

The Gospel Restoration Movement



**A Paradigm Shift
From The Relics Of Legal Righteousness
To The Gospel Of Incarnational Living**

DICKSON

THE GOSPEL RESTORATION MOVEMENT

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Preface

This is a life-changing book, not because of any literary design on the part of the author, but because of the subject of the book. Other authors have written on the same subject for two thousand years. I have tried in my own words, for my own spiritual renewal, to refocus on the power of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are thus receiving in literary form my own personal adventure into the incarnational existence of the Son of God. Many years ago He began the transformation process of my life, which process is still incomplete. It is my prayer that this book will in some way renew your faith, and aid in your own spiritual transformation into the image of Christ.

The incarnational journey of the Son of God from heaven into the hearts of millions throughout the centuries has changed the world. I have tried in this book to in some way rehearse the beautiful advent of the Son of God from heaven and into our hearts. Though we struggle to understand how God can become man, our finite understanding is enough to stimulate a paradigm shift in both thinking and behavior. In my personal studies I have sought in some way to comprehend the incarnational advent of God into the flesh of man for the purpose of taking me to His original home of existence.

The writing of this book has been personal. It has been personal in that I believe every Christian must study the subject of this book thoroughly in order to reaffirm one's faith, and thus continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have found that there are some very dedicated people who are ministering to the needs of others as the Son of God ministered to us. They have sometimes not been able to identify why they are who they are. It is my prayer that the subject of this book will bring to light their inner motivation. They work in response to the heart of God. These gospel workers just work because they have to. This is the power of living the gospel. Throughout the pages of this book I have sought to identify why so many saints unselfishly labor to fulfill the needs of others because their spiritual needs were fulfilled by the incarnate Son of God.

Christianity is unique in reference to the motivation of the gospel. There is no other faith among the religious inventions of men that compares with the dynamic of the gospel message. The God of heaven is love, and when people of this world emulate the love of God through His Son, there is something within the hearts of the motivated that is beyond the words of men. Only the gospel of the invasion of God into this world could answer the question as to why Christians behave as they do.

It is my prayer, therefore, that this book will in some way bring together all the beauty of the gospel. If it does, then you can in some way understand why you are the way you are in your tireless labors for others. Your incarnational living of the gospel exemplifies before the world the message of our Savior that is far more powerful than words.

Introduction

In 2004 Mel Gibson released the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, which he directed, and was written by himself and Benedict Fitzgerald. It had a phenomenal impact on the hearts of people around the world. Production cost was a meager thirty million dollars, but box office sales went way over six hundred million. It was indeed a box office hit.

We remember seeing the movie. It was indeed an emotionally penetrating portrayal of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ as He was taken to the cross after being horribly beaten by Roman soldiers. Gibson's crucifixion scene stunned the audience. We remember walking out of the theater speechless. The audience was stone silent because of the emotional trauma that they too had experienced. It was as if each one of us in the audience had been standing right there in the crowd two thousand years ago when glass or bone-tipped leather scourges lashed across the incarnate flesh of our Lord. It was as if we had the sensation to wipe the splattered blood of Jesus from our own bodies.

Blood flowed as a ravaged body of Jesus fell to the ground. We almost yearned that death would soon come to the crucified Jesus as His body tore against spikes that were driven through His flesh. By the end

of the crucifixion scene, all of us sought relief from the horror of the moment. We had agonized with Him in His torture as His fleshy temple gave up the spirit. It was a movie scene none of us wanted to ever experience again. It was too real. But that was the way it was when the cruelty of the Romans was unleashed on a condemned victim who was headed for execution on a cross.

The remembrance of the cross at the Lord's Supper has never been the same since. All of us have this mental image that Gibson sought to intentionally leave imprinted on our minds. Though we saw the movie over fifteen years ago, we still cannot forget the image of the crucifixion. When the bread of the Supper and fruit of the vine pass before us during the memorial moment of the week, we can envision the blood-soaked body of Jesus on the cross. We cannot forget. We feel almost uncomfortable with the fact that that was the way it truly was in those days. That was the suffering that was inflicted upon Him. And then a tear comes to our eye when we recall that He knowingly submitted to all that suffering in order that we be with Him and the Father for eternity.

The images that Gibson seared into our memory, however, sometimes

lead us to forget something that is far beyond that cruel scene of the crucifixion. The “cross scene” was not the whole story. At the time Jesus was suffering on the cross, something was transpiring in the heavenly realm that had been awaiting inscription on human history since that first bite of the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden. The cross was only the revelation of something greater, something more endearing that would permeate history and transition all of us into an eternal bliss where there will be no more suffering. Gospel had appeared to humanity.

Chapter 1

THE GOSPEL REVEALED

When we speak of things concerning the cross, nothing has changed from the world's perspective of the cross since the days when Paul inscribed the words, *"But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness"* (1 Co 1:23). The cross was in view when it was said of Jesus when He was first presented at the temple by His parents, *"Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel"* (Lk 2:34). To the vast majority of the Jews, they stumbled over the cross in the sense that it was difficult for them to accept a crucified Messiah.

By the time of the initial revelations of the gospel through Jesus, the Jews had established for themselves a system of self-righteousness by which they believed that they could sanctify themselves of sin before God. They were as Paul describes them, *"For I testify of them [the self-righteous Jews] that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge"* (Rm 10:2). Their zeal to maintain their own self-righteousness before God was useless in view of the fact that it is not possible for one to justify himself before God through obedient religiosity of works of law (Gl

2:16). The Jews persisted in their lack of knowledge of this fact. So Paul continued to explain their problem with the righteousness of God that was revealed at the cross.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Rm 10:3).

When Jesus was on the cross, He was *"the end of law for righteousness to everyone who believes"* (Rm 10:4). For this reason, therefore, the Jews stumbled over the cross because they were so self-absorbed in their supposed self-justifying religion. Paul said of them, *"But Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law"* (Rm 9:31). So we would ask why this was so. Paul answered, *"Because they [the Jews] did not seek it by faith, but as if it were by works [of law]. For they stumbled over the stumbling stone [of Jesus and the cross]* (Rm 9:32). This is exactly what had been prophesied by Isaiah: *"Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of offense, and whoever believes in Him will not be ashamed"* (Rm 9:33;

see Is 8:14; 28:16). And so Paul and thousands of others in the first century were not ashamed of this gospel that was revealed on the cross (Rm 1:16).

Because the Jews were so self-absorbed in their own self-righteousness, they could not see beyond the actual humiliation of One who was crucified on a cross by Roman soldiers. When Jesus uttered from the cross, “*Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,*” He was revealing the problem of the Jews at the time (Lk 23:34). If they had truly known what was transpiring behind the empirical curtain of flesh and blood on the cross, then they would later have rejoiced over the cross. Instead, because they could not see beyond the cross of crucifixion, the cross became the stumbling block over which most religious Jews stumbled. They were simply willing to carry on with their own self-righteousness through supposed law-keeping and meritorious deeds.

We too are not that innocent in reference to “empirical theology.” When we sit at the Lord’s Supper and remember, is it not that we often focus our minds only on the actual suffering and crucifixion of Jesus? When there are those who speak before the Supper, do they not speak only of the suffering of Jesus on the cross? We go into detail concerning His agony,

His shedding of blood, nails tearing through His flesh, and finally, His giving up His last breath. We almost take all the joy of celebration out of the Lord’s Supper by making it a funeral dirge of sadness. In doing so we forget the the rest of the gospel because of our weekly moments when we attend the funeral of the Supper. We deny ourselves an opportunity for rejoicing by focusing only on the suffering of Jesus in the flesh on the cross.

We believe that the cross was a momentary event of history in the mission of Jesus to reveal something overwhelmingly marvelous that was taking place at the time He was suffering on the cross. Because the early disciples did not realize this at the time, they went fishing after the crucifixion (Jn 21:3). The two witnesses from Emmaus simply went back home (Lk 24:13-29). But the cross itself represented something far beyond the cross itself. From God’s point of view, eternity was taking place in the few hours Jesus was suffering on the cross. Our full understanding of eternity will not be realized until a final trumpet is heard from heaven. It will then be our time for eternal comprehension. It will be then that we will fully understand the totally of the gospel, of which the cross was only one event.

Chapter 2

THE INCARNATIONAL GOSPEL

If we can in some way comprehend the magnitude of the subject of the next three chapters, it will completely transform our lives. However, because we are of this world, and of the flesh, it may be difficult. But if we can in some way work our minds around the reality of the incarnation of God into the flesh of man, and we truly believe what we discover, then we will never be the same again.

We would begin with an example. I was about three thousand kilometers away from home ministering, teaching on gospel living to a dedicated group of religious leaders. I had been invited by a local church leader who had called several leaders together for the meeting that night. After the meeting, the local church leader asked me to stay with him and his wife for the night. So I did.

It was a very small house with children and grandchildren here and there. The children graciously heated up some water so I could take a washcloth-bath after the 7-hour drive I had just completed in order to arrive at the location of the meeting. The good brother and his wife said that I must sleep in their bed, which, against my protest, I graciously did. The wife slept in a small bed with about four children and grandchildren swarmed

around her, some sleeping on the floor. I was unaware of where the good brother slept until the next morning.

When I awoke at 4:00^{am} to continue my way to the next gospel workshop, I discovered that the good brother had slept outside in his old car in order to make room for me to have the comfort of his own bed. This was incarnational living. Why do Christians do things as this?

“Incarnation” is a word that can be literally applied to God only. God is spirit (Jn 4:24), and only God can incarnate into the flesh of man. And in this, **the gospel revelation began in the manger of a barn in a small village of Bethlehem a little over two thousand years ago.** However, before Bethlehem, the apostle John wanted us to understand that the Bethlehem birth did not constitute just another citizen to be registered with the Roman census. John carried our imagination back into the enclave of heaven. *“In the beginning was the Word,”* revealed John, *“and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God”* (Jn 1:1,2). Before the Word came into the world, there was existence in the realm of heaven. Before creation, He was one with God.

And then incarnation happened. ***“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”*** (Jn 1:14). What is impossible for us to understand fully was raised in the arms of Joseph from a manager of hay in a barn in Bethlehem. Only God, not Mary or Joseph, could have ever understood what had just happened when Mary cried out in birth pains, and the Son of God was released into the world.

“Son” means origin, and thus, the Son of God in the flesh originated with a cry from the flesh of woman, and would eventually end on earth with a cry from the Son Himself on a cross when He would leave this world (Lk 23:46). But between the two cries, something wonderful happened. The good news of the gospel began in a manger. The last chapter is yet to be revealed with the blow of the last trumpet from heaven.

After an initial thirty years in the flesh, the Son of God, who was given birth into the world in the flesh of man, began His journey to the suffering of the cross. At the very beginning of His ministry, sincere men began to realize that something was different about this One Mary and Joseph had named Jesus. Nicodemus came to Him in the night and said, ***“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him”*** (Jn 3:2).

Though Nicodemus did not understand the full implications of what he stated in the words, “from God,” he would eventually. As all the disciples, he would understand that Jesus was not just a good Rabbi from Nazareth. He was God in the flesh. He was the only begotten One who had ventured out of the corridors of heaven into the flesh of man (Jn 3:16).

This Jesus of Nazareth was first known as Rabbi, but the revelation of who He actually was would go far beyond His manhood and knowledge in teaching the law. He was first the man Jesus, and then Rabbi/Teacher (Jn 1:38). He would then be proclaimed to be the Christ (Messiah) of Israel (Jn 1:41). The disciples harbored this faith in Him until the last few days before the cross (At 1:6).

But then His humanity was reaffirmed when He bled and died on the cross. The cross signaled the last of His humanity in flesh and blood as the disciples knew Him. Nevertheless, the cross was not the end of His incarnational existence, nor did the cross reveal His true identity.

Death had no control over Him who had the power to create that which could die (Cl 1:16; Hb 9:27). And thus by the power of the resurrection, the man Jesus, the Rabbi/Teacher, the Messiah of Israel, was then proved to be the Son of God (Rm 1:4). It is now that this Son of God is

King and Lord over all things. The story of the gospel will be complete when He returns from heaven with the control of His mighty angels (2 Th 1:6-9).

When the apostle John compiled his record of seven miracles that Jesus worked among men, he called on his readers to come to the same decisive conclusion that he and the other apostles had come to when they saw and handled the resurrected Son of God (1 Jn 1:1-3): *“These [seven signs] are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”* (Jn 20:31). And we believe, but our belief will always be handicapped with our inability to comprehend fully the incarnational action of God coming into the flesh of man. It is just something that lies outside our human empirical comprehension. Nevertheless, we seek to understand as much as possible through His example, and the example of those first disciples whose lives were totally transformed.

Our journey to understand begins with a question: How would we suppose that God the Son would allow Himself to be incarnationally introduced into the world? Six hundred years before, it was prophesied that “a voice” would come crying in the wilderness and announcing His coming (Is 40:3). But in our own misguided social environment of prestige

and pomp in a religious world that has often gone astray from the incarnate Bethlehem babe, we would possibly consider that He should be introduced by the top “lectureship speakers” of Jerusalem. Or possibly, He should be introduced by some renowned professor or preacher of some major religious group in Rome. Or, we might seek out some well-known religious leader among the Jews who was instigating a rebellion against the Roman Empire. All these presumptions would be wrong assumptions.

If God would have someone to introduce the incarnation of Himself into the world, then we would certainly assume that He would introduce Himself by one who himself would seek to bring the literal incarnation of God metaphorically into his own life. And that one was John, the baptizer in the wilderness. **He exemplified the metaphor of the literal incarnation of the Word by living incarnationally in the wilderness.**

Before he began his introductions of the incarnate Word, we do not know how much was revealed to John concerning the One he would cry out in the wilderness to be the coming One. But we do assume from his lifestyle that he was obliged in some way to live the life of the Word who was incarnate from spirit into the flesh of man. How else can we explain John’s behavior and the location he chose as

his “church sanctuary.”

In some way to be “worthy” to introduce divine incarnation, John extracted himself from the fine life of glamour in Jerusalem. “*He came preaching in the wilderness of Judea*” (Mt 3:1). He refused to be dressed in the glamorous tailored suits of the touring preachers. “*John had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist*” (Mt 3:4). He deprived himself of the fine cuisine in the restaurants on Main Street in Jerusalem. “*His food was locusts and wild honey*” (Mt 3:4).

If the One he was to introduce to the world gave up the glories of heaven in order to be incarnate into the flesh of man, then certainly John in some way felt that he must do the same. He too must live the incarna-

tional life. How else could he possibly introduce to others the One who gave up all that heaven had to offer in order to trudge the dusty roads of Palestine in the flesh of man (Ph 2:5-8; Cl 1:16)?

If we would preach this same incarnate Son of God, should we not in our own way do the same? People must see in us incarnational living in order to be drawn to the One who was incarnate for us. John introduced the gospel restoration movement by introducing the incarnate Word who would draw all men unto Himself because He gave up so much for us (Jn 12:32). Though we can never lower ourselves as much as the incarnate Word, we must at least, as John, give it our best effort. Heaven is reserved for incarnationals.

Chapter 3

THE INCARNATIONAL GOSPEL JOURNEY

Remember when Peter, during the ministry of Jesus, said to Jesus, “*Behold, we [apostles] have left all and have followed You*” (Mk 10:28)? The gospel restoration movement began during the earthly ministry of Jesus, poured over into the life-style of the immediate apostles of Jesus, and then into the behavior of the early church. When Saul became Paul, the one who persecuted incarnationals disciples left all for the incarnate Son of

God. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul too expected others to live as the One to whom he had submitted through the gospel. In order to persuade others to be drawn to the incarnationals Savior of the world, he too had to follow the behavior of His Savior that was emulated in the lives of the first apostles.

Through Paul’s hand, the Holy Spirit inscribed these things: “*Have this [incarnational] **mind** in you that*

was also in Christ Jesus” (Ph 2:5). And with this statement, the materialist begins to shutter at what is inferred. Nevertheless, it is through this paradigm shift into the mentality and actions of the Son of God that we all must move.

So the Spirit continues through Paul with the incarnational journey of the One who came forth from God. When the Son of God was initially existing “*in the form of God* [that is, spirit], [He] *did not consider it robbery to be equal with God* [in spirit]” (Ph 2:6). Form and equality with God were sacrificed for incarnational existence with those whom He had created in the flesh (Cl 1:16). In order for Him to dwell among His brethren, incarnation was necessary for the salvation of us all.

Therefore, since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise partook of the same, so that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil (Hb 2:14).

“In all things He [the Son of God] had to be made like His brethren, so that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people” (Hb 2:17).

If we would live the incarnational life in gratitude of being delivered from death, then we too must give up living after the “form of the world” and being “equal in glamor” with those of the world. The incarnational life calls on us to change our aspirations from the world to heavenly aspirations of those things that are above (Cl 3:1,2). And for this reason, few who are in high places in the world humble themselves to the incarnational life as a disciple of the incarnate Son of God.

In order to make this paradigm shift, transformation is necessary. “*Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Rm 12:2). Having the mind of Christ calls for a transformation of our minds. The mind of Christ must become our mind. We live the incarnational mind of Christ when we begin thinking and behaving as the incarnate Son of God in whom we profess our faith. This is the aroma of Christ (2 Co 2:14). When all those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God start living the incarnational mind of Christ, it is then that we experience the gospel restoration movement. This is a movement that is led by incarnational thinking as opposed to legal self-righteousness.

The Spirit continued with His definition of how our behavior must emulate the incarnational behavior of

the Son of God. The transformation of our mind is His business through our voluntary submission to the aroma of His being. He established the example that we must follow. The Spirit explained that since **it was Jesus' business to transform Himself into the flesh of man**, then Jesus calls on us to make the same personal decision. So the Holy Spirit reminded Paul's readers, "*He [the incarnate God] made Himself of no reputation*" (Ph 2:7). "Made Himself" is middle voice. Jesus acted upon Himself. His incarnation was not passive, suggesting that the Father and Holy Spirit acted upon Him. **His incarnational existence was totally personal and self-inflicted.** So it must be with us.

Jesus could not blame the Father if the incarnation was not complete. And neither can we blame the Holy Spirit if our lives are not totally transformed in following the example of Jesus. As Jesus Himself carried out the incarnation of His own self, **so we also must carry out our incarnational transformation in the renewing of our minds and life-styles.** At the end of the day, we can never blame the Holy Spirit for any lack of transformation of our lives into the mind of Christ. We must take ownership of our own paradigm shift to be transformed into incarnational living.

We must be patient with ourselves and others, for transformation

into incarnational living is a lifetime struggle. John Mark grew up among the privileged in the big city of Jerusalem. His life as a young man was evidently sugarcoated as the son of an economically advantaged family.

In his youthful zeal, and possibly by the encouragement of his cousin, Barnabas, young Mark tagged along on Paul's first missionary journey (Cl 4:10). After passing through his cousin Barnabas' homeland of Cyprus, the glamor of the trip lasted only until he was faced with the daunting task of crossing the mountains of Pamphylia in southern Asia. He was too far from the comforts of his Jerusalem home and the fun of the journey had turned into agony. It was there that he turned from the work.

When it came time for Paul to launch out again on a second missionary journey, he deemed John Mark still incarnationally immature for the type of incarnational journey in missions that the transformed Paul could accomplish (At 15:36-37). However, Barnabas was patient with his cousin, and subsequently took him back to the familiar territory of Cyprus (At 15:39). But what is significant to notice in the transformation of Mark is embedded in Paul's request for him during Paul's imprisonment during his final years. He wrote to Timothy, "*Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is profitable to me for the min-*

istry” (2 Tm 4:11). So the last mention we have of the formerly spoiled Jerusalem boy is when he was with the imprisoned apostle Paul in a Roman prison (Cl 4:10). Mark had spiritually grown to be able to venture far beyond the mountains of Pamphylia. He had grown to venture right into the heart of what would become the center of state persecution against Christianity. His incarnational transformation was complete.

In the years that followed the disappointment at the foot of the mountains of Pamphylia, Mark spiritually grew into profitability. It took time for him to grow into the incarnational life that would be profitable for ministry. But he made it there. We must be patient, therefore, with ourselves and others as we too grow into incarnational living.

What is significant about Mark is that he did not turn back from the challenge to grow into behavior that emulated the incarnation of his Savior. He would not allow himself to have a faith that was void of living the incarnational gospel.

In the incarnation, Jesus did not hold Himself up in heaven with “faith only.” He did not continue to reside in the form of God in a heavenly environment when there was a mission that had to be accomplished. He thus acted on Himself and launched out of heaven and into the form of man. In

comparison to His existence with God in the form of God, incarnation meant that He had to personally make the decision to sacrifice the reputation (existence) of being God in the spirit (Ph 2:6). He sacrificed the privileged existence as God in order to be made as a man. He thus took the form of a slave by “*being made in the likeness of men*” (Ph 2:7). In some metaphorical manner, we must do the same.

It was not only in the likeness of men that He came, but He made Himself a slave to the needs of others. The Greek word in the text is *doulos*, the word for slave. A slave gives up his right to choose for himself when he allows the needs of others to make choices for him. There is no such thing as living an incarnational self-willed life. Incarnational living is inherently slave oriented. And so as the Son of God loved us to become a slave on our behalf, we too love others in order to be their slaves (1 Jn 4:19,21).

Those who would live as incarnational slaves must follow Jesus to dirty feet. The incarnational life-style is not for those who thirst after popularity or prosperity. They do not crave to be “Hollywood preachers” who broadcast themselves around the world as someone who thinks himself to be somewhat. Worldly and selfish ambition is not the spirit of the slave of Jesus who would live incarnationally. On the contrary, the

incarnational slave finds a towel and looks for dirty feet to wash (See Jn 13:1-20).

After Jesus washed all the disciples' feet, He said to all of them, "*Truly, Truly, I say to you, a bond-servant [slave] is not greater than his lord*" (Jn 13:16). And since we call Him Lord, then we must find more than the dirty feet of twelve men to wash. We must look for dirty feet throughout our lives. If we think of ourselves too good to wash dirty feet, then we are not disciples of the One who initially created the feet.

In appearance as God, the incarnate Son made Himself into the flesh of man in order to wash dirty "spiritual" feet (Ph 2:8). Those who would seek to be somewhat among their peers, must do likewise. Few who are in high places are called to these matters because they find it difficult to incarnate into the example of a slave to the needs of others. If the preacher loves "*the best places at feasts and the chief seats in the synagogues,*" then he seeks to live contrary to an incarnational Savior (See Mt 23:6). If one is a lover of money, he too will find incarnational living difficult (See Lk 16:14). In fact, the incarnate Son of God said, "*Whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple*" (Lk 14:33). Jesus gave up all of heaven in order to lead the way in giving all of self to us.

Incarnational living calls for death to our old life of living for ourselves and consuming upon our own lusts. The Son of God "*humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Ph 2:8). When Jesus said, "*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple,*" the disciples soon realized that incarnational living after their Master meant a cross of death (See Lk 14:27). It is as the incarnational life-style of Paul. "*I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you that I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily*" (1 Co 15:31). If one would live the incarnational sacrifice of Jesus, then he puts his signature on his own death certificate to have died with the incarnate Son of God on the cross of Calvary (Rm 6:3).

But there is a glorious end to the incarnate life-style. We will in some way be in this life as Jesus now is. The Spirit explained, "*Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name*" (Ph 2:9). It was upon the foundation of this truth of the risen and reigning incarnate Son of God that Paul inscribed the following words in reference to all those who would live incarnationally in this life:

For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more they who receive abundance of grace

and of the gift of righteousness [through the gospel of Jesus] will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ (Rm 5:17).

What a glorious statement! And just in case we missed the point in the letter to the Romans, Paul reminded the evangelist Timothy with the same thought: “*For if we died with Him [in baptism], we will also live with Him. If we suffer [bearing our cross], we will also reign with Him [in this life]*” (2 Tm 2:11,12). This reigning is not future, it is present as Jesus now

reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Living the incarnational life is a victorious life in Christ. The faith about which John wrote (Jn 20:30,31), leads to victorious living in this life. “*This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith*” (1 Jn 5:4). The incarnational life is victorious only if we take the incarnational journey with the Son of God who was formerly with and as God, but then on His own initiative, became as the flesh of man in order to be our slave and wash our dirty “spiritual” feet.

Chapter 4 INCARNATIONAL EXAMPLES

It is the incarnate life as a disciple of the incarnate God that we seek to live. This is living the power of the incarnational gospel. Once we understand the incarnational journey of Jesus, we then begin to understand some of the puzzling historical statements in the New Testament concerning the behavior of the early disciples.

For example, during the first days after the official announcement of the gospel reign of Jesus, the early disciples “*sold their possessions and goods and divided them to all, as everyone had need*” (At 2:45). Because we often live in materialistic societies today, we have difficulty understanding this behavior. When we un-

derstand what happens once one adopts the incarnational journey of the Son of God to the cross, then we begin to understand that the submitted seek to emulate in their lives the incarnate Servant who suffered on the cross for them. In the historical setting of the previous statement, those first disciples were willing to forsake what they possessed, just as Jesus forsook heaven He possessed, in order to serve the needs of those who had journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast. Inherent in incarnational living is using possessions to continue the mission of King Jesus.

This transformed behavior of the early disciples continued far beyond

Pentecost. Church was identified by the incarnate nature of the members. A few years after Pentecost, this behavior was again brought out in Luke's historical statement concerning the sacrificial offering of the members. **"And no one said that any of the things he possessed was his own"** (At 4:32). This is incarnational thinking. Why would the Holy Spirit make this statement concerning the "mind of the church" if only a few of the members behaved in this manner? The point is that the Spirit recorded for posterity through Luke the very heart of the incarnational living of the early disciples as a whole. There was a paradigm shift in how they viewed the ownership of their possessions. Owners still had control of their possessions (At 5:4). But they were willing to relinquish their ownership of what they possessed in order to fulfill the needs of others.

There were few anomalies among them in sacrificial contributions. The very nature (behavior) of the church was identified by the incarnational sacrifices of every member to meet the needs of others. Jesus had revealed that His disciples would be defined and identified by their love for one another (Jn 13:34,35). And that was just what happened when men and women were obedient to the incarnational Son of God. Gospel living is inherently sacrificial.

Luke further explained, *"Nor was there any among them who lacked, for as many as were owners of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold"* (At 4:34). And such did Jesus who left his "land" in heaven. He established the example for those who would be His disciples. *"Whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple"* (Lk 14:33). This was in the prophesied relationship that Jesus would have with His disciples during His ministry: *"He who finds his life [of possessions] will lose it. And he who loses his life [of possessions] for My sake will find it"* (Mt 10:39).

Mark recorded the same sentiment of Jesus: *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever wishes to lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, the same will save it"* (Mk 8:35). This is gospel living after the example of the incarnational Son of God. *"For what will it profit a man if he will gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Mk 8:36). However, if we are willing to leave all for Jesus, then Jesus promises the following in this life.

Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My sake and the gospel's, who will not receive a hun-

dredfold now in this time ... and in the age to come eternal life (Mk 10:29,30).

Paul lived the incarnational life. “*What things were gain to me [in my former life],*” he wrote, “*those things I have counted loss for Christ*” (Ph 3:7). He did not escape into living a fanaticized hyperbole, but a reality in reference to his own incarnate living: “***I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord***” (Ph 3:8). And to express his emphatic life-style that illustrates the example of incarnational living, he wrote in reference to those things he gave up and left: “***I count them refuse so that I may gain Christ***” (Ph 3:8). The Greek word for “refuse” in this text is the word “dung.” Aspirations for those things of the world become repugnant to those who live the incarnate life. They are refuse to be discarded and never sought after again.

For the incarnate disciple, money becomes only a means to accomplish the mission of living and preaching the incarnate Son of God. The Philippians saw this in the lives of Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, and subsequently behaved the same in their own lives after only a few days as disciples of Jesus. Paul, Silas and Timothy were in the city of Philippi only a few days on the second missionary jour-

ney of Paul—Luke stayed when the other three went on to Thessalonica (At 16:12). During the few days while the evangelists were in the city, Lydia and the Philippian jailor, with their households, obeyed the gospel by baptism into Christ (At 16:15,33).

Several years later, Paul wrote of the example of these new disciples. He reminded them that immediately after obeying the gospel, they began to support the preaching of the gospel when he, Silas and Timothy moved on to Thessalonica.

Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel [in your lives] when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent once and again for my needs (Ph 4:15,16).

Why do new Christians do things as this? The answer is simple. When evangelists go forth living the incarnate life of the One they proclaim, then those who obey the gospel of the incarnate Son of God know what they are getting themselves into before they obey the gospel. They first count the cost, and then they begin to understand that in this life God will do them right regardless of their sacrifices (See Lk 14:28-33). But most important, God will reward them with

eternal life when the Son returns. Therefore, as Paul lived the incarnational life of his Savior, so did the Philippians in reference to making themselves the slaves of others who were in need, just as those first disciples on Pentecost. When the gospel of grace comes into one's life, marvelous things will happen.

*We make known to you the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia [which includes those in the city of Philippi], that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy **and their deep poverty**, abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, yes, **and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord** (2 Co 8:1-3).*

All the disciples of Macedonia followed the incarnate example of the first evangelists who came to them, for one of those first evangelists later wrote to the Corinthian disciples, "*Be imitators of me even as I also of*

Christ" (1 Co 11:1). As Christ gave up everything of heaven for us, so we are willing to give up everything of this world for others. As He made Himself a slave to our needs, so we also make ourselves a slave to the needs of others. This is the gospel of incarnate living after the example of the Son of God. In fact, "*this is the message that you [we] have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*" (1 Jn 3:11). We can know that we are living the incarnate life of Jesus by our response to the needs of others. "*We know that we have passed from death to life **because we love the brethren***" (1 Jn 3:14). "*By this we know love, because He [through incarnation and the cross] laid down His life for us. **And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren***" (1 Jn 3:16).

*But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, **how does the love of [the incarnate] God abide in him?** (1 Jn 3:17).*

Chapter 5

THE CRUCIFIXIONAL GOSPEL

It is the love of the incarnate Son of God that motivates our hearts to live the incarnational life. In reference to the incarnate body of the Son of God, God's love was demonstrated

on a cross for our behalf. The cross happened in history, not because we were worthy people, but because we were worthless people in sin. "*But **God demonstrates His love toward***

us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rm 5:8). The cross was a demonstration. There was no "faith only" in reference to God's love for us. The Son of God did not stay in heaven and just believe us into the grace of God.

Incarnation, which was for the purpose of a sacrificial offering for sin, was a demonstration of the fact of God's love for us. For this reason, His love for us is reciprocal. Therefore, "*we love because He first loved us*" (1 Jn 4:19). During His ministry Jesus prepared His disciples for the crucifixional life-style of love that would come as He demonstrated the love of God on the cross.

"*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*" (Lk 14:27). Crucifixional living is the demonstration that we are the disciples of Jesus. By our love we demonstrate that we are of the crucified One (Jn 13:34,35). All those who would simply cry out "Lord, Lord," without obedience to the instructions of the Father, have deceived themselves into believing that a dead faith is profitable. James asked such people, "*But are you willing to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*" (Js 2:20). So James admonished, "*You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only*" (Js 2:24). The crucifixional life is a demonstration that

we have been crucified with Christ. Our faith led us to the cross. And once at the cross, we emulate in our own lives the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God.

The crucifixional life is as what Paul stated of himself. "*I die daily*" (1 Co 15:31). He explained, "*I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*" (Gl 2:20). Bearing the cross of Jesus means living daily the crucified life. Notice the **passive tense** in the phrase that Paul wrote in reference to obedience to the gospel in baptism: "*Our old man was crucified* [Gr. passive] *with Him*" (Rm 6:6).

Passive means that our old man was **acted upon**. At the cross, Jesus acted upon our old man of sin. We were crucified **with** Him two thousand years ago. Our obedience to the gospel today is our acceptance of His crucifixion for us. We thus walk the crucified life when we are baptized into Christ. "*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death* [crucifixion], *we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection* [from the dead]" (Rm 6:5). He was resurrected to reign as King of kings. And by walking the crucifixional life, we too reign in life with Him (Rm 5:17).

Paul wrote, "*We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness*" (1

Co 1:23). For the Jews who were looking for a Messiah who would deliver them from Roman oppression, they could never follow a crucified leader. A crucified incarnational God was just foolishness to the Gentile idol worshipers who held their gods in high esteem. Therefore, neither the Jews nor the Gentiles in mass would allow themselves to be crucified with Christ in obedience to the gospel in baptism. Such things were contrary to their theological world views.

But notice this: *“For though He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we will live with Him by the power of God toward you”* (2 Co 13:4). The power of the gospel to both save souls and change lives was unleashed at the cross. Jesus allowed Himself to remain weak in the flesh in order to be taken in bodily form to the cross. But He was raised up by the power of God. He was *“declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead”* (Rm 1:4).

In the same manner, we allow ourselves to be crucified with Him in order that by the power of a forgiving God, we too can be raised to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:4). The crucifixional life is the result of our submission to Him being crucified for us, and then raised by the power of God to reign. This is exactly what Peter

reminded those on Pentecost who took part in the crucifixion of Jesus: *“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (At 2:36).

The result of submission to the gospel of crucifixion is the crucifixional life. *“Now those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”* (Gl 5:24). Such people can only do as Paul wrote, *“God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world”* (Gl 6:14). The crucifixional life is a life of self-denial. In other words, and with the same thought, Paul reminded those in Colosse, *“For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”* (Cl 3:3).

We died with Christ on a cross of crucifixion. Our lives are embedded into the crucified Christ, and thus we have died to the world. In living the crucifixional life, we *“put to death”* our fleshly members that crave after the things of this world (Cl 3:5-7). *“If you then were raised with Christ [from the waters of baptism], seek those things that are above”* (Cl 3:1).

Living the crucifixional life is more than venturing outside our

“comfort zone” to do an occasional soup kitchen in the ghetto. If there is still a “comfort zone” in our lives, then we are living neither the incarnational, nor the crucifixional life. Comfort zones vanish away when we do as the crucified Paul, “*We endure all things so that we should not hinder the gospel of Christ*” (1 Co 9:12).

Therefore, we must live as Paul. “*I have become all things to all men so that I might by all means save some*” (1 Co 9:22). As Jesus moved out of His “comfort zone” in heaven in order to go to the cross, we too must move out of our “comfort zones” to live the crucifixional life.

Chapter 6

THE RESURRECTIONAL GOSPEL

Living the resurrectional life is the evidence that the gospel is alive in our lives. Herein is revealed the power of the gospel to engender a paradigm shift in our moral life-style. We remember what was preached on Pentecost that first cut people to the heart.

*Foreseeing this, he [David] spoke of the resurrection of the Christ **This Jesus God has raised up** Therefore, being exalted at the right hand of God God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ (At 2:31-33,36).*

Realizing the reality of the resurrected and reigning Lord Jesus Christ, “***They were cut to the heart***” (At 2:37). What cut the people to the heart was the gospel of the resurrection and reign of Jesus. The man Jesus was made Lord and proved to be the Christ

(Messiah). It was by the power of His resurrection that God proved that He was the Son of God (Rm 1:4). The resurrected and reigning King Jesus, therefore, is the power that motivates the transformation of our lives.

The Holy Spirit rehearsed the power of the resurrection in the lives of men and women who truly believed that Jesus was raised from the dead. He wanted us to realize that if we extract the fact of the resurrection from Christianity, then our faith is simply just another religion. So He began His rebuke of some in Corinth with the question, “*Now if Christ is preached that He rose from the dead, how can some say among you that there is no resurrection*” (1 Co 15:12). “*But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. **And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is vain***” (1 Co 15:13,14).

And if Jesus was not raised, “*Then those also who have fallen asleep [died] in Christ have perished*” (1 Co 15:18). If He were not raised, then we are to be pitied for our foolish faith that He was (1 Co 15:19). So “*if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*” (1 Co 15:32).

But since He has been raised, then this changes everything. The power that motivates a moral paradigm shift in our lives is our faith in the resurrection and reign of Jesus Christ. Paul said as much in Colossians 3. The prelude to Colossians 3 is Romans 6:4:

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

Paul introduced his motivation for living the resurrectional life by referring to the Colossians’ former baptism into Christ. “*If you then were raised with Christ [from the waters of baptism], seek those things that are above*” (Cl 3:1). Because the Christian has believed in the resurrection, he was buried with Christ in baptism in anticipation of the final resurrection to come (Jn 5:29). The power

of the resurrectional life is in the resurrection of Jesus, for His resurrection assumes His kingdom reign. This is the power that refocuses our attention to His reign in heaven. Our minds are turned off those things that are on this earth in order to focus on the reigning King Jesus who is seated at the right hand of God (Ep 1:20,21; Hb 8:1).

Believing in the resurrection of Jesus is the impetus to “*put to death your members that are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*” (Cl 3:5). It is the power to “*put off ... anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy speech ...*” (Cl 3:8). Belief in the resurrection of Jesus empowers us to transform our lives into the image of our King.

Since we have put off the old man of sin in the waters of baptism (Rm 6:6), we “*have put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him*” (Cl 3:10). Therefore, our belief in the resurrection moved us to the grave of water to join Jesus in His burial. Through our belief in the power of the resurrection and His reign, we are driven to lead the resurrectional life after coming out of the tomb of water.

Christians will always live in a world of moral degradation. It is the way of the world. If Christ was not

raised from the dead, then we have no reason to be repulsed with the moral degradation of the world. If Christ has not been raised, then there is no such thing as “moral degradation,” for we are free to live as we choose. There are no moral standards.

But if Christ has been raised from the dead, then everything changes. God sees the world through the resurrection, for in the resurrection He proved to us that Jesus was His Son (Rm 1:4). And since Jesus was His Son who came into the world, then the world will eventually be held accountable by the moral standards of our King. “*He who rejects Me,*” Jesus said during his earthly appearance,

*“and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. **The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day**”* (Jn 12:48).

The time is coming when God will judge “*the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus Christ] whom He has ordained*” (At 17:31). Eventually, “*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*” (2 Co 5:10). Knowing that we will give account before the resurrected Son of God inspires us to live resurrectionally according to the standards of His word. The gospel of the resurrection is our motivation to stand confident in the fact that Jesus will come again with His angels (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

Chapter 7

THE GOSPEL KINGDOM REIGN

It all started with the historical statement, “*Now when they [the Jews] heard this [the resurrected and reigning Son of God], **they were cut to the heart***” (At 2:37).

Something on that Pentecost in Jerusalem two thousand years ago was spoken that caused a traumatic response from the hearts of about 3,000 people. What Peter preached was not sweet Jesus, meek and mild. He did not preach church. He did not initially preach repentance and baptism. But something he did preach eventually led to the world being spiri-

tually turned upside down by the change in life-styles of about 3,000 people.

Peter’s initial gospel message began with King David. King David of Israel knew that the authority of his kingdom reign always originated from heaven at the throne of God. Therefore, when God promised that He would in the future set Someone on his throne, David correctly concluded that the One who would eventually reign on his throne would rule from heaven with the authority of God. By the Spirit, David prophesied of such

a reign in Psalm 110:1: ***“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.’”***

All who were in attendance on that memorial Pentecost two thousand years ago knew the prophetic statements of David in reference to his throne. Peter’s message helped them to connect the dots. In announcing the resurrection of Jesus, he convinced them that “this Jesus” whom they had crucified was the “Lord” about whom David had spoken. He was the One whom the Father had promised would be seated on the throne of David. Peter proclaimed that the man Jesus was the Man. It was gospel news that Jesus was resurrected and reigning on David’s throne.

This same Jesus, whom they had previously known only as a good Teacher from Galilee, was raised up by God to be seated on the throne of David (At 2:32). This same Jesus was at the time of Peter’s pronouncement, *“both Lord and Christ”* (At 2:36). This was Peter’s initial gospel message. This was all he had to say in order to cut men to the heart. When people understood that Jesus was the reigning Son of God who is coming again to take vengeance on those who do not know Him, then they were cut to the heart. They were subsequently moved to submit to Peter’s instruc-

tions to obey this gospel news (See 1 Th 1:6-9).

We must explain from the rest of the New Testament where Peter did not have time to go. The same Jesus about whom he spoke was at the time he delivered this gospel message, was reigning as **King** of kings and **Lord** of lords (1 Tm 6:15). **All authority** in heaven and on earth had been given unto Him (Mt 28:18). **All things** had been put under His feet, and He was the controlling **head** over all things (Ep 1:22). Even angels and all earthly authorities and powers had *“been made subject to Him”* (1 Pt 3:22). *“God also has **highly exalted Him** and given Him the name that is **above every name**”* (Ph 2:9).

The Hebrew writer did not want us to understand that Jesus’ reign was limited to a national kingdom as that over which David reigned. On the contrary, he wanted us to understand that King Jesus’ reign extended far beyond David’s reign over Israel alone. So with the following words, the Hebrew writer clarified the galactic kingdom reign of Jesus from heaven over all things:

You have put all things in subjection under His feet. For in subjecting all things to Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we do not yet see all things put under Him (Hb 2:8).

On Pentecost, Peter was speaking to unbelieving Jews. At the time he addressed these Jews, **they were under the kingdom reign of a new King in heaven.** It was now time for those who were the true Israel by faith to be transferred unto the kingdom of the new King (Cl 1:13).

Those who initially heard Peter's announcement were not in the church. At the time, and during the ministry of Jesus, most Jews did not believe that the One about whom David prophesied was the Son of God (Mt 16:18,19). On Pentecost, however, Peter informed them that there had been a change of kingship in heaven, and that the resurrection proved Jesus to be more than a good Rabbi from Nazareth. **For the first time in history, Peter announced the gospel reign of the resurrected Son of God.**

On that day about 3,000 believing Jews were transferred unto the kingdom reign of Jesus by their obedience to the gospel. They were before their obedience to the gospel under the kingdom reign of Jesus for about a week. However, they were not members of the church of obedient subjects, for the church was established on Pentecost by their submission to Jesus' existing reign. They submitted to the King who had already ascended to the right hand of God in heaven only about a week be-

fore. In other words—don't miss this point—**King Jesus was already made King of kings over all things in heaven and on earth BEFORE the first gospel announcement of His kingdom and reign was made by Peter on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.**

We must emphasize this point because there is a subtle misunderstanding that is persistently made by some against the present gospel reign of Jesus to which the initial subjects of this reign submitted. It is asserted that the kingdom of Jesus and His church are the same, and thus the reign and kingdom of Jesus are limited to the church. Unfortunately, those who assert this misunderstanding of the present gospel reign of Jesus fail to recognize that they are minimizing one of the vital truths of the gospel message that cut about 3,000 Jews to the heart on the day of Pentecost. By teaching a limited reign of Jesus, they are cutting the heart out of the gospel reign that Peter preached on Pentecost that moved men and women to be cut to the heart.

The totality of the gospel entails the incarnation of the Son of God (Jn 1:1,2,14), His atoning death for our redemption (1 Co 15:3), His resurrection that proved Him to be the Son of God (Rm 1:4; 1 Co 15:4), His ascension to be head over all things for the sake of the church (Ep 1:22), **His**

present kingdom reign and priesthood over all nations of the world (Hb 8:1), and His final coming to take us to our eternal home (1 Th 4:13-18).

If we limit Jesus' present reign only to those of us who have submitted to His gospel reign, **then we are cutting a significant piece out of the message of the gospel.** We are limiting the reign of Jesus, and thus weakening the power of the gospel that includes His present headship and reign over all things for the benefit of the church.

The kingdom of Jesus and the church **are not the same.** The members of the church are the obedient subjects of the kingdom of Jesus on earth. However, the kingdom of Jesus presently extends from heaven and far beyond the church of obedient subjects. It extends to angels, earthly authorities and powers. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, and those kings and lords over whom He reigns are not all members of the church.

Even Satan is under the kingdom authority of Jesus, for it will be Jesus who has the authority to cast the old serpent into fire and brimstone (Mt 25:41; Rv 20:11-15). Even during His lower state of earthly ministry, Jesus had authority over all demons. One terrified demon even cried out to the incarnate Son of God, "*I beg You, do not torment me!*" (Lk 8:28). If Jesus had such authority over demons even

while He was on earth, then we are amazed at the authority He now has as King of kings and Lord of lords over the universe. The knowledge of His present kingdom authority is the impetus for us to change our lives.

To suppose that Jesus' kingdom is confined only to the church of the obedient is a subtle attack against His present gospel reign over all things. If His reign is limited to the church, then it would be easy to be fearful of supposed demons creeping around in the night if King Jesus had no control over them. Those who teach that the kingdom and church are the same need to take another look at what they are teaching in reference to limiting the galactic kingdom reign of the Son of God. They are preaching a limited King Jesus who has limited power and limited influence in the affairs of man and over the kingdom of darkness. They are opening the door of opportunity for all the end-of-time prognosticators who believe that Jesus is yet to come in order to rule over the world.

We must keep in mind that Jesus presently has authority over all for the sake of those who have submitted to the gospel of His reign. Remember, the church is composed of all those who are subjects of the kingdom reign of Jesus, but not all the kingdom of Jesus is composed of those who are the church. Though we may not now see all things subject to the reign of

Jesus, as stated by the Hebrew writer (Hb 2:8), there will come a time in the future when King Jesus will subjugate all things, and then cast the wicked and Satan into eternal destruc-

tion (2 Th 1:6-9). It will be then that He will return kingdom reign to the Father (1 Co 15:28). It will be then that we shall forever be with our King and Lord Jesus.

Chapter 8

LEGAL RESTORATION

It was very difficult for the Jews of Jesus' day to accept the ramifications of the gospel. It was difficult because of the nature of the bondage of the religion into which they had brought themselves. Judaism was so contrary to the gospel of grace.

Judaism, as many religions today, was based on countless traditions that had become the religious heritage of the Jews. At the cost of having some relationships even with the Samaritans, who had a similar historical religious background, the Jews had a difficult time relating with those who professed other religious faiths. Subsequently, "religious policemen" arose out of Judaism in order to guard and enforce strict obedience to the traditions of the Jews and to guard the Jews from even eating with those who were not Jews (See At 11:2,3). And just in case there was a difference of opinion in reference to interpreting the codes of the religion, there were religious lawyers (scribes) who would settle disputes. Legal restorationists always have a court of judges and law-

yers (See Js 2:4; 4:11).

It was not that the Sinai law of Moses was the problem. All the debate was over the tagged-on interpretations and examples that the Pharisees and scribes had attached to the law. When Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "*You have heard that it was said ... but I say unto you,*" He was not contrasting the Sinai law of Moses with what He would reveal later on the cross (Mt 5). **He was contrasting the gospel with the Jews' interpretations of the law.** He was setting the stage for the great conflict that would soon arise during His ministry and after the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles all truth in reference to the gospel of grace (See Jn 14:28; 16:13,14). There was new wine coming that would burst asunder the old wineskins of the legal restoration of Pharisaical Judaism.

The legal restoration of Judaism arrived in Palestine during the few centuries before the revelation of the gospel through Jesus. We better understand the ministry of Jesus that the

Holy Spirit recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke when we understand that after the Babylonian captivity, there was a call for restoration among the returning Jews. The Jewish writer Matthew made the statement, “*And after they were deported to Babylon*” (Mt 1:12). It was as if he wanted to alert us to a time when there was a change coming in the Jews’ restoration movement. The change would be difficult because the Jews had struggled for centuries to get to where they were religiously by the time Jesus came into the world.

While in captivity, the Jews had been so estranged from the Sinai law that they had established countless interpretations of the law that they codified with the law. By the time Jesus arrived, the Jews’ religion was no longer the Sinai law alone, but the law plus all their religious regulations. There were the written traditions of the Mishneh, Talmud, and interpretations of the Torah. During the captivity new orders were established as the Pharisees and scribes of the law. In their separation from the temple, synagogue assemblies were inaugurated with synagogues being built throughout the Roman Empire. The synagogues were not a part of the Sinai law.

During the fourteen generations from the Babylonian captivity to the coming of Jesus, the religious lead-

ers of the Jews had established a hoard of religious rites and ceremonies that became the Jews’ religion (See Mt 1:17; Gl 1:13). It was into this arena of legal restoration that Jesus was born and the gospel announced. The nature of Judaism became the definition for the legal restoration that Jesus confronted during His ministry. The same confrontation continued as the disciples went forth to preach the gospel.

By the first century, the additions of interpretations and religious customs had moved the religious leadership of the Jews away from the heart of God. In fact, in order to keep the people entangled in the legal restoration of the Jews, guardians of the traditions protected the religious heritage of the Jews. Their protection of the traditions of Judaism was so stringent by the time the gospel was revealed, that Paul, who was engrossed in Jewish religiosity, proclaimed through the Spirit, that that in which he and the other Jews were involved was actually the “Jews’ religion” (Judaism) (Gl 1:13). It was this “legal restoration movement” of the Jews after their captivity that eventually nailed Jesus to the cross and stoned one of the first messengers of the gospel (At 7:54-60). **Legal restoration is always at odds with gospel restoration.**

The post-captivity restoration of the Jews was not God’s revealed faith

to Israel on Mount Sinai. It had by the time of Jesus become a conglomeration of accepted interpretations of the law and added traditions. It was into this strict legal restoration of the Jews after the captivity that Jesus came with the freedom of the gospel. This was indeed the background for the statement of Paul in a letter that was directed specifically to the invasion of such legal religionists into the gospel-obedient church of Christ: *“But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son”* (Gl 4:4). Gospel restoration always glows brightly to those who are entangled in the throes of legal restoration.

This was not a casual inscription of Paul’s literary attack against the legal restorationists of some Jewish brethren who had come in among the disciples of Galatia. Since God knew that the gospel would bring a gospel restoration in the midst of legal religiosity, He simply waited until legal religion was at its zenith before He revealed the gospel. It would be in this way that the gospel restoration of Jesus would be clearly revealed to be in contrast to Jewish legalism.

In their religious zeal after the captivity, the religious leaders of the Jews set themselves on a course of legally restoring their faith in Palestine. Unfortunately, they did so by trusting in their performance of law by which they presumed to establish

their own righteousness, and thus justification before God. In their ignorance to perfect their righteousness before God, the Jews went beyond the Sinai law. *“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God”* (Rm 10:3).

Where the legal restorationists of the Jews went wrong was their attempt to guard the Sinai law of Moses with countless regulations and interpretations that surrounded the keeping of the law itself. In doing such, they lost sight of the intent of the law. When Jesus came with a gospel restoration, the Pharisees and scribes came complaining to Jesus, *“Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders?”* (Mk 7:5). The disciples did not so walk because Jesus was revealing to His disciples a gospel restoration that was soon to be revealed on a cross and announced in a Pentecost sermon.

So Jesus rebuked the religious policemen of Judaism: *“For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men”* (Mk 7:8). **Invariably, legal restorationists will exalt their traditions and interpretations of the law above the law itself.** And because of their zealous religious spirit, they will seek opportunities to debate their opinions when they judge that someone is not walk-

ing according to their established traditions.

But the legal restorationist will not stop there. Jesus explained. *“All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition”* (Mk 7:9). For a present-day example, the legal restorationist will argue and debate over the legal performance of the Lord’s Supper, but in his zeal of debate he will lose sight of the unifying purpose of the Supper itself.

The legal restorationist will legalize worship with certain ceremonies in order to validate that he has in his behavior carried out “true worship” according to law. But at the same time, he sits in the assembly with his heart far from God. The legal restorationist will always end up as the legal restorationists of the Jews: *“This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me”* (Mk 7:6). The legal restorationist is always in a quandary over the performance of his acts of worship, while at the same time his heart is far from the heart of God in the performance of his legal actions. His worship is heartless because he seeks to legalize worship.

The legal restorationist will sometimes heartlessly argue his case with others, but will satisfy himself with the assumption that he has already won the argument. He will

notch his Bible with a victory because he has won a battle by heartlessly throwing opinion after tradition against his opponent in order to prove his point.

The legal restorationist Saul was sincere in his efforts to defend the Jews’ religion. He was heartily zealous, but his zeal was based on ignorance of the heart of God. He later confessed as a gospel-transformed apostle, *“I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief”* (1 Tm 1:13). His confession begs the question: When legal restorationists debate their opinions and traditions with gospel restorationists, are they not revealing their **unbelief in the power of the gospel?**

Legal restorationists can always be identified by their willingness to contend. Now we understand why Paul exhorted Timothy that the leaders of the flock of gospel believers must not be contentious (1 Tm 3:3). And in the context of some argumentative brethren in Corinth, Paul wrote, *“But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor the assemblies of God”* (1 Co 11:16). Paul was gospel driven because he was a gospel restorationist. But some of those in Corinth who were contentious, were not so. Therefore, Paul instructed Timothy and Titus as to

what must be done when faced with a legal restorationist: ***“Reject a factious man after the first and second admonition”*** (Ti 3:10). In fact, he instructed both Timothy and Titus not even to show up at meetings with those who are contentious (See 1 Tm 1:3,4; 6:3-5; 2 Tm 2:23; Ti 3:9).

For the legal restorationists, the recording of the earthly ministry and teachings of Jesus was for the purpose of outlining a dissertation on law. Some Bibles are printed as “red letter” editions. The “red letter” editions of the records of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John originated out of a desire to make sure that the readers of the Bible correctly identified some supposed codified mandates that came directly from the mouth of Jesus. While the “black letters” identified the gospel behavior of Jesus, the “red letters” somehow revealed “commandments” from Jesus that were more important than the gospel example that Jesus lived.

The legal restorationist, therefore, reads and labors over his Bible with the purpose of finding legalities in the pronouncements of Jesus, while minimizing the gospel example of the life of Jesus. People sometimes do such with the teachings of Paul. It was for this reason that Paul exhorted the Corinthians, *“Be [gospel] imitators of me [in my behavior] even as I also am of Christ”* (1 Co 11:1). The gos-

pel restorationist reads and labors to discover the gospel example of Jesus and Paul that reveals the heart of God.

Legal and gospel restorationists come to two very different motivations for studying the word of God. Each uses the Bible from the viewpoint of two different perspectives. Legal restorationists are often searching the word of God for scriptures to win debates and identify the “liberals” in the church. They are often searching for laws by which they can justify themselves legally before God. Gospel restorationists are motivated to search the Scriptures in order to discover the gospel of the grace of God that motivates them to cry out “Abba, Father!” They subsequently ask their Father for instructions as to how they would live the gospel.

The legalist ends up with pride and boasting, and an attempt to self-justify himself according to perfect law-keeping. Gospel driven people of faith, on the other hand, end up remembering the words of Jesus, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted, [etc.]”* (See the entirety of Jesus’ explanation of the character of the gospel driven saint in Mt 5:3-12.)

We must not miss the conclusion of Jesus’ “beatitudes”: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righ-*

teousness sake, Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you ..." (Mt 5:10,11). It is in the nature of legal restorationists to persecute those who seek God's righteousness through gospel behavior, as opposed to self-justification through perfect law-keeping. We must not forget that legal restorationists put Jesus on the cross and stoned a disciple named Stephen who lived and preached the gospel. Legal and gospel restorationists are inherently opposed to one another.

If one today were born out of a legal restoration movement, then it will often be difficult for him to transition into a gospel restoration. When he does make the transition, he often brings with him the baggage of his legal religiosity. Self-righteousness will often follow him after he comes forth from the waters of baptism. For some time it will be difficult for him to walk in the newness of life in Christ after having been set free from perfect law-keeping. So Paul would remind such people, "*For sin will not have dominion over you, **for you are not under law, but under grace***" (Rm 6:14).

We caution ourselves about this because most of the Jews of the first century did not obey the gospel. Their hearts were hardened to the gospel of grace that flows from the heart of God. It was intentional that the gospel first confront those who were embedded

in legal restorationism. The prophet Isaiah revealed, "*He [God] has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts*" (Jn 12:40). After obedience to the gospel, it often takes some time for those who were previously blinded and hardened by legal religion to see the light of the freedom that is in Christ. Obedience to the gospel calls for a complete transformation as to how one relates to the God of grace.

God would take ownership of the hardening aspect that the gospel has on those who refuse to obey the gospel. The gospel offers the opportunity for people to harden their hearts against the heart of God. When one has confidence in the performance of his own righteousness, it is quite difficult for him to have faith in the righteousness of God that was revealed on the cross. When one has for years walked by sight in his own righteousness, then it is sometimes difficult to walk by faith in the grace of God.

Therefore, when the gospel went forth into all the world, "*Some were hardened and did not believe*" (At 19:9). We could even apply a statement here to legal restorationists that was made specifically in reference to the Jews: "*But their minds were hardened. For until this day the same veil remains in the reading of the old covenant, which veil is done away in Christ*" (2 Co 3:14). The legal restorationist is always veiled with his le-

gal righteousness in performance of law. He is veiled to the point that he cannot understand the freedom that gospel restoration offers.

In order to defend gospel restoration, and to guard the church against legal restorationists, the Holy Spirit used a former legal restorationist to defend gospel restoration (See Ph 3:1-8). He used the apostle Paul who wrote to the Philippians in reference to his former legal performance of Judaism, ***“I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”*** (Ph 3:8). Paul explained that he wanted to ***“be found in Him [Christ], not having my own righteousness that is from law [keeping], but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith”*** (Ph 3:9).

Paul tried the legal restorationism of the Jews. But he found it wanting. When he finally realized the righteousness of God that was revealed through the gospel of Jesus Christ, he

responded by releasing all those things he counted profitable in the Jews’ religion.

In the preceding statement is the transfer of one from the kingdom of darkness in legal justification by works of law into the kingdom of the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Cl 1:13). In this transfer, we would follow Paul. He had experienced the continual guilt that legal restoration brings into one’s life, a guilt that always leaves one on his bed at night wondering if he has performed properly all the mandates of his religion. After the transfer, Paul, and those to whom he wrote, were encouraged to ***“rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say, rejoice”*** (Ph 4:4). And to those brothers and sisters who were being recruited to return to the legal restoration of the Jews (Gl 4:17), he mandated, ***“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”*** (Gl 5:1).

Chapter 9 GOSPEL RESTORATION

Paul’s letters to the Christians in both Rome and Galatia are the constitution for gospel restoration. These two documents would be the “bill of rights” for those who once lived under the bondage of law, but found freedom from perfect law-keeping under

the gospel of God’s grace. Gospel restoration calls for a return to the gospel of grace as opposed to a return to the demands of perfect law-keeping as a means to be justified of sin before God. For this reason, gospel restoration stands against religion, for re-

ligion is defined by strict adherence to a system of religious codes whereby one would attempt to justify himself before God through law-keeping and meritorious good works.

The gospel is good news because the sufficient atonement of the cross sets us free from having to sanctify ourselves through good works and perfect law-keeping. This gospel appeal was stated clearly by Paul: “**By works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight**” (Rm 3:20). Therefore, we are “**justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**” (Rm 3:24). We are thus “**not under law, but under grace**” (Rm 6:14). These statements of Romans establish the foundation upon which the gospel restoration rests. And to be clear, these statements are saying that one cannot be saved on the basis of keeping law perfectly. When one goes wrong, atonement cannot be made for sins by doing good works. **The premise of legal restoration and gospel restoration are contrary to one another.**

Legal religion places one under the bondage of having to self-sanctify one’s self by keeping perfectly the rituals of a particular religion in order to be saved. Within the rites of religion there is always some system of self-sanctification by which one can atone for violations against either God or the rites of the religion. But if

Paul says that any attempt to keep even the law of God perfectly is impossible, then certainly keeping all the unique rituals of any particular religious group is totally impossible. Paul’s point in reference to our relationship with God’s law is that “*there is none righteous [under law], no, not one*” (Rm 3:10). The same can be said of one’s efforts to obey all the rules of his or her particular religious group in order to justify one’s self before God.

As the Jews who had established their own righteousness as a religion (Rm 10:3), we sometimes think we can devise a system of self-sanctification in order to be justified before God. The problem with any system of self-justification is that such systems of religion are inherently ego-centric. We are led to boast one against another because of either our law-keeping or assortment of atoning good works. But in the eyes of God, the Holy Spirit responds, “*And if [we are saved] by grace, then it is no more by works [of law or good works], otherwise grace is no more grace*” (Rm 11:6). Therefore, since we are saved by God’s grace, then there is no room for boasting in reference to our performance of law or good works. “*Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith [in the grace of God]*” (Rm 3:27). Religion and

gospel, therefore, are contrary to one another.

The legal restorationist always falls short because he falls short both in his performance of the laws of his religion, as well as the law of God. On the other hand, the gospel restorationist is always confident. His confidence is not in himself in reference to his performance of law and rituals, but in the grace of God who performed for him on the cross.

Our confidence is not in our performance of law, or self-sanctifying good works to atone for our failure in our performance of law. Our confidence is in Christ Jesus and the grace that was revealed at the cross. It is this confidence that we seek to restore to the hearts of men. We seek to restore the **“confidence we have through Christ toward God”** (2 Co 3:4).

Our confidence is not in ourselves, least we create for ourselves an opportunity to boast. Paul wrote to those of Achaia in reference to some among them who boasted in their religiosity. So he asked the Achaians to bear with some foolish comparisons on his part **“so that I may boast a little”** (2 Co 11:16). Paul took the opportunity to boast of his life in order to shame those in Achaia who trusted in their performances.

Paul’s boasting was actually a mockery of those who would boast in their meritorious works in order to

sanctify themselves. So he sarcastically rebuked those who suffered little for Jesus. **“What I speak,”** he wrote, **“I do not speak as the Lord, but as in foolishness in this confidence of boasting”** (2 Co 11:17). So **“seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also”** (2 Co 11:18). If there were an opportunity for comparing works (accomplishments) of the flesh—Paul considered such comparing foolishness—then he listed the hardships of his incarnational living (2 Co 11:22,23). But he did so, as he stated, out of foolishness. He went beyond their works by revealing the suffering he personally endured as a result of living the mind of Christ (2 Co 11:24-27). Paul sought to embarrass those who would take pride in the performance of their work-oriented religion.

We must not overlook the application of what Paul stated in the context of 2 Corinthians 11. Unique religious groups are maintained solely because all the adherents of the groups commonly maintain the rituals and ceremonies that identify each particular religion (denomination). This is what some in Achaia were doing, for in doing this they were offering their religious performances as a testimony to themselves and others that they were right and Paul was wrong. Through their self-sanctifying performances, therefore, they were seeking

to draw attention away from Paul and to themselves.

This is always the appeal of the religionists who seek to trust in the rich heritage of religious codes that identify his or her particular religious group. Legal religionists trust in their heritage that is identified by the performances of their religion that have been handed down to them by their forefathers. They do this in order to have confidence in their faith. However, in the context of 2 Corinthians 11, Paul sarcastically mocked such reasoning and behavior as Elijah mocked the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel who religiously cut themselves in order to validate their faith (1 Kg 18:27).

When religionists, as some in Achaia, start “*comparing themselves among themselves*,” then we know that they have moved beyond the foundation of the gospel (2 Co 10:12). We must not forget that different denominations exist because the adherents compare their religious heritages among themselves. For this reason, they can never have gospel unity among themselves because each particular group is exalting his “rich” heritage above others. Gospel restoration tears down all this nonsense.

Restoration of the gospel means that we can have no confidence in our performance of the rituals of our particular religious group, law or good

works. One of the central statements that defines gospel restoration is 2 Corinthians 4:15: “*For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people **may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.***”

It is the gospel of grace that motivates thanksgiving. “*For by grace you are saved through faith, **and that not of yourselves** [in the performance of unique rituals, laws or good works], *it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast*” (Ep 2:8,9). We are not saved by our meritorious behavior of law in conforming to any system of religion. We are saved by God’s actions on the cross. And in thanksgiving to the grace of God that was revealed on the cross, we work. The gospel restorationist is identified by his or her obedience to law and works **because of his gratitude for what one has already received through the cross**. We are not saved in order to boast of what we seek to acquire through our religious performances.*

We are thus “*created in Christ Jesus **FOR** good works*” (Ep 2:10). We must not allow our desire to boast to change the preposition from “for” to “by.” We are not created in Christ **by** good works. Through obedience to the gospel in baptism into Christ we come into the sanctifying realm of the blood of Jesus, and thus we are

justified freely before God (Rm 3:24). “Freely” means that our justification was in no way accomplished through our performance of either rituals or law-keeping in order to come into Christ. “Freely” means that there need be no supplementing of the grace of God. It is for this reason that baptism is never a meritorious obedience to law, but a heartfelt response to the gospel of grace. This is why the Holy Spirit used the phrase “obey the gospel” to refer to baptism (See 2 Th 1:8; 1 Pt 4:17).

When one understands the realm of the sanctifying blood of the Son of God, he seeks to come into this realm of grace by being buried with the One who created this realm of grace (See Rm 6:3-6). Newness of life is thus in Christ because it is there that one has the privilege of walking in the continual cleansing of the blood of Christ (1 Jn 1:7).

Our salvation is not accomplished by our performance of law in Christ, neither is it accomplished through self-sanctification. There is for those who are in Christ the total and continual cleansing by the sanctifying blood in Christ. Jesus offered the atoning sacrifice for our sins once and for all time. Sanctification was accomplished for everyone in Christ at the cross. When we speak of atonement, therefore, “*this He did once for all when He offered up Himself*” (Hb

7:27). “*By His own blood He entered once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption [for those who are in Christ]*” (Hb 9:12). “Once for all” means that there can never be any supplementing of the blood offering of the cross with our presumed self-sanctifying efforts to complete the cleansing blood of Jesus.

Now listen to this: “*By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*” (Hb 10:10). Every time we think we can sanctify ourselves through our own works of merit, then we must remember that we are denying the “once for all” sufficiency of the sanctifying blood of Jesus on the cross. Through our works of merit, we are minimizing the effectiveness of His blood. Self-sanctifying religiosity minimizes the power of the gospel (Rm 1:16). As long as one lives a life of self-sanctification, he or she can never experience the full joy of a gospel restoration.

And herein is the devastating blow to those religious groups who seek to sanctify themselves by strict adherence to the traditions of their fathers. **They honor their fathers in the keeping of the heritage of their religion above the sanctifying power of the blood of Jesus on the cross.** We must not forget that there is no salvation in any church. Salvation is not in church, for the church is

the assembly of the saved, and the saved do not sanctify themselves.

The gospel restoration seeks to restore the sufficiency of the cleansing blood of Jesus at the cross. We seek to restore in our lives the full power of the gospel. Legal restorationists seek to be sanctified by the blood of Jesus in conjunction with obedience to religious rites, law or meritorious good works. Legal restoration is thus defined as religion by the self-sanctifying efforts of the adherents to a particular set of rules. But the gospel restorationist walks in gratitude and thanksgiving because of his faith in the sanctifying blood that flows freely from the cross of Jesus.

This is “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jd 3). This “faith” was not a body of doctrine. It was not a code of laws. This is the faith that excludes religious performances by which we would seek to sanctify ourselves of sin before God (Rm 3:27). This is the faith that trusts in the gospel of God’s grace as opposed to trusting in our own performance of law and works. It was on the foundation of this faith that Paul wrote to all of us to “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Ph 2:12). It is not that we are working for our salvation. We already have it! We must not forget that because we are already His children, “*it is God who works in you both*

to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Ph 2:13). We are His “workmanship” because His grace drew us into Christ through the gospel, and subsequently we walk in thanksgiving of His grace (Ep 2:10).

Gospel restoration means that we trust in the sufficiency of the sanctifying power of the blood of the cross. It means that we need not attempt again to sanctify ourselves through perfect law-keeping and meritorious works of religion. In Christ, we already have the sanctification by His blood as we live the gospel (1 Jn 1:7). Through the sanctification of His blood, therefore, we are justified before God. Again, we are “*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rm 3:24). And “*having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rm 5:1). Therefore, “*having now been justified by His blood, we will be saved from wrath through Him*” (Rm 5:9). Glory hallelujah!

This is the gospel that must be restored in the religious world that continues in the fruitless self-sanctifying efforts to be justified through religious performances of law and good works. Restoration of the gospel has a tremendous appeal to those who know that they are in the bondage of their own religiosity.

The mistake that many make is

that they appeal to those who are in the bondage of legal religiosity with just another legal-based religion. If we are legally seeking to be justified before God, then we have no gospel freedom in Christ to offer to those who are living under the bondage of legal religiosity. In other words, if we are denominational in our identity, then we have no appeal to those who are also living denominationally. Unfortunately, if we feel that we have all the rules figured out, with a scripture under every point of a doctrinal outline, then we have lost our appeal of the gospel of freedom to those who have the same system of religion.

Gospel restoration is not an appeal to law, but **an appeal to grace**.

If our appeal is to the religionist who is living under the same bondage under which we are living—self-sanctification through perfect law-keeping—then there is no drawing power by the grace of God. God’s grace is not discovered through law-keeping. Law is discovered when we discover grace. Is this not what Paul meant in Romans 8:15,16?

*For you [Christians] **have not received a spirit of bondage again to fear** [in trying to perfectly keep law], but you have received a spirit of adoption by which we cry, “Abba, Father!” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that **we are the children of God.***

Chapter 10

GOSPEL GATHERINGS

There is no **command** in the New Testament that states that Christians must fast. But in Acts 13:1-3, when Paul and Barnabas were about to go on their first missionary journey, we see the early Christians in Antioch fasting in preparation for the mission. We wonder why these Christians would fast for such an epic journey to preach the gospel, even though there were no commands to fast.

In the absence of a command to fast, we see the fasting of the Antioch disciples as an indication of their se-

riousness to preach the gospel to the world through Paul and Barnabas. But without a command to fast for the occasion, we still wonder as to why they fasted? When Jesus said that His disciples would fast when the bridegroom was taken (Mt 9:15), could it be that when Jesus was taken away through death, and then ascension, that they would then after Acts 2 fast in the preaching of this gospel message to the world?

We have also noted that there is no command in the New Testament

to partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week when the disciples come together. But we see the first Christians doing so, both in Troas, and by deduction in the Achaian city of Corinth. In the absence of a direct command to partake of the Supper on the first day of the week, we find churches throughout the world remembering the gospel of the Christ on Sunday. We wonder why? Could it be that those who understand the greatness of the gospel are moved without command to celebrate the gospel when they come together?

We need not wonder long when we consider the power of the gospel. Gospel-driven people need no law to fast when a special mission to preach the gospel is under consideration. Gospel commitment naturally calls for fasting when the gospel is going to be preached. Connected with prayer, fasting is only natural in order to call on God when a gospel-driven church sends forth ambassadors of the gospel into all the world.

As it would be spiritually unnatural for gospel-obedient saints not to pray and fast for gospel missions, it would also be spiritually unnatural for them not to remember the gospel when they come together in assembly. In fact, it would be quite revealing if there were an assembly on Sunday when the Supper of the Lord did

not take center stage for the occasion. If the Supper was not the primary focus of a Sunday assembly, then we would be suspicious concerning the motives of the people who were gathered in attendance.

Consider this for a moment. Christians are the church of the Lord Jesus Christ because the members have all obeyed the gospel of Christ (1 Co 1:12,13; 12:13). They have believed in the incarnational entry of the Son of God into this world because the Father so loved us (Jn 3:16). They have subsequently responded to the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross. They have rejoiced over the good news (gospel) of the empty tomb that proved Jesus to be the Son of God (Rm 1:4). And, they continue to believe in the gospel reign of the Son of God at the right hand of the Father (At 2:32-36; Hb 8:1). There is good news yet to come when the risen Son of God comes again from heaven with His mighty angels (1 Th 4:13-18; 2 Th 1:6-9). There is a great deal of good news that Christians have to celebrate when they come together.

In response to the gospel journey of Jesus into this world in order to take us out of this world, we have believed in the gospel. We have thus obeyed the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). We have obeyed the gospel of Christ, and subsequently, we

have been added by God to the universal church of Christ (At 2:47). Now then, what would gospel-obedient believers naturally seek to do when they gather in assembly on the first day of the week? Would it not be to remember that which, or the One, who motivated them to assemble in the first place?

When we speak of partaking of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, no commands are needed for gospel-obedient people to do so. Only those who are still influenced by legal religiosity need a command. **But no command is needed for those who have obeyed the gospel.** They need no command for them to remember the gospel when they come together on the first day of the week since the gospel is the centrality of their lives. In fact, it would be unusual for gospel-obedient believers not to partake of the Supper that reminds them of the purpose for which they have come together in honor of their Savior.

Since Jesus Christ is the very purpose for obedient saints to gather every first day of the week, then their remembrance of why they are the saints of God is only natural when they assemble.

In fact, it is for this reason why we would question the assembly of those who had no intention of remembering the gospel of Jesus Christ

through the Supper when they came together. The center-of-reference to some assemblies may be a gathering of narcissistic religionists. By narcissistic we mean that the assembly is focused primarily on themselves. Some eloquent speakers seek an assembly before whom they can perform their sermons. They thus seek to inspire through eloquent speeches in order that people "turn the channel" to them again the following Sunday. They presume, therefore, that the people have showed up for them. Some attendees seek a musical concert for the pleasure of their ears. They too are narcissistic in that they attend for themselves to please themselves. The assembly, therefore, becomes an opportunity to be entertained.

And then there are those who enjoy a good social gathering with religious friends of a common heritage. These give honor to the fathers of their traditions, and subsequently, use every Sunday morning as an opportunity to renew their membership in the church social club that gathers under a unique name on Fifth Street and Main.

It is true that each attending member of a church may have some of the preceding motives in mind when attending a particular assembly. However, if the preceding motives—and others—are the primary reason

for checking off one's attendance chart on Sunday, then those who attend as a collective have to a great extent moved away from the gospel of Jesus Christ as the primary focus of any assembly.

In another book we wrote of an encounter with a preacher who had come across a border into a country we were visiting. We knew the preacher when we recognized him coming out of a food store. After the usual surprised greetings, we eventually came around to ask him why he had come from such a great distance and across the border. He simply replied, "We have no fruit of the vine back home for the Supper, so I came to buy a supply for the brethren."

Surprised? We should not be. With such consideration gospel-obedient believers consider the importance of the Supper in assemblies that honor Christ. Gospel-driven people will do unusual things to make sure

that they express their gratitude for the atonement of the cross, the gospel reign of Jesus, and His coming again. They want to be holding up a cup of the "blood" when He arrives in the clouds.

Preachers who are not narcissistic—as the preacher we encountered—will assist in any way so that the assembly of gospel-obedient saints release their gospel-responsive hearts in proclaiming the death, resurrection and reign of Jesus through the Supper. They need no commands to do such. They simply cannot help themselves but to remember the Lord for themselves, and remind the Lord to come and fetch them from this cruel world. These are those leaders who are a part of the gospel restoration movement that is presently sweeping across the world. They are leading the church in a gospel restoration movement.

Chapter 11

GOSPEL IDENTITY

The primary reason for gospel-obedient saints to show up at the assembly on Sunday is to exalt the Son of God as their Savior and to celebrate their commitment to the covenant they have with God. The assembly of the church of Christ centers around Christ, the only mediator we have

with God (1 Tm 2:5). This is the very foundation upon which Paul made the concluding statement of Romans 16:16: "*Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches [assemblies] of Christ greet you.*"

The word in this text that is commonly translated "church" is the

Greek word “assembly” (*ekklesia*). When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome with the statement, “all the churches (*ekklesia*) greet you,” he was reassuring the Christians in Rome by reminding them that they were not alone. There were other assemblies of Christ throughout the Roman Empire who were also meeting together in order to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Christ, and their Savior. They were publicly doing so through their participation in the Supper of the Lord. Each assembly of saints was identified as an assembly of Christ because the saints came together to proclaim through the Supper that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God (See Mt 16:18,19). He was Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15).

Legal identity and sectarianism were far from Paul’s thinking when he made the statement of Romans 16:16. He certainly had no intention of establishing a legal name for the church. He had just written an entire Spirit-inspired dissertation that resoundingly denounced that Christians were part of a legal sect under law. He proved that we are not under law, and thus made no attempt in this final chapter of his glorious epistle to legally name the church.

There are some who are quite inconsistent in their interpretation and application of passages as Romans 16:16. In the passage, to greet one

another with a holy kiss is an imperative (command). However, reference to the “churches of Christ” is simply a declarative statement. Some would make the declarative a command, while making the imperative of the holy kiss a declarative. When names and traditions of a legal restoration become heritage theology, it is difficult to transition to the gospel of grace.

Paul wrote Romans in order to state that we are not under law, but under the gospel of grace. He would certainly not have contradicted himself when he came to the final chapter of Romans. His proposition throughout Romans was that we are “*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rm 3:24). He eventually concluded, “*Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of law*” (Rm 3:28). “*For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace*” (Rm 6:14).

If we would seek to revert to justification through perfect law-keeping, then we would be returning to the law of sin and death (Rm 8:2). By the time Paul came to chapter 16, he wanted his Roman Christian readers to know that they were not alone, for others were assembling under the name of Christ and were celebrating their victory over sin by the grace that was revealed through Jesus Christ.

With that said, those of the assembly of Christ, therefore, **can never find their identity in a legal name.** The church can never be identified by the members' establishment of some system of legal assembly, and thus become a religious sect among other sects. It is for this reason that established legal acts of worship can never identify the assembly of gospel-driven people. As soon as gospel-identified people morph into a legal identity, they are no longer under grace, but under meritorious law-keeping, and thus under the law of sin and death. **It is their celebration of the gospel of grace that identifies the people of God.**

Paul's entire argument in Romans and Galatians was that God's people are identified by a grace response to the heart of God apart from law. They are gospel-driven, not law-driven. And for this reason, they can find no comfort in perfect law-keeping. Their comfort is in the gospel of the grace of God.

Does this mean that Christians are not under instructions from God because they have been justified before God by trusting in His grace? Paul would answer, "*Do we then make void law through faith [in God's grace]? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law*" (Rm 3:31). Gospel motivated children establish law in their lives by asking in thanks-

giving that their Father should instruct them as His children. Grace-saved people are thus fervent students of their Father's instructions (Bible) because of their overwhelming appreciation of their Father's grace. On the other hand, cries for grace are hollow when they come from those who do not study their Bibles.

When the saints digress from gospel motivation to be instructed by their Father, to identifying themselves through their own meritorious obedience by law-keeping, then they know that they have become another sect as other religious groups that are not gospel-motivated by faith in the grace of God. When we identify ourselves in name only, then we know that we have become a sect of meritorious law-keepers, or a group of tradition keepers who seek to protect our identity by name only. We have exchanged a gospel restoration of grace for a legal restoration movement of law-keeping.

Those who are sectarian often boast in the rules of their sect. It is for this reason that sectarianism is inherently boastful in order that the adherents of the sect legally identify themselves as a unique sect. Subsequently, legal restorationists who trust in their ritual-keeping sectarianism take pride in the rules of their identity. Such people should be reminded of what the Holy Spirit said of those

who seek to boast in their legal righteousness: “*Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith [in the grace of God]*” (Rm 3:27).

The members of the body of Christ assemble to celebrate the fact that they are grace-saved people, and not self-justified by their perfect law-keeping. The Lord’s Supper is the centrality of their assembly because they celebrate the fact that they are not a sect that is identified by law-keeping. They are identified as grace-respondent disciples of the One who was revealed as the Son of God at Calvary through His incarnational offering (Mt 27:54).

Those who are still struggling to meritoriously obey legal acts of worship in order to prove their identity have missed the point. Grace-motivated disciples assemble on the first day of the week because they are of Christ, **not** because they feel compelled under law in order to validate themselves as the church through law-keeping. If they were to assemble in order to validate themselves as the church through meritorious obedience to legal acts of ceremonial worship, then they would be contravening the gospel of grace by which they are to be motivated. If they seek to be under a “law of worship,” then they are no longer under grace (Rm 6:14). If one can ceremonially perform his per-

fect worship through assigned rituals, what need is there of grace?

In our efforts to be transferred unto the gospel restoration of the Son of God we often bring with us theological baggage from our former residency in legal restorationism. **It is simply a contradiction to assert that we are a grace-defined church of God, while at the same time, we seek to legally identify ourselves as a church through meritorious laws of worship.**

We must refer to those religious groups who see no need to assemble around the table of the Lord to express their gratitude for the gospel of God’s grace. We must reflect on their motivation for assembly. If they partake of the Supper only periodically, then they only periodically proclaim Jesus Christ as the primary personality for their assembly. They do so because they have simply minimized the importance of the Supper by their infrequent observance of the Supper.

We would correctly assume that those who have not obeyed the gospel in baptism would have little motivation to celebrate the gospel when they assemble. Narcissistic worshippers rarely celebrate the gospel simply because the purpose for their assembly is often not gospel focused. When our assembly is on “me,” then we have little desire to remember “He” (Jesus). But when our assembly is

always focused on the incarnational, resurrected, and reigning Son of God, then it is not possible to assemble without remembering through the Supper who He is and our calling on Him to return.

Those who have obeyed the gospel need no commands to remember the gospel of Jesus when they come together. They need no law for a weekly proclamation of the gospel during their assemblies. Gospel celebration is a natural response of gospel-obedient people.

It is for this reason that the encouragement of Romans 16:16 is just as relevant today as it was when it was first penned two thousand years ago. There are thousands of assemblies of the saints around the world today who are continually celebrating Jesus Christ who gave Himself as an atoning sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. The members of these assemblies need no law to meritoriously act out some form of worship. Their observance of the Supper of the gospel of

Jesus identifies the One on whom they focus when they come together in assembly.

When Jesus Christ is the star attraction of our lives, we thirst to glorify and remember Him around His table “as-often-as” we can. And when all the elements can be provided when we come together in the “assemblies of Christ,” it is unthinkable not to commune together with our Savior around the table.

After all our attempts to be identified legally as the disciples of Jesus, our identity still rests on the foundation of how Jesus said we would be identified as His disciples. There is nothing complicated about this identity as it was clearly revealed in the following statement:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another** (Jn 13:34,35).*

Chapter 12

GOSPEL OF HOPE

The gospel story has not been finalized. There is one last event that will conclude history and sum up all that was planned before the creation of the world (See 1 Pt 1:20).

Life would be an existence of de-

spair if there were no hope of life after death. The gospel, therefore, would mean nothing if there were no final chapter of hope to survive death. What good would be a faith if there were no future beyond enduring the

trials of this life? We who believe would be as Paul wrote, “*If we have hope in Christ only in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied*” (1 Co 15:19). And if there were no life after death, then enduring life would be most difficult. The hope that this life is not all there is gives meaning to life itself. The gospel, therefore, is good news for our sanctification from sin only in view of the fact that we will exist beyond death. But if there is no resurrection coming that will deliver us into eternal life, then there is no good news about the sanctifying blood of the cross. Our resurrection to come validates the sacrificial offering of the Son in the past. In other words, there would have been no need for the cross if there were no resurrection to come.

In Jesus’ final words to His disciples before His crucifixion, He prepared them for hope.

I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, so that where I am, there you may be also (Jn 14:2,3).

This was the foundation upon which the early disciples based their faith as they went forth into all the tribulation of the world. About a week before the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles in Acts 2, it took two angels to remind the apostles that there

was a gospel of hope in Jesus’ coming again to receive them unto Himself. He left them at the ascension, but He would come again. After Jesus ascended, the angels said to the stunned apostles,

You men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in like manner as you have watched Him go into heaven (At 1:11).

This was the first announcement after His ascension that Jesus would come again and complete the gospel that was planned before the creation of the world (1 Pt 1:20). This was, therefore, an announcement of the final chapter of the gospel.

Our predicament of life was written by Isaiah and reaffirmed in quotation by the Hebrew writer:

Therefore, since the children are partakers of flesh and blood [that will eventually die], He [the Son of God] also Himself likewise partook of the same, so that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Hb 2:14,15).

We are in the bondage of a physical

body that is subject to death. And if there were no resurrection, then our end would be hopeless and our fear of death would be justified.

But the promises of the Son of God that are validated to be real on the basis of His resurrection from the dead, has changed all this. In our obedience to the gospel, we have come into the new paradigm of eternal life (2 Tm 2:20; 1 Jn 5:11). The gospel of the resurrection means hope for a body that was destined to be terminal. The Word become flesh in order that *“in His name the Gentiles [nations] will hope”* (Mt 12:21). David declared, *“Therefore, my heart rejoiced and my tongue was glad. Moreover, my flesh will also rest in hope [of the resurrection]”* (At 2:26). Paul stood before unbelievers and proclaimed, *“I am being judged for the hope and resurrection of the dead”* (At 23:6). Christians, therefore, can stand firm in the fact that they *“have hope in God”* (At 24:15).

The gospel of our hope is strong. It is so strong that it moves us to keep our focus on the cross. It compels us to look forward to the future coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was in the meaning of Paul’s words when he wrote, *“For we are saved by hope”* (Rm 8:24). Because of this hope, we remain steadfast in the gospel which we obeyed. Our hope, therefore, must be beyond this world in order to keep

our minds focused on that which is above.

“Hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man sees, why does he still hope for it?” (Rm 8:24). Therefore, *“if we hope for what we do not see, then with perseverance we wait for it”* (Rm 8:24). It is the gospel of the final coming of Jesus that keeps our minds focused on Him who is above this world (Cl 3:1,2). Hope moves our minds beyond this life.

Hope in His final coming, therefore, is the foundation of stability upon which we base our gospel living. It is such because we can see beyond this life as a result of His resurrection from the dead. It is as Paul wrote to the Achaians, *“Seeing then that we have such hope [in life beyond death], we use great boldness in our speech”* (2 Co 3:12). Or, we might say that we “use great boldness” in our behavior.

It is the gospel of our hope in His final coming that leads to *“rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulations, continuing steadfastly in prayer”* (Rm 12:12). Hope is the motivation by which we keep our lives focused on living the sanctified life. John wrote, *“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”* (1 Jn 3:3).

Before we came into Christ, we were *“strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and with-*

out God in the world” (Ep 2:12). Death meant the end of everything. No comforting words could ever have been said to us on our death bed. But when we came into Christ, the funeral atmosphere changed. We now “*believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus*” (1 Th 4:14). If we die before Jesus comes again, then we will be in that company of souls He will bring with Him when He comes for the living saints. For this reason, when we consider those brothers and sisters who have died, we “*do not grieve as others who have no hope*” (1 Th 4:13).

The funeral of the unbeliever is a scene of termination and sadness. But the funeral of the believer is a celebration of one who has been delivered from the trials and tribulations of this present world. Because of our faith in Christ Jesus, Paul wrote that there has come to us “*the hope that is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel*” (Cl 1:5). For this reason, we must not be tempted to move “*away from the hope of the gospel*” that we have heard (Cl 1:23). If we remain steadfast in our hope of His coming to take us home with Him, we will certainly reap the rewards of this hope.

Paul would ask all of us, “*For*

what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” (1 Th 2:19). This is the gospel we preach to the world. This is the message of good news that brings hope of glory that is yet to come.

It is the desire of the evangelist to go forth with the gospel of hope in order that in the end, he may do as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “... *so that I may present you as a pure virgin to Christ*” when He comes again (2 Co 11:2). Paul preached in order “*to present you [Colossians] holy and blameless and beyond reproach in His sight*” (Cl 1:22; see Jd 24).

We eagerly yearn for this conclusion that validates the necessity of the incarnation of the Son of God. Paul was evidently so overcome with excitement about this matter that when he finally finished the chapter of the gospel of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, he simply stated in his final words, “*Come, O Lord*” (1 Co 16:22). John evidently experienced the same emotional euphoria when he finished inscribing the visions of Revelation. “*He [Jesus Christ] who testifies these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus*” (Rv 22:20).

We too cannot but thank enough “*our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and*

given us everlasting comfort and good hope through grace” (2 Th 2:16). So we walk “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Ti 1:2; see 3:7). We will, therefore, remain to be the faithful house of God “if we hold fast to the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (Hb 3:6; 6:11,18). It is the gospel of hope that we have as an “anchor of the soul”

(Hb 6:19). It is an anchor of our soul because it is based on the foundation of “*the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (1 Pt 1:3). Peter’s concluding words are appropriate:

Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind. Be sober and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pt 1:13).

Epilogue

We do not know much of what will transpire when Jesus comes again. It would thus be fruitless to speculate concerning those matters that are beyond our empirical abilities to understand. However, we must caution ourselves about the speculations of those who presume to know much about that which has yet to be experienced, or revealed.

Though we may not know a great deal about what will be revealed, we can caution ourselves about believing those things that are contrary to the very nature of the gospel. This is especially true in reference to the incarnational dwelling of Jesus among us, and the revealed teaching of the Holy Spirit about living the gospel. There are some very important points to remember in reference to our hope of dwelling in eternity:

- **Our hope is not in carnal things.**

In living the incarnational life after the example of the incarnate Word, we have spiritually grown to the point where we consider the things of this world not to be coveted when there are needs to fulfill (At 4:32). We have thus lived a gospel life where we counted as “dung” those things of the world that we once coveted to be the center of attraction in our lives (Ph 3:8).

When we obeyed the gospel, we refocused. Our minds have been focused on those things that are above, and not on the things of this world (Cl 3:1,2). We have left all for Christ. We could go on with the host of examples in the New Testament and in the lives of many we know who have forsaken the world in order to preach the gospel to the world. But throughout our entire lives of living the gospel, we have sought not to be carnal.

It would certainly be inconsistent

to believe that heaven is a worldly place of dwelling. We have struggled all our lives to detach ourselves from that which is carnal. Would it be reasonable to believe that what we would inherent in heaven would be carnal? We lived to emotionally detach ourselves from the value of gold. Would we then assume that God will give us gold in heaven? The truth would be that gold is so worthless in heaven—we speak metaphorically—that it is used to pave streets.

Heaven cannot be that which we have denied throughout our incarnational living in this world. Heaven will not be an environment wherein gospel living will be reversed.

- **Our hope is not vindictive.** The Hebrew writer reminded his readers that vengeance was God’s business (Hb 10:30). And when Jesus comes again, He will come with His vengeance (2 Th 1:8). The point is that the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures has taught us throughout our life of living the gospel that we must put away all vindictive feelings toward those who persecute us. When Jesus comes again, therefore, He will not put us in an environment where we can carry out vengeance on those who did us harm in our lifetime.

We must be cautious, therefore, about end-of-time prognosticators who seek to convince us that we will

reign over our persecutors. Such a theology is vindictive. It is contrary to incarnational living. Such is contrary to the spirit of what Jesus uttered from the cross: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Lk 23:34).

- **Our hope does not thirst for power.** When Paul wrote that we now reign in life with our Lord Jesus Christ who is now reigning, he did not want us to assume that there was coming a time when we would rule over unbelievers on this earth (Rm 5:17). Such a teaching would be contrary to the spirit of gospel submission.

Our “spiritual” reign over unrighteousness would last as long as the reign of Jesus. And the reign of Jesus will terminate when He has subjected the last enemy, which is death (1 Co 15:26,27). It will be then that Jesus will return kingdom reign to the One who subjected all things to Him. *“And when all things are subjected to Him, then will the Son also Himself be subject to Him who put all things under Him”* (1 Co 15:28). Physical death will end with the resurrection. It will be then that the reign of the Son of God will also end. At that time our reign with Him will end.

We must be cautious about any theology that would assume that our spiritual reign with Christ now will be changed to a physical reign here

on earth sometime in the future. Such hopes appeal to our narcissistic inclinations, and are thus totally contrary to the mind of the incarnate Son of God we sought to follow all our lives. We would ask why would God give us a hope that was totally contrary to the gospel of the incarnate Son of God? Why would He reverse the mind of Christ by which we have struggled to live with a carnal reign over the wicked on earth?

We must always keep in mind

that Jesus has prepared our character in life in order to coexist in heaven with others in a paradigm of eternal life. Any theology that contradicts what Jesus is training us to be now, cannot be true when He comes again. We can envision heaven to be a place where incarnate disciples of Jesus coexist with one another forever. This is the purpose of “church” as we learn to live with one another in preparation for eternal dwelling in the presence of God.