in order. How could these first disciples have ever been “church” without having organized themselves as “church” on a Sunday morning?

According to our “church thinking”

today, that Sunday after was surely confusing, so confusing that some today would conclude that the church did not exist even before the members had their first “organized” assembly the Sunday after. Others resigned themselves to the fact that “church” would be started later when the apostles got their act together and wrote some “church orders” for official assemblies. In all this confusion, these people forgot that “church” is identified by individuals who have obeyed the gospel, not by a collective assembly of individuals who have legally and orderly performed a system of religious rites as an assembly.

On that first Sunday after, the first disciples simply met together in homes throughout Jerusalem for praise and hugs. They were simple people who simply fellowshiped with one another around a dining room table in someone’s house. They had no Bibles, only the simple message of their King who had been crucified fifty days before and was resurrected to reign over their lives from a heavenly place. They had no name for themselves as a group. They were not even called

Christians, which reference came many years later in Antioch (At 11:26).

Discipleship does not exist because of ritualistic assemblies, but by an endearing love that baptized believers in Jesus have for one another on a day by day basis (Jn 13:34,35). This love was so strong among the early disciples on that first Sunday, and immediately thereafter, that the local resident disciples sold their possessions in order to keep the sojourning new disciples in town in order to stay enrolled in the apostles’ Bible class, for the apostles were their “Bibles” (At 2:42-45). Everyone continued evangelistically teaching Jesus as the Messiah in the temple courtyard to the unbelievers, but they also encouraged the believers from house to house throughout the city of Jerusalem (At 2:46; 5:42).

When all is considered, discipleship of Jesus is actually a simple way of life in seeking to glorify God by one’s behavior on a daily basis. The first disciples would have been truly thankful that one of our “church organizers” of the modern organized church was not in town and in their midst the Sunday after.

Chapter 6

FERAL CHRISTIANS

We like Webster’s Dictionary definition of the word “feral”: “A term applied to wild animals descended from tame stocks, or to animals having become wild from a state of domestication.”

My wife and I recently adopted

these two cats that looked so innocent and loving in their first impression pictures online. So we signed up to adopt the two felines in hope of replacing a most loving cat of ours that had passed on. We longed for another to grow into the same

domain of our affection.

When we saw these two very cute cats online, we yearned for cat company. (Cat lovers should never watch cat videos online.) Upon our request, and without previous visitation of the cats by ourselves, the owner of the two fluffy balls of hair brought them over to our house/warehouse. She unleashed them, and then they immediately scrambled into obscurity. They exiled themselves to some unknown den.

What we did not realize before agreeing to take in the two hobos was that both felines had gone feral for lack of attention. They had been rescued as wild runaways, and thus, upon their arrival at our house, and for fear of us, they returned to the wild somewhere in our house/warehouse. When no love is shown, cats in a short time go feral. They follow their instincts to go back to the wild. It is how God created them. God created cats with the innate instinct to preserve themselves in the hostility of the wilderness.

After two days, we finally caught a glimpse of one of the phantoms when we awoke in the early night hours while he was on the night shift prowl. But for three days, both of the critters remained hidden and unseen, obscuring themselves like poltergeist somewhere in our house/warehouse. Nevertheless, we knew they were there somewhere, for during the night hours we would hear this cry, “Meoooooow.”

After the eventual “capture” of the two “ghostly” fluff balls, they were immediately sent straight to solitary con-

finement in a single room where there was no place to hide. It was then our challenge to bring them in from the wild. Special visitation rights were given to their new owners. At first, when we lovingly squeezed them in our arms, they strained against our caress in order to make an escape. But we were more persistent than they. Our love of cats overpowered their love for the wild.

We knew an interesting characteristic about domesticated cats even if they have gone feral. They cannot resist a God-created instinct about their very nature. They cannot help themselves. Even the most wild and vicious cats of the jungle cannot help themselves. When tamed, they purrrrrrr when loved and scratched.

For example, when I was once on a seminar safari in Africa, I visited a lion sanctuary where old wild lions were brought into a caged area to be tamed and protected. In the caged area of the sanctuary there was this flimsy fence that separated tourist and beast. There were several of us tourists on the “safe” side of the fence when I decided I would bravely take a picture of the monster cats on the other side of the fence.

So I got down on my knees, pushed the lens of my camera through an opening in the fence, and then proceeded to snap a picture of a beautiful maned male lion that was not too far away. But unbeknownst to me, and while I was intently gazing through the camera lens to secure the best focus, another lion saw me on my knees, and then came running along the fence toward me from my blind side.

Of course everyone standing there who was witnessing the spectacle gave me no warnings. They were willing to allow me to be lion food for the day just to get their own unique pictures of a mauled tourist with blurred pictures who had been attacked by the king of the jungle.

Upon arrival at my prone position, the head of the “charging” lion hit my extended camera lens and I flew backward flat to the ground in total fright. When I regained my composure, and brought my heartbeat back below 100, everyone was laughing head over heels about what to them produced memories for a lifetime to tell their friends back home.

And the fearsome beast? With a deep purr, he was just standing there, rubbing his head against the fence, trying to entice me to scratch his head. All he wanted was some loving affection, even from a startled cameraman.

So into our loving arms these two fierce feral feline friends had been released in order to be tamed by our persistent care and tender love. Whenever we would capture one of the furry felines, we would scratch and rub their backs and heads. But it was difficult for them to let go of their natural instincts to live in the wild. Nevertheless, these beasts who had gone feral purred again while we tenderly scratched their ears back into domestication.

Now there was an irony of the behavior of our feral friends. Our two new prodigals remembered the good old days when they were once domesticated to be

house cats by some loving owner. It may have been that they just let go of their wildness for a moment in order to allow their basic instincts to purr to take over. They naturally loved to be scratched, and thus, they just purred away as we scratched their backs and heads.

If you would become impatient with bringing feral cats in from the cold, it might be good to remember when we ourselves were once “feral” in the wilderness of sin. When we had all gone “feral” in the wilderness, God sent His incarnate Son to the cross in order to reveal that He still loved us. With His heart, He wanted to scratch us until we purred. It was then, by His heart of love on the cross, that He drew all of us out of the wilderness of sin in order to enjoy the gospel (good news) of His love. Believe me, most of us were so “feral” that we fought Him all the way to the cross. Some of us must indeed confess that God had to do a lot of “scratching” in order to make us purr in thanksgiving. Nevertheless, though we strained against His love, we could not help ourselves but to be drawn to the cross of His heart. We eventually relinquished in repentance.

How could we refuse the heart of God that was nailed to the cross? After our struggle through repentance, we eventually succumbed to love. We purred. And we continue to purr in gratitude for the cleansing blood that continues to flow from the cross of love. But we admit that there is still some “feral” nature in us as we seek to keep ourselves from the call of the wild. If we do not continue to focus on Jesus, we will be-

come feral Christians. We therefore walk the walk of gratitude of being delivered from the wilderness. His constant scratching reminds us that we are loved by a God who so loved us that He gave His only Son. And for this reason, we continue to snuggle into the loving arms of the One who, through love, captured us out of the wilderness.

We have no desire to become “feral Christians.” Been there. Done that. And we all have the dirty, sin-stained T-shirts hanging somewhere back in our “feral closets” to remind ourselves of who we once were before we were touched by the heart of God. We continue to remind ourselves of the Holy Spirit’s comforting exhortation: **“But you were washed. But you were sanctified. But you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus in the Spirit of our God”** (1 Co 6:11).
GLORY HALLELUJAH!

Now back to our two feral friends. Love has conquered resistance. Wherever we walk in our house/warehouse, our two feral friends are right there at our feet, pestering us with their obnoxious fear of leaving our presence. When they do somehow venture outside our presence, we hear this deep cry for us. We simply answer, “Here,” and they come

running to our presence for security and more love. When we are working at the desk, they are there lying somewhere close. When we lie down, they are there close to lie down beside us. They no longer want to be outside our presence.

When God drew us out of the wild through His revealed heart at the cross, our behavior became no different than our two tamed feral cats. We never want to be outside His presence.

He is not finished with us, but He is making great progress, so much so that our “feral sins” of the past are becoming obscure as a distant memory. They are a memory as the apostle Paul who never forgot that he once persecuted God’s people, and thus, was the chief of “feral sinners” (Read 1 Tm 1:12-17). But it is God’s continued love that moves those memories of our past further into obscurity. We cannot help ourselves now. We just purr away in the caress of His love. We now, as Peter confessed, have nowhere to go, but closer to Jesus (See Jn 6:68). The temptation to walk in the wilderness is long gone.

Research:
Book 59: *Following Jesus into Glory*
Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 7

THE HEART OF GOD

I sat there in the office of a secretary who had long been working in ministry for over two decades with this particular fellowship of disciples. As we sat

there and discussed this and that about our partnership in world evangelism, there had just come into the office before my arrival this older gentleman

whom I had never before met. Age had wrinkled his face and arduous labor had bowed his back. But all these signs of age were covered with a beautiful smile from ear to ear. His arrival at the office a few moments before was a surprise to the secretary who knew him well, and where he was supposed to be. I was just a bystander as she commenced to question him for being there. She lovingly exhorted him to return from the place from which he had just escaped.

What I soon learned was that the jolly escapee was a new brother in Christ. He had just decided to release himself from confinement after spending several days cooped up in a hospital room. He had had enough. So he grabbed his clothes when the nurses were out of his room, and escaped to his old pickup truck in the parking lot. He then made a fast getaway to people to whom he had been drawn by love.

So there in that office of this secretary I encountered this runaway. The secretary had before my arrival made a secret call for help. So the secretary, unbeknownst to me and the escapee, was there in patient conversation with us while she awaited the "Mod Squad" of love.

Our escapee was a new convert who had just come into a realm of love that he had never before experienced. He had lived alone for several years at a small rural location with his beloved dogs, cats, goats and sheep. While surviving in an old shack that was dilapidated beyond imagination, someone who was living the gospel of Jesus eventually made contact with this hermit of circumstances.

When first contacted, this companion of animals immediately felt something for which he had been yearning for years. It was something that was incredibly beyond what dogs, cats, goats or sheep could offer. He subsequently relinquished to unconditional love and joined with Jesus on the cross, in the tomb, and resurrection from the waters of baptism.

And there he was in that office as an escapee from the care of the hospital, for he was not in good physical condition. In fact, he was nigh unto a stroke that could have sent him on into eternity at the very moment we tried to convince him to return immediately to the hospital. His condition was so severe that the hospital had to keep him under close observation at all times just in case.

What happened next still brings a lump in my throat. Two of the servants of that group of disciples eventually showed up at the office in answer to the secretary's call for help. These two brothers walked in that office without even the inclination of a smile on their faces. They were serious about getting the one for whom they cared so much back to the hospital. They were deputies of love who had come to capture an escapee whom they loved, for they, too, were fearful for his life. They were deeply concerned for the old fugitive. So they immediately commenced to reason with the brother to please return to the hospital, for someone in his condition could die immediately.

The pleading of the deputies of love went on seriously for over thirty minutes.

All the time I sat there and experienced the aroma of the heart of God in action. I restrained tears in the presence of two brothers who could not help themselves but to radiate the glow of God's heart in the confinement of that office. It was overwhelming. I have never witnessed gospel living to the extreme that I witnessed that day. Those two loving brothers had no smile on their faces in order to reveal the seriousness of their love for an old man whom the world had discarded to live alone as a hermit in an old dilapidated shack.

There needed to be no smiles on that occasion, no hugs, just the flow of deep love in order to convince the sick brother to surrender to their loving service for him. If ever "tough love" prevailed, it did that day. So eventually, the escapee surrendered to the intoxicating aroma of love that filled the room. He was personally driven back to the hospital by one of the brothers. His pickup truck was confiscated in order to discourage another escape. He was reassured that others would continue to feed his beloved dogs, cats, goats and sheep, just as they had been doing since he entered the hospital.

These two angels of love touched more people on that day than just an old man who needed for them to stay close in his later years. They touched me. Embedded forever in my mind is the incredible experience of the heart of God that was at work on that day. Embedded in my heart is a true example of how God's heart works in the hearts of His people. Only God knew that an old man and an

old evangelist both needed an injection of love on that day.

Gospel living needs no fanfare, no mention in church bulletins, no newspaper articles, and no slaps on the back. It is a daily walk of life by those who have truly discovered the heart of God. And on the day I sat in that office, I had the privilege of experiencing the heart of God at work in the hearts of two brothers who could live no other way since they too were brought into the sanctuary of the gospel. I cannot remember the words that were spoken by the two angels of love on that memorial day, but I can remember the intense gaze of love that came forth from the two brothers who had the awesome heart of God within them for a dear brother with whom they desired to remain in their fellowship for a few more years. They were truly being fathers in the faith to a new child of God who needed to be loved ... intensely.

Their love probably saved a life that day when a sick old brother they loved relinquished to their love. The old young brother's response to love encouraged the two angels of love to continue their ministry to the saints in order to release the love of God that poured forth from their hearts (See 1 Co 16:15,16; Hb 17:13). Once their love had been released on that particular occasion, they immediately went in search of other opportunities to once again reveal the heart of God. If I ever find myself an escapee from where I am supposed to be, I can be assured that these two brothers will come looking for me. There is a certain reassuring comfort in this thought. One might say that

this is the magic of Christianity.

Research:

Book 73: *The Gospel of the Heart of God*
Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 8

LIGHT FOR A NEW DARK AGES

We once listened intently to the interview on TV of an 84-year old man enrolled in a primary school in Eldoret, Kenya. Kimani Maruge had set the Guinness Book of World Records in 2004 for being the oldest man in the world enrolled in a primary school.

During the interview, Maruge sat there with fellow students surrounding him. They had elected him to be the “head boy.” As the interview progressed, the interviewer asked the aged Maruge, “Why did you enroll in this school?”

The answer was short and clear. “I wanted to learn how to read,” replied the old primary school student.

The interviewer admired the ambition of the formerly unschooled senior. So she asked, “Why do you want to learn how to read?”

The secular interviewer was surprised with the answer. “I want to be able to read the Bible for myself,” was the reply of the senior primary school student.

Now the interviewer was curious. So she followed up Maruge’s response with the question, “And why do you want to read the Bible for yourself?”

“Well,” Maruge quietly replied, “those pastors preaching on Sunday, you can’t trust them. They don’t know the Bible and they don’t preach the Bible.”

Out of the mouth of the innocent aged the truth was spoken. What the 84-year old primary senior citizen student was saying was more than the words that came out of his mouth.

We live in a world today where self-proclaimed apostles and prophets stand up every Sunday morning and preach, but they know little about the Bible. With eloquent speech, they keep their audiences spellbound in ignorance because they themselves have little knowledge of and often little regard for, the preaching of the Bible. On the other hand, we must say, there are those sincere teachers who are quietly doing the best they can with what they know. But unfortunately, there are too many noisemakers standing behind pulpits about whom Paul wrote. They are “*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tm 3:7).

As a result of the ignorance of the Bible behind a lot of pulpits throughout the world today, “Christianity” is moving into another Dark Ages. The first Dark Ages of human history prevailed during a time up to and around five hundred years ago. Before the sixteenth century in Europe, the Bible was forcefully kept from the people by the religious leaders who prevailed over the minds of the people. The common people were

barred from a direct knowledge of the Bible because the autocratic religious leadership of the time **refused to allow the Bible to be translated into the common language of the people.** Because the Scriptures were only in Latin, the common people who did not know Latin could not read the Bible for themselves. Religious leaders kept people in darkness in order that they remain dominant over the faith of the people. It was thus, the Dark Ages.

The religious leadership of the Dark Ages had every reason to control the translation of the Scriptures into the language of the people. If the Scriptures were translated, then the people could read the Bible for themselves, without going through the twisted interpretations of the religious leaders. If the people could read the Bible for themselves, then the people would discover that there were some serious problems with the dominant religion of the day.

Nevertheless, some very brave men as Husk, Tyndale and Wycliffe during those Dark Ages, gave their lives in order to translate and print the Scriptures into the language of the common people. Against the will of the religious leaders of the time, brave translators took on the noble task of leading the people out of darkness through the word of God. With Gutenberg's invention of the moveable-type printing press around 1440, the controlling religious leaders at the time could no longer keep the Bible away from the people. In fact, the first book that rolled off the Gutenberg press was the Bible.

This did not mean, however, that the

controlling religious leaders relented in their militant efforts to destroy the Bibles that were printed in the language of the people. "Bible burnings" were common. When copies of the printed Bible were found that had been printed in the language of the people, the controlling religious establishment gathered them up and burned them.

Autocratic religious leaders reigned in those Dark Ages because the people could not read the Bible for themselves. If the authority of the Bible was minimized in the lives of the people, then the religious leaders could maximize their control over the faith of the people. In their ignorance of the Bible, people were thus in the bondage of the religious establishment. And as long as the people were in the bondage of the religious leaders, they could not be free in Christ Jesus. Those who would be free, and thus not bow to the authority of the established religious leadership, were excommunicated, and sometimes burned at the stake.

Satan is still using the same old tactics today to keep the people in ignorance of the Bible. He still uses established religious leaders, but in a more subtle way. His tactic today to keep the people ignorant of the Bible is through a biblically ignorant leadership. This new Dark Ages is creeping upon us because those of faith are still being controlled by their own ignorance of the Bible. It is not that any particular religious group autocratically reigns as in the Dark Ages of centuries ago. Nor are people barred from owning a Bible and reading it for themselves.

Satan has become more sinister. He has changed his tactic to using the zeal of a biblically ignorant and eloquent pastor, who produces a lot of noise in order to dominate a willing audience of people who have relinquished their minds to a preacher who knows little Bible. The people have itching ears and follow after those who can excite their minds with fanciful prognostications of “end of time” speculations. It seems that the more noise a preacher can make, the more excited an ear-itching people become. What Paul wrote of a generation in the first century, is also prevalent today:

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. **But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires** (2 Tm 4:3).*

Serious Bible students know that there is nothing new about this tactic of Satan. Except for a very small remnant, over two and a half millennia ago, Satan captured an entire nation in the same way. Even after Divine intervention on Mount Sinai, the nation of Israel eventually went into the apostasy of Bible ignorance. It was not that the people became irreligious. On the contrary, they remained religious in their apostasy of willful ignorance of the word of God. When the nation was brought to an end in the promised land, one of God’s prophets stated God’s judgment as to why the people were destroyed:

“My people are destroyed for lack of

knowledge [of My word]. Because you have rejected knowledge [of My word], I will also reject you so that you [as a nation] will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children” (Hs 4:6).

That same pronouncement could be made today throughout the world in reference to many who presume to be pastors and apostles of churches, but refuse to study and preach the Bible. Those who would be God’s children are being forgotten because they are being led by those who have little concern for the authority of the word of God. Self-proclaimed religionists trust in their eloquent ability to speak and their positions of religious authority as part of some religious establishment. Independently, some have just captured a church of ear-itchers for themselves.

In their coveted positions of religion, they have become the blind guides of those who are religious, but who are not hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of God (See Rm 10:1-3). As the established religious leadership during Jesus’ ministry, there are the blind guides today who are leading a generation of children into the ditch of destruction because of their lack of knowledge of the word of God. They fail to hear the warning of James: *“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we will receive the stricter judgment.”*

So what would Jesus say today to the attendees of churches who sit pa-

tiently every Sunday in order to hear some knowledge from God? As a generation of “children” who are about to be forgotten by God, they often do not know what Jesus warned His “attendees” during a similar situation over two thousand years ago concerning wayward religious leaders: “***Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch***” (Mt 15:14).

Would Jesus sign off on the blind guides of today? Possibly so, for He said the preceding to the religious leaders in His generation. A truly blind guide, according to Jesus’ experience with some during His ministry, were unwilling to listen to His word of truth. Since Israel was

destroyed because the nation moved into a “Dark Ages,” so is the world of Christendom doing today by moving away from a Bible-based faith. It is for this reason that we seek for a Bible-believing remnant who will come out of those who are being led into captivity by those who are “blind guides.” We are calling for those throughout the world who still love their Bibles, to read the Bible for themselves. We would exhort this generation with the same words that Paul used to exhort Timothy, “*Give heed to reading*” (1 Tm 4:13).

Research:
 Book 2: *Biblical Interpretation*
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 9

FALLING OUT OF LOVE

Remember these words, “*O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all day long*” (Ps 119:97)? And again, “*Great peace they have who love Your law*” (Ps 119:165). Psalm 119 is a eulogy of David who loved the word of God so much.

We now live in a religious world of Christendom as that about which the God of heaven judged Israel: “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*” (Hs 4:6). This is where many are today in a religious world that is fast giving up the authority of the word of God in matters of faith, and yet in some way, claiming to be “Christian.” If one would ask why we believe this, then please follow with us through the following statements that

help us make a self-evaluation of where we are in our priorities in reference to our claim to be “Christian.” Please make a check if the statement in some way identifies your faithfulness:

- I need a concert on Sunday morning in order to draw me to the assembly.
- I need a hero (icon – personality – pastor/preacher) around whom I assemble with other fellow admirers of the “person of the hour.”
- I need to be drawn to a preacher because of his eloquent speech and dynamic noise.

- My faith is first based on the faith of another, or is validated by legal performances of religious ceremonies by which we identify ourselves as a Christian.
- My identity as a Christian is based first on how I react in a legally orchestrated assembly.
- The validation of my faith is based primarily on a subjective emotional experience that I have during an assembly of the saints.
- I believe in a God who exists only because of the attendance of believers to an assembly.
- I believe that my worship is acceptable to God only when I am at a unique location that is dedicated for worship.
- I identify myself as a Christian because I associate myself with a unique name, and not primarily by a gospel life-style of love.
- When I hear a call for Bible study, I am apprehensive about attending the study.
- I am not enthusiastic about teaching the word of God to others.
- I seldom read the Bible, but never study it with pen and paper.
- I am more excited about studying the books of men, rather than the Bible itself.
- I read more religious books by men than the Bible.
- I believe the books written by men are as important as the books of the Bible.
- As a father or mother, I am not teaching the Bible to my children in our home.
- My memorization of the word of God has not progressed beyond John 3:16.
- My faith is based primarily on my religious heritage.
- The traditions of my religious heritage have authority over statements that are made in the Bible which they may contradict.
- I am intimidated by the norm of the theological thinking of my friends.
- My salary as a preacher sometimes determines the theology of my teaching.
- Being accepted by others is more important to me than the truth of God's word.

- ❑ My religious beliefs and behavior are often determined by social acceptance, rather than the word of God.
- ❑ I am apprehensive about teaching the truth for fear of being rejected by others.
- ❑ When I discover something new in personal Bible study, I am apprehensive about sharing it with those who sign my pay checks.
- ❑ I am emotionally disturbed when someone challenges my faith that is validated first by the word of God.
- ❑ I am afraid to study the Bible because I fear that I might discover that I am wrong in some of my beliefs and practices.

If we have checked any of the preceding statements, we must never forget the exhortation of the Holy Spirit through John: “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments*” (1 Jn 5:3).

If the word of God is not the absolute center of our faith, then we will create a “god” after our own subjective imagination or emotions. We will then assume that this “god” we have created in our minds will accept any worship that we may invent for ourselves (See Jn 4:24).

Faith still comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rm 10:17). And when religious people stop studying the word of Christ because they have stopped loving the word of God, then they will create a god and a christ who are twisted to their own self-created religiosity. We must never forget that if the Bible were extracted from our society, we would within one generation create in our minds a god and christ who could not be defined by the God and Christ of the Bible. We live in a world today where Bibles are available, but students of the Bible are rare.

Research:

Book 27: *The Bible and Faith*

Book 58: *Thirsting for the Word of God*

Biblical Research Library

www.africainternational.org

Chapter 10

WONDERING BEYOND WORDS

We would be presumptuous to write a doxology of existence before Deity uttered the first command, “Let there be” What could ever be said in human words before words existed? And if we could write anything about that which was before the beginning, then there

would exist nothing about which to write.

After the end of a week of creative beginnings, and in order for us to wonder concerning that which Deity has willed into existence, the Holy Spirit had to take the mind of the biblical chronicler on an adventure of discovery when

he inscribed, “And God said” It was only then that there was something about which to articulate in the words of man.

Words are the meager invention of existence. Vocal cords and sound waves of this atmosphere produce and transmit words. Ears intercept and decipher. But before the existence of any of these physical necessities for human communication, we would be elementary to assert that the Eternal had to pronounce words in order to bring into existence that which produces and transmits words. Surely there is metaphor in the Spirit’s ledger of the Genesis “words” to create, for a Being who had no vocal cords, plus there being no atmosphere to transmit spoken words, could not use the words of humanity to “pronounce” into existence that which we empirically experience. Our conclusion is that He “willed” the universe into existence. But until the universe fulfills its purpose, humans are allowed to communicate to one another their own “will” through words.

In our most distant wonder, we gaze through our telescope. We are overwhelmed. We are humbled by our insignificance in comparison to the vast galaxies that occupy space. We are humbled by discoveries of immense existence and conclude that we are only a cluster of biological cells on a speck of dust, which speck cannot even be seen—if it could be—from the center of our own galaxy. And there are trillions of earth-like specks of dust and millions of other galaxies that occupy space. Our telescope reveals to us that we are incredibly finite in an infinite existence.

All that we could possibly conclude through the lens of a telescope is what existed before the beginning was “energy” in motion. We find it impossible that a coalition of material specks and gases could create. Since the second law of thermodynamics of the material world cannot be reversed, then we can only conclude that what we witness in the present galaxies is that there was a beginning. But we wonder concerning that which existed before that which we now observe through our telescope.

We are told that the universe is expanding. We have no theology that would conflict with such an assumption. However, entropy is also increasing as a supposedly expanding universe suffers from the decay of released energy. Is existence returning to the nature of its origin?

Since the expansion of the universe cannot be brought to a conclusion, then we conclude that space is infinite, and that surely there will be some conclusion as there was certainly a beginning. As we can only imagine what existed before the beginning, so we are left to wonder what will be after an expanding universe has expanded itself into infinity, if indeed there is an end to infinite space.

Since we all conclude that the beginning was a point of transition from before to after, from nonexistence to existence, then we are all stuck with an unanswerable question. The atheist has no idea what lit the fuse of the speculated Big Bang Theory. The theist cannot imagine existence outside the material worlds to which he gazes through his telescope. If the theist concludes “Who,” in-

stead of “what,” then he must conclude that he believes in a “Who” who needs no words of men to generate existence, for only that which exists in the material/physical world has the ability to produce words. This Deity must exist apart from the material world that He willed into existence. And since He is autonomous of all that exists, then we can only conclude that His existence does not depend on that which exists.

Before dictionaries were written, the “Eternal Who” occupied emptiness. If creation refers to bringing into existence that which is material, then we must assume that only “space” existed in eternity. “Space,” therefore, was the eternal dwelling place that was occupied by that which could will the galaxies into existence.

But why would the “Eternal Who” do such a thing, that is, bring into existence that which was inherently finite? Why would He call into existence an assortment of galaxies, and use only one dust particle of trillions on which to place a living being? We can only conclude that the Eternal Occupant of space and eternity is to be defined by love, for love must express itself, or it is not love at all. And for this reason, creation happened, not because there was loneliness in

“space,” but because love had to act. And thus we would add, it is the nature of infinite love that it needs no material existence to exist, but it must create in order to be defined. The fact that we exist is the “proof” of His existence as a God of love.

We have no presumptions as to whether the “Eternal Love” (God) did all this before our present existence, or will possibly do it again after the terrestrial and celestial drama of this existence have played out their purpose for existence. It is simply not our business to surmise such things, though we yearn to speculate. We only wonder what the Eternal Creator will do with the rest of the galactic baggage after this speck of dust is wrapped up at the sound of the last trumpet, or simply allowed to explode away into limitless space. We wait in anticipation, realizing that since He brought it all into existence, then certainly He has everything under control. This is only a logical deduction that defines the One who has the power to bring into existence that which our telescope and Bible reveals.

Research:
 Book 25: *The Existence of God*
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 11

OBJECTIVE ASSURANCE

There is a difference between subjective and objective influences and responses. Subjective focuses on **inward**

feelings and emotions. Objective focuses on **outward** influences that often generate subjective responses. Our emotions

and thoughts are subjective influences that determine our behavior. Influences from what we empirically experience around us, or read, are objective. Objective influences affect our subjective responses, but objective influences exist separate from our subjective being as a person. Though only God can judge us according to our hearts, He does not accept subjective responses alone in reference to our salvation.

Now consider this in reference to God generating a salvational response and behavioral changes in our lives. James referred to both the subjective and objective when he wrote, “*Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (Js 2:17). Faith is inward, and thus subjective. Works, however, are objective, for they are an outward manifestation of that which is within us. Works are something that can be witnessed by others in one’s life. When James said, “*I will show you my faith by my works,*” he was rebutting those who affirmed that their faith alone could simply be accepted because it was self-proclaimed (Js 2:18).

But James is saying that God does not accept anyone’s subjective faith without an open and objective demonstration. He does not accept anyone’s declaration that “I am saved,” without the objective testimony of obedience. And for this reason, He does not ask any Christian to accept anyone’s faith that is not objectively demonstrated through fruit bearing.

Some self-righteous disciples in Corinth sought to masquerade themselves as saints. But Paul wrote that they were Satan’s disciples among the sincere dis-

ciples. They “*masquerade themselves as ministers of righteousness*” (2 Co 11:15). But, Paul warned, their “*end will be according to their works*” (2 Co 11:5). Their inner twisted self-righteousness would be revealed to be false when they were objectively judged according to their works. Judgment will be fair, therefore, because “*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).

Final judgment will be objective according to our works, and thus there will be no doubts as to why one is either saved or condemned. And for this reason, God allows us to make an objective judgment of others according to the witness of their works. This is what Jesus meant when He instructed His disciples, “*Do not judge according to appearance [of what one pretends to be], but judge righteous judgment [according to his deeds]*” (Jn 7:24). We are only allowed to make judgments objectively by witnessing the righteous works of others. In this context Jesus said, “*You will know them by their fruits*” (Mt 7:16). Christians have no right to judge the subjective motives of one another. However, they are to be cautious fruit inspectors.

We learn from this something very important from this in reference to how God considers both the salvation and faithfulness of any person. The faith that saves is objectively manifested and witnessed by others. It is declared by God to others when others see the obedience that God objectively requires in His word

in order to be saved. Paul focused on this principle in the life of the erring disciple: “*For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation*” (2 Co 7:10). In other words, if it is sincere, subjective godly sorrow will manifest itself objectively in a changed life of repentance, which changed life is objectively perceived by others. As God accepted no faith without an outward expression, neither does He accept any repentance that cannot be objectively witnessed through godly behavior. He expects us to do likewise.

Now we need to apply this principle to those who seek God’s approval in reference to their salvational relationship with Him. In the historical context of idolatrous religiosity, believers in Jesus in the first century sought to influence idolatrous unbelievers through the power of the objective gospel event of the incarnation, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Son of God. Their initial objective statements gave direction to salvation for unbelievers: “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you ... will be saved*” (At 16:31). This was an initial objective statement that called for a subjective inward response of faith in the resurrected and ascended Jesus. The inquiring sinner had the opportunity to subjectively respond with inward faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, in order for the sinner to come into a salvational relationship with God, the subjective response had to be manifested with an objective demonstration.

The Ethiopian eunuch is a typical example of an objective response. Philip objectively presented the means by which

the eunuch could reveal any subjective faith. Beginning with Isaiah 53, Philip “*preached Jesus to him*” (At 8:35). Philip’s objective word about Jesus worked because the eunuch responded with a desire to objectively reveal his subjective response to Jesus. So he said to Philip, “*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized*” (At 8:36). Baptism was an objective manifestation of an inward subjective faith.

The same scenario developed on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter presented the objective evidence that the crucified Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (At 2:14-36). The people, therefore, subjectively responded, for they were “*cut to the heart*” (At 2:37). Their response was initially inward. However, they had to make an outward objective response before they could receive remission of sins. In order that they reveal their subjective “cutting to the heart,” therefore, Peter revealed to them what they must do to objectively manifest before God and man that their faith was not dead: “*Repent and be baptized every one one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*” (At 2:38). A change in behavior (repentance), and baptism, were the objective responses to their subjective “cutting to the heart.”

God never asked repentant believers to trust in their own intuition, feelings, or emotions in order to validate their own salvation. He has never required this of people for one simple reason: “*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to*

direct his steps” (Jr 10:23). If we were allowed by God to trust in our own subjective emotions as a guarantee of our salvation, then we would become narcissistic religionists. This is the belief of manmade religionists who call out to God in order to seek their own terms for their own salvation. It is an effort on the part of the individual to validate his or her own salvation without the objective declaration as to when God declares one to be saved.

As Peter uttered the mandate of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38, a God-directed objective response of faith must always be the point of reference where sins that separate us from God, are washed away in the waters of baptism (At 22:16). The objective experience of baptism into Christ is a point in one’s life where faith is objectively revealed, both to God and to those who witness the occasion.

After years of spiritual growth, the objective response of baptism is a God-ordained point of reference to which one can always know that God saved him by washing away his sins. This is not the case with the subjective declarant who would spiritually grow beyond those youthful years where he or she sought to declare his or her own salvation by a self-proclamation that is not stated in the word of God. **It is God who has the right to declare when we are saved**, and His declaration is made by our objective obedience to the death of Jesus for our sins, and resurrection for our hope (See Rm 6:3-6).

Immediately before His ascension, Jesus explained it clearly: “*He who believes* [subjective] *and is baptized* [ob-

jective] *will be saved*” (Mk 16:16). The objective (baptism) substantiates the existence of the subjective (belief). However, Jesus continued, “*But he who does not believe* [subjective] *will be condemned*” (Mk 16:16). There is no reason to mention the objective (baptism) if one does not have the subjective belief to take one into and out of the waters of baptism. If one’s subjective faith does not lead to an outward manifestation of objective obedience to Jesus’ instructions, then his faith is dead. It is dead because it is a faith that is void of objective obedience.

We must caution everyone, therefore, that faith (subjective) comes by hearing the objective word of Christ (Rm 10:17). If we do not obey what God has objectively presented through words of instruction in reference to our faith, then we are harboring a dead faith about which James said would produce only death.

God never gave man the right to declare his own salvation through his own self-proclamation that he “received Jesus,” “went forward during a ‘church’ service,” or fell to his knees. It is God, not man, who, through His word, mandates the objective conditions that must be obeyed in order that we are assured that our sins are washed away. And His declaration is actually quite simple: “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*” (Mk 16:16). It cannot be stated more clearly than that. Our assurance, therefore, is in the declaration of God that our sins have been washed away and forgiven at the point of our obedience to His instructions that we read about in the

Bible. Our assurance is based on what God proclaims through His word and not on our own self-proclamation.

Research:
 Book 31: *Justified by Works*
 Book 41: *Obedience to the Gospel*
 Biblical Research Library
 www.africainternational.org

Chapter 12

NOT KNOWING WHAT WE HAVE

John A. Hunter was a famous “white hunter” of Africa, especially during the unveiling of the continent during the 1920s. In his lifetime work as a hunter/guide across the African wilderness, he entertained numerous foreign guests, including movie stars and European royalty. On one occasion, he received a telegram from two hardy adventurous foreigners who wanted to hunt the legendary Ngorongoro crater of the Serengeti to which Hunter had never ventured. He was living in Nairobi, Kenya at the time, so as a young hunter/guide, he accepted the challenge.

Before the arrival of his adventurous foreign guests, Hunter set about organizing 150 hardy African porters, gathering supplies, and as much information as possible about the remote Ngorongoro crater. He wanted to make the three-month safari a success for his visitors.

Few outsiders had visited this remarkable wonder of an extinct volcano. The basin of the crater was surrounded by a crest that captured innumerable animals on plains that stretched about fifteen miles (about 24 kilometers) from crest to crest. It was an anomaly of nature, both geographical and in wild life. At the time, few people from outside Af-

rica had ever witnessed this marvel of nature.

Once all preparations were made, the safari group set out and struggled for over two weeks through the hostile bush of the African wilderness in order to get to the remote Ngorongoro. While enduring the thorn bushes of the trek, and because the journey was so challenging, Hunter labored as the sole hunter/guide to keep everyone just above survival in order that their destination be realized.

And then finally, after the torturous journey had concluded in a legacy of travel, they reached the crest of the crater. The entire safari entourage gazed down with astonishment across the plains of the crater. It was covered with thousands upon thousands of animals. It was a hunter’s wonderland. Hunter later wrote of the occasion:

“All the tales I had heard of Ngorongoro were as nothing compared to the great herds spread out over those green fields as though shaken out of a giant pepper pot. The crater seethed with game. The grass was cropped as fine as a lawn by the thousands of beasts. In the distance the herds seemed to melt together into a trembling mass of white and fawn. There

were zebra, eland, giraffe, topi, waterbuck, reebuck, bushbuck, steinbok, Thomas gazelles, Grant gazelles, impala, wildebeest, duiker, oribi, and ostrich. This was how all the African veldt must have looked before the coming of the white man. Here in this isolated crater was the last great stronghold of game” (J. A. Hunter, *Hunter*, Harper & Brothers, 1952).

Hunter also wrote concerning the obsession of his two foreign clients: “My two clients behaved like children suddenly turned loose in a candy store. They shot until their rifles were too hot to hold” (Ibid.).

One fortunate Englishman had long before made it to the Ngorongoro wonderland before Hunter and his safari crew arrived. The Englishman, Captain Hurst, had established a ranch in the crater after having received a lease from the government to make the crater his home. Unfortunately, two weeks before Hunter arrived, Captain Hurst was killed by an elephant. Upon the death of Hurst, his workers immediately dispatched a runner to report the death of their master to the authorities in Arusha, Tanzania. A runner had returned from the authorities at the time Hunter arrived. The request from the authorities was that Hunter investigate the death of Hurst, collect all his remaining belongings, and then have them sent back to his brother in Nairobi, Kenya, which thing Hunter faithfully did.

When Hunter eventually returned to Nairobi after the three month safari, he was approached by the brother of Cap-

tain Hurst, to whom all the belongings of the Captain had been faithfully returned. The brother had gone through the belongings and discovered the lease document that validated that Hurst had been given a ninety-nine year lease of the entire Ngorongoro crater. Hurst’s brother was a successful businessman in Nairobi, and thus had no desire to retain the lease. So he offered the lease to Hunter for next to nothing in annual rent.

After talking the matter over with his wife, and recalling the two-week struggle through the African bush to get from Nairobi to Ngorongoro, Hunter decided not to accept the offer. He decided that he and his wife could not give the rest of their lives to living in isolation from humanity, though in a paradise as Ngorongoro.

When Hunter wrote of this story in his memoirs that were published in 1952, he repentantly recalled that what was a two-week tortuous trek through the African bush to reach Ngorongoro in the 1920s, was at the time of writing less than a two-hour drive from Nairobi on smooth roads in a comfortable vehicle. At the time he wrote, the Ngorongoro crater had become the most famous tourist attraction of all Africa. If only

Sometimes, when we are given great opportunities, we often fail to realize their full potential. And the greatest opportunity of all was expressed by the apostle Paul: “*For by grace you are saved through faith It is the gift of God*” (Ep 2:8). Grace is free, paid for, and was handed out at the cross. Unfortunately, we will never fully understand

what we have in Christ until we walk through the “pearly gates.” We often sadly wonder how many people throughout the world daily turn down the “Ngorongoro grace” that God offers to all with the minimal “rent” of only a few faithful years of service on earth. And, there is no end to the lease on grace. The payments will be eternally cancelled at the sound of a great trumpet, for which we all anxiously await.

When Felix said to Paul, “*In a short*

time you almost persuade me to become a Christian,” he had no idea what he was turning down (At 26:28). He knows now, but we would urge everyone in all the world not to make the same mistake by turning down the gospel that is the door to enter into the Paradise of God.

Research:
 Book 63: *New Creation*
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 13

LET IT ROT!

Harvest time on a central Kansas farm in America back in the 1950s was always miserably hot. Choking dust flew everywhere when our old P-Case combine was reaping through the dry Kansas wheat fields. The dust was inhaled into nostrils to the point that every handkerchief at the end of the day was caked with a dingy mucus dust from the farm lands of Middle America.

Nevertheless, in those days our father stirred us voluntary “child laborers” out of bed at 6:00^{am} every morning, especially during harvest. During this time of the year, we three brothers knew that we were in for a 16-hour day until a year’s salary was securely in the storage bins. Those were the days when we laboriously struggled to harvest the wheat fields of our third generation farm in order to provide food for others. It was the way we were, and the purpose for which we labored.

Once when I had wiped the sweat

from my 10-year old brow, our Uncle Minor came by for a visit to the farm. He had just returned from a North African country where he had gone to work in the oil fields. During his visit, he related a story to all of us that is still difficult to understand, even these sixty years later.

At the time, he revealed that our American government had decided to give away several ship loads of our precious wheat, over which we and a host of other Kansas farmers, had laboriously toiled. That was no problem. We had enough for our families.

One ship load of wheat was sent to a foreign country of which we had never heard. In order to ship out the wheat, our American government rented the ships and paid the shipping bills with American tax money in order to freight the wheat to the particular North African country from which our Uncle Minor had just returned from the oil fields. The en-

tire offer to the North African country was totally **free**. It was “foreign aid” to a people who were in dire need of food at the time.

So our Uncle Minor sat there and told us farm boys an almost unbelievable story that made my father’s blood boil. Sure enough, Uncle Minor continued, the ship of wheat had arrived safely at the sea port of the country to which it was freely donated. But at the time our uncle left the country to return home, the ship load of wheat was still sitting there at the sea port. It had been docked there so long that the wheat in the hull of the ship was rotting away to uselessness.

So we asked our uncle, “Why could the captain of the ship not unload the wheat and give it to the people who were starving?” Our uncle responded with what was to us very young farm boys, who had labored in the heat of the day over that wheat, a horrifying answer.

“The government told the ship captain that he could not unload the free wheat unless America also paid the port fees and customs of their country.”

We were aghast. We could not understand. We cannot write the words that came out of our father’s mouth at the time. For years after we just could not understand why a government could do such a thing to their own people. That North African government was essentially saying to us Kansas farmers, “You will have to pay us to give us your free gift to our people.”

Even to this day we find it hard to

comprehend the evil corruption to which men will sink for the love of money. The “rotting wheat” episode in our lives changed our thinking. We began to understand why money is truly the root of all evil. The North African government officials cared little for their starving citizenship. They just wanted money to enrich themselves at the cost of famished fathers, mothers and children who were starving to death during a famine.

But then we think about ourselves and the free gift of God’s grace. It was imported FREE on a cross outside Jerusalem. It was as if God, who so loved the world, said to humanity, “Here, take it and feed your starving soul!” But we behave as one who might walk into a restaurant, sit down, have a luscious meal set before us, and then say to the cook, “What will you pay me to eat your food?”

We dream of living forever. And because we do, God sent a “ship load” of grace our way as free “foreign aid.” Would we stand at the foot of the cross and audaciously cry out to God, “How much will You pay us to unload Your free gift in our lives so that we not spiritually starve?” For some, especially those who love the riches of this world, his free gift of grace is still docked at the cross. Nevertheless, we still remember an old song by M. S. Shaffer:

**Gone is all my debt of sin,
A great change is brought within,
And to live I now begin,
Risen from the fall;
Yet the debt I did not pay,
Someone died for me one day,**

**Sweeping all the debt away,
Jesus paid it all.**

Book 32: *Making Disciples in a Global Community*, Chapters 7,8
Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Research:

Chapter 14

ANTISEPTIC BLOOD

Science has now given us the knowledge that the alcohol and organic acids of wine have great antibacterial benefits. And in conjunction with its use, wine can help settle diarrhea. But from the beginning of time, the ancients knew nothing of how wine did its magic. They only knew that wine worked in reference to healing wounds and settling stomachs.

When the priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek, came to greet one of the forefathers of our faith and his fighting men, who were returning from an intense battle, he brought with him bread and wine (Gn 14:18). He presented his gifts to Abraham and his men after they had returned from a battle to rescue Lot, his family, and many others who had been taken captive by marauding kings. Melchizedek's gift of bread is understandable. The men had to eat. But what about the wine? If was poured on their wounds, then the alcohol in the wine would cleanse the wounds.

We have always wondered about the use of wine throughout recorded history. We have usually concluded that it was only for consumption. But we were wrong. After Noah came forth from the ark, he "*planted a vineyard*" (Gn 9:20). There was a reason he did this. Of course

there are those warnings about "strong drink," that is, wine that is consumed which has not been mixed with, or diluted by water (Pv 31:6).

But then there is a curious prophecy concerning the "scepter" that would not depart from Judah (Gn 49:10), an established prophecy in reference to the coming of the Christ. In describing what the Christ would do, a very unusual statement was made in the Genesis 49 prophecy: "*He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine. He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes*" (Gn 49:11). There was a hint of "cleansing" in this prophecy.

We have found that most Bible interpreters pay little attention to verse 11 of this prophecy, for most Bible interpreters are very distant from how the fruit of the vine was used by the ancients for purposes other than drinking. Most confine their understanding of wine to something that was simply drunk. But why would the Christ "wash his garments in wine"?

A good Samaritan might enlighten our understanding. There was a traveler on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell among thieves. The thieves roughed him up in their act of theft to

the point that he needed “medical” help. Then came the good Samaritan, whom Jesus said “*went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine*” (Lk 10:34). The wounds were bound, and then oil and wine were poured on. The text does not say that the wounded traveller drank the oil. Neither does it say that he drank the wine. The wine was used as an antiseptic to clean his wounds.

And now we may have a window of understanding into the use of wine throughout the Old Testament era, and into the New Testament. It was certainly drunk as a product of the vine. However, after the grape juice is squeezed from the grapes, in the usual temperature of the day, the natural sugar of the juice ferments into alcohol within only three days. **It is the alcohol and organic acids in the wine that disinfects that on which it is poured, or that with which it is mixed.** When wine is mixed with polluted water, the alcohol and organic acids in the wine kills the germs in the water. The water is thus “cleansed” by the wine. When the wine was poured on wounds, the wounds were disinfected. The antibacterial agent of wine was the only disinfectant available in ancient times.

And now we know why Melchizedek brought wine to Abraham and his men. Some of his men were suffering from wounds they had incurred in their battle with the marauding kings. As the traveller the Samaritan treated, they needed the antiseptic qualities of the wine for their wounds. Add to this the possibility that they also needed to mix the

wine with the water that was available in order that everyone have purified water to drink.

We remember that Timothy, in his travels, once suffered from stomach problems that possibly came from drinking polluted water. In order to solve the diarrhea, Paul instructed Timothy, “*Drink no longer water exclusively, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities*” (1 Tm 5:23). Was Timothy instructed to stop drinking water? That would be impossible. What both Paul and Timothy knew, and what we usually do not, is that the wine was mixed with the water in order to “cleanse” (purify) the water.

The Greek word translated “use” in Paul’s instructions, **is not** the word for drink. Of course Timothy would drink the wine in his drinking of the purified water, but not to drink water that was not mixed with wine. Paul was instructing Timothy to use the wine with the water in order to purify the water. Timothy was suffering from drinking bad water. The disinfectant that had been used by the ancients since the beginning of time was God’s natural disinfectant that came from the fermentation of the fruit of the vine. Therefore, when Noah came forth from the ark, one of the first things he did was to plant a “pharmacy” (a vineyard).

The mixing of wine with water was practiced for centuries before the Christ came to “*tie his foal to the vine,*” and cleanse his clothes with wine. This helps us understand why Jesus attended a marriage feast where He would have the opportunity to work His first miracle, which

miracle involved wine (See Jn 2:1-11). He wanted us to understand that the prophecy of Genesis 49:11 was fulfilled in Him. And He wanted to prepare the thinking of the people for the cleansing blood of the cross that would come in about three years from this time.

During the feast, the host explained that there was a difference between “inferior wine” and “good wine” (Jn 2:10). The only difference between the “inferior wine,” and the “good wine” that Jesus created, was that one was possibly mixed with water and the other was not. The advantage of the mixed water and wine was that it was difficult to drink enough of it in order to become drunk. One can drink only so much liquid, and thus, one can drink only so much “inferior wine.” But after one has drunk as much as he can of the “inferior wine” (mixed), then comes the “good wine,” of which Jesus provided in abundance. He would provide the same at the cross. He would provide new wine that would burst upon the old wineskins of Jewish religiosity (See Mt 9:17).

While we lived in Sao Paulo, Brazil many years ago, one would never, in any large populated Brazilian city, drink water directly from the tap. The water must first be filtered, and then, the filtered water was “cleansed” with a purifying agent. It was then safe to drink. It seems that Timothy had been drinking the water of the densely populated area of Ephesus, and as a result, he suffered some problems that came from drinking polluted water. Paul reminded him of the purifying agent of wine in order to clean

up his water, and his diarrhea, and thus, be returned to health.

We say all the preceding in order to better understand what Jesus meant on the night when He poured forth His cleansing blood on a cross. Maybe there is more meaning to what Jesus said when He held up a cup of the fruit of the vine during His final supper with His disciples, and said, “*For this is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many for the remission [cleansing] of sins*” (Mt 26:28).

The disciples who were sitting there had been taught that for centuries wine was used to cleanse water and heal wounds. And now the fruit of the vine would take on a metaphorical meaning when it was drunk in remembrance of the new covenant. **The fruit of the vine would symbolize the cleansing blood of the covenant.** For us His disciples, who walk in the light of this new covenant, “*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 Jn 1:7).

When a soldier pierced the side of Jesus on the cross, we now believe that we have a better understanding of the statement that John wrote of what seemed to be an insignificant event: “*blood and water came out*” (Jn 19:34). When we drink the fruit of the vine during the Lord’s Supper, we remember how water is cleansed when it is “mingled” with wine. When His blood is mingled with our souls, we too are cleansed. **The cleansing power of the contents of the cup was on the mind’s of the disciples when Jesus held up the cup.** They knew that wine cleansed water and wounds.

They would later understand that His blood would cleanse their souls of sin.

The next time you partake of the “blood of the covenant,” it would be good to remember that the Christ was wounded in order to anoint our wounds with His cleansing blood. And as each one of us drink the fruit of the vine, we will remem-

ber that it is the blood of Jesus that goes continually through our veins to keep our souls disinfected from sin.

Research:
 Book 39: *The Lord's Supper*
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 15

ALL THINGS IN COMMON

***“Now all who believed were together
 and had all things in common.”***
 (At 2:44)

This is a statement of the culture of fellowship that existed in the early church. This was a historical statement of brotherhood ... fellowship ... camaraderie ... sharing ... unity ... and just human instinct that results from the movement of a people into a new paradigm of gospel behavior. The statement was made of those who obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost over two thousand years ago. What was recorded of the behavior of these gospel obedient believers reflects a social paradigm shift from individualism to collective responsibility. It was a shift from self-centered religiosity to the selfless gospel living of those who wanted to remain together as one body of Christ.

We live on a continent of post-colonialism. Colonialism meant that some European power took over and took care of their claimed territory, and the citizenship thereof. On this continent, we live

also in a country of post-apartheid where cultures of people within the country were cared for by one culture of people, who had in the past, maintained the control of the country. In order to maintain their self-determination of the country as a whole, homelands of different cultures were established within the country. The dominant culture then wrote multimillion dollar checks every year in order to take care of the people of the homelands.

The negative cultural training of the people of post-colonialism and apartheid was the development of a people who often want to continue to be taken care of. The foreign colonial governments have long since gone. For almost a quarter century, apartheid was buried through democratic elections by all the people. But the legacy of “being taken care of” still lingers. As a result, leadership, whether in government or church, has been handicapped with the urge and behavior of “being taken care of.”

This is what makes the historical statement of Acts 2:44 concerning the early Christians very intriguing in its ap-

plication to post colonial and apartheid cultures. There is something about the gospel that changes people from looking for someone to take care of them to looking for others for whom they can care for.

There is a uniqueness in a gospel culture to take ownership of one's responsibility of himself and others in order that the community of slaves (the church), reach out to the lost. It is truly a paradigm shift from worldly thinking. It is a life-style principle of behavior that is often quite difficult for post colonial and apartheid citizens to grasp. It will take a few generations to weed out of these cultures the urge for someone to take care of them. However, those who adopt the spirit of the gospel can weed out such behavior in one day, as did those on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:44. When one obeys the gospel, outstretched begging hands are immediately transformed into helping hands.

“Having all things in common” defines the social core of gospel living for all those who have obeyed the gospel. Jesus illustrated exactly what this meant when He met with the apostles at a breakfast on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. He had taken care of the apostles during His ministry, and now, **it was time for them to learn how to take ownership of themselves as a group without someone taking care of them.**

The occasion was that the apostles had fished all night (Jn 21:3). They had caught nothing. Then Jesus showed up on the beach, cooking a few fish and having some bread (Jn 21:9). After the

apostles had a miraculous catch of fish, they brought their fish to the beach where Jesus was cooking the fish that He had provided. Now notice what Jesus said to them, **“Bring some of the fish that you have now caught”** (Jn 21:10). **Jesus did not supply all the fish that was needed to feed the whole group.** In other words, if they were going to eat in fellowship with Jesus, they had to pay with their own fish. Jesus was not going to pay their bill at the table.

Jesus could certainly have provided enough fish for everyone who was present, as He had on other occasions (Mt 14:13-21; 15:29-39). But the occasion was now different. A new paradigm of fellowship was being established. It was now time for them to live according to the gospel of mutual sharing.

The beach breakfast was after the resurrection, and prior to the ascension. It was now time to make a paradigm shift in the fellowship among the disciples. **Jesus was no longer “taking care of them.” They were to “have all things in common,” and thus, to mutually take care of one another with what each member of the group could bring to the table.** Therefore, He called on them to share in the breakfast by providing their share of the fish that was needed for the occasion. In Acts 2:44, this principle of gospel living permeated the fellowship of the early disciples.

When disciples “have all things in common,” everyone comes to the table with his or her share of the food. **No one person has the responsibility of “taking care of” the physical needs of the**

entire group. In fact, if anyone would not “bring his share of fish to the table,” “neither let him eat” (2 Th 3:10). Paul was stringent about this principle, for it was a principle that defined the fellowship of the disciples from the very first day of the existence of the church. He reminded the Christians in Thessalonica about his gospel behavior when he, Timothy and Silas initially came to them: “... nor did we eat any man’s bread **without paying for it**” (2 Th 3:8). These evangelists did not sit at the table of fellowship without paying for their share. They allowed no one to pick up their tab.

“Having all things in common” means that every member of the group brings something to share with the group. When one becomes a Christian, he or she comes into a social paradigm in which every member of the group mutually shares with every member of the group. If one can work to provide for himself and others, but is not willing to work, then he cannot be a part of this community of those who “have all things in common.” In fact, such a one is walking disorderly because he refuses to work in order to mutually share with others. And thus, according to the instructions of the Holy Spirit, this member must be sent out of the group in order that he or she be ashamed of his or her selfish behavior and narcissistic self-centeredness (2 Th 3:6).

Remember when the poor widow gave her last two coins for the temple tax? Jesus said of her contribution, “*I say to you that this **poor** widow has put in more than all*” (Lk 21:3). “*She out of her pov-*

erty has put in all the livelihood that she had” (Lk 21:4). Why did she do this? Jesus was standing right there and He did not relieve her of her responsibilities because she was poor. She gave out of her poverty because she wanted to take ownership of her responsibilities to pay her share. She did not want someone else to “pay for her lunch.” She felt that if she could not pay her way, then she had no fellowship with the group. And for this reason, **the disciples in Macedonia begged Paul to take their contribution** for the famine victims of Judea in order that they enjoy “*the fellowship of the ministering to the saints*” (2 Co 8:4). This is sacrificial giving according to the spirit of the gospel.

The Macedonians sacrificially partnered in the fellowship of the saints **after** they obeyed the gospel. But the poor widow gave her last two coins **before** Jesus’ sacrifice of the cross. She did it before the resurrection and ascension. Now what would we think of anyone who has obeyed the gospel, but is not willing to take ownership of their responsibility to mutually share with the body?

Those who do not seek to “bring also their fish” to the table have not understood what it means to live after the principle of the gospel of Jesus. They do not understand the principle of the gospel giving.

Research:
 Book 57: *The Godly Giver*
 Book 73: *The Gospel of the Heart of God*
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 16

TOGETHER

“Now all who believed were together.”
(At 2:44)

We have close friends we encounter every few years. When we eventually meet, it is as if we had never parted. We pick up our conversation where we left off several years before. You know what we mean, and possibly this will give some insight into what the Holy Spirit meant when He spoke of the early disciples in Jerusalem being “together” in a spiritual bond that superceded their presence with one another.

Some have difficulty understanding what it means when Luke recorded in Acts 2 that those who “*believed were together.*” They misunderstand because they are reading into the text their present social/religious cultural behavior. Because some define Christianity as a system of assemblies, they assume that the word “together” refers to the regular Sunday assembly of those early Christians. Some even believe that “together” means that ALL the Christians in the city of Jerusalem assembled together in one place at the same time. But we think this is an understatement of the solidarity of the early body of Christ.

If we would understand “together” after the churchianity by which we consider one another “faithful” in attendance today, then we will run into some very perplexing difficulties in understanding the nature of the camaraderie of the early

disciples. First, consider the fact that on that first day of the beginning of the church, about three thousand individuals obeyed the gospel (At 2:41). Does this mean that in order to be “together” all these disciples assembled in the same place at the same time the following Sunday after the Pentecost Sunday? Were they not “together” before they came together in assembly? Some say they assembled together on the first day of the week in the temple courtyard. But they misunderstand Acts 5:42 that defined the function of the saints a few years later. They were “*daily in the temple and in every house*” teaching and preaching **Jesus as the Christ. Teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ refers to an audience of unbelievers**, not believers. The believers already believed that Jesus was the Christ. They were in the temple courtyard preaching the gospel to the yet unbelieving Jews who gathered there.

Second, if being “together” means that they were all together at the same time and in the same place, then we have a location problem. There were no purpose-built “church buildings” in Jerusalem. There were no church buildings in the entire Roman Empire for three centuries after the establishment of the church on that glorious day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 in Jerusalem. The early Christians met in the homes of the disciples throughout the city of Jerusalem, as well

as homes throughout regions to which the gospel was preached and obeyed. When Peter was released from an imprisonment in Jerusalem, he went to one of those houses, the house of Mary (At 12:12). But then he told others to go and announce his release from prison to others who were praying in other homes (At 12:17). There is no historical or archaeological record of the existence of any purpose-built church buildings in Jerusalem for centuries later. At one time it is estimated that there were at least 30,000 Christians in Jerusalem not many years after the beginning in A.D. 30. All these Christians were “together,” but they were not all meeting together at the same place and time on Sunday.

Those thousands of Christians in Jerusalem in the early days of the church were meeting in hundreds of homes throughout the city. Nevertheless, they were still “together.” Even on the first Sunday after Pentecost, when there were about three thousand new disciples in the city, they “split up” and met in homes throughout the city. But they were still “together.” “Splitting up” to meet on Sunday in homes does not mean that they were not “together.”

“*The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly*” (At 6:7). By the time of the events of Acts 4, “*the number of the men was about five thousand*” (At 4:4). If we add women and children to this number of individuals, we can conservatively estimate that there were possibly 10,000 individuals meeting in homes in Jerusalem by the time of the recorded events of Acts 4. If an estimated

twenty-five people could meet in the ordinary house, then there would have been about 400 assemblies in 400 houses throughout Jerusalem every Sunday. But they were still “together.”

Being “together” as Christians in Acts 2:44 **does not** refer specifically to assemblies with one another. If we assume that the early Christians had to be in one another’s presence in order to be “together,” then we have a very shallow understanding of what the Holy Spirit meant when He said that they were “together” in Christ. **Their being “together” refers to fellowship in spirit and ministry because of their common obedience to the gospel.**

Words as “solidarity,” “camaraderie,” “bonded” and “fellowship” would be words that would define what “together” means in the context of Acts 2. Though there were several hundred assemblies of the disciples throughout Jerusalem, the members were still “together” as the body. They were “together” because they knew who they were as disciples of Jesus, and what they were to do as His disciples. “Together” refers to a spiritually bonded community of all those who commonly obeyed the one gospel, regardless of whether the obedient are in eye contact with one another. This is exactly what John meant when he wrote the following:

That which we have seen and heard we declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1:3).

When a new assembly started in another house in the city of Jerusalem, it was not a “church split.” By the time Paul wrote a letter to the disciples in Philippi, there were Christians meeting in homes throughout that city. In one statement of his letter to the Philippian disciples, Paul defined what it means to be “together”:

*Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you **stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel** (Ph 1:27; see 1 Co 1:10).*

Those who are “together” are in solidarity with one another because of their gospel living, not because of some system of assembly by which they would offer an artificial appearance that they are unified as an autonomous “church.” Those early Christians in the entire city of Jerusalem were “together” because of their common spirit and united force to

preach the gospel to all in Jerusalem. They were still “together” even when persecution scattered them from Jerusalem into all the world (See At 8:1-4).

Assemblies were only the serendipity of being “together.” The early disciples were “together” throughout the world before they even showed up at an assembly. Their assembly did not define them to be “together.” Their being “together” in the bond of the gospel resulted in whoever could come together in assembly. Their common obedience to the gospel assumed their camaraderie in both living and preaching the gospel. If we would think that being “together” referred exclusively to their coming together in assembly, then we would end up with the preposterous conclusion that they were not “together” after the “closing prayer.”

Research:

Book 55: *Organic Function of the Body of Christ*
 Book 65: *The Power of Many as One*
 Biblical Research Library
www.africainternational.org

Chapter 17

WORSHIP BEYOND THE POWER GRID

The beautiful serendipity of our common obedience to the gospel is our fellowship with one another in assembly. Though our assembly with one another as disciples of Christ does not define who we are as Christians, it does define our common bond that we have in our obedience to the one gospel. It is for this

reason that we seek not to forsake any opportunity to be with those who have submitted to the gospel of the incarnate Son’s death for our sins, and His resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4).

We have little information in the New Testament documents concerning what the early Christians did during their

assemblies with one another. We know that they encouraged one another to love and do good works (Hb 10:24,25). Since the Holy Spirit encouraged them to exhort one another through spiritual songs, we can assume that this is what they did when two or more came into contact with one another (Ep 5:19; Cl 3:16). And since their meetings were always participatory as each disciple came with a song, a prayer or a teaching to offer, we can assume that no one person became the center of reference for the assembly (See 1 Co 14:26).

Their assembly around a common meal was a common practice from the very beginning (At 2:42,46). When at all possible, they maintained a love feast when they came together in assembly (See 2 Pt 2:13; Jd 12). The example of the Ephesians was that every first day of the week these disciples ate the love feast with the Lord's Supper (At 20:7). The point is that their assemblies were ordinary; they were opportunities for exhortation and encouragement. Their assemblies were simple and worshipful in an atmosphere of quiet solitude.

So much has changed since those days. Many assemblies for worship have changed from being opportunities to study the word of God, and being encouraged by a participatory fellowship with one another around a common meal, to assemblies that have morphed into theatrical events during which performances of a few are meant to seat the majority in silence. "Assembly events" are orchestrated as well choreographed theatrical performances that hold the attendees in

awe as actors carry on with their parts in a staged play. All is conducted in hope of producing an emotional experience that will satisfy the "worshippers" until the next planned event the following Sunday. Before the next staged event the following Sunday, the actors practice their particular parts in the play in order that the "worship event" be conducted with the fine tuned precision of a New York theater. The Lord's Supper in remembrance of the gospel has long been forgotten in many assemblies of "Christian" churches. The Bible has been reduced to a book from which to read a few selected passages, and not a text to be explained and applied. In the religious world in which we live, emphasis on the message of the gospel has been exchanged for an energetic cheerleading performance by a dynamic speaker.

We struggle with theatrical worship events and speakers whose messages are void of gospel. Such events and sermons seem to be far removed from the simplicity of the early disciples. We think of the "boat worship" of the apostles who sat offshore in a boat on a calmed sea, realizing that in that same boat there was a Deity who controlled the seas (See Mt 14:33). We think of those 3,000 on the day of Pentecost who scurried about to find a home in which to meet on the following Sunday in order to bow down in thanksgiving to the One they had eight weeks before called on Roman soldiers to nail to a cross. Then there is David in a quiet meadow watching over his sheep, uttering, "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him."

Solitude seems to have left many assemblies wherein participants feel disappointed if their wondering minds are not held captive for a few moments by a stage of performers.

It seems that in the “modern assembly” today, if the electricity were to go out, the acting of theatrical performances would likewise go out. We wonder how many people would even show up at an assembly that was beyond a power grid that would tune up all the electrical appliances that we feel are so necessary for an “effective assembly event.” When in Brazil a person in the middle of the Amazon made contact with us through ham radio, asking for a keyboard he could connect to his generator. And then there was the person who said he wanted to start a church, but he first had to learn how to play the guitar. He learned to play, plugged the guitar into the power grid, and “church” began.

Is this that to which the modern assembly has cloned us? Can we not go to some far off village in the middle of Africa without a generator and guitar? Must

our mission schools teach classes on how to play a guitar? Are our missions limited to the extent of the power grid?

What is it with us that we need noise in order to quietly come together to bring tears to our eyes by reading those Bible stories that changed so many hearts and the entire world. Can the old gospel story no longer produce a tear without a trumpet? Have we drowned out the “still small voice of God” with the power of our booming speakers? If you do not agree with our complaints, then disconnect your “worship” from the power grid for a couple Sundays, and see who shows up. We believe the true worshipers will continue to show up, but the spectators who come for the show, will wander away, looking for some other assembly that is still connected to the power grid.

Research:

Book 35: *Worship God*

Book 36: *Worship Freely*

Book 42: *The Music of the Church*

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