

Inscriptions

JUST SAYING



III

DICKSON

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Roger E. Dickson

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Preface

Inscriptions are written for the purpose of publishing editorial teaching—sometimes opinions—on matters that affect our daily living as disciples of Christ. Each *Inscription* has been prompted by something that has currently happened, usually in reference to something in the world of religion. Though sometimes influenced by a political or social event, I have tried to stay focused on the Bible as our foundation of faith, and thus, our guide through times of turmoil.

It is not necessary to agree with all the conclusions that I have made in every editorial. No writer should ever expect others to agree with him totally on every point. As we reserve our right to have personal opinions, we also honor the opinions of others. If we would expect total agreement on every point of discussion, then we would be moving in a direction of religion.

The problem with religion is that some charismatic personalities have often “stolen the show,” and thus moved Jesus into a secondary figure of influence in reference to their faith. When God sent His Son into this world through His humble birth in Bethlehem, He intended that our total focus be on Him. We would not, therefore, work in any way to divert the attention of others from Jesus to some man.

This is the problem with religion. Religion exists because faithful adherents bind themselves to either accepted traditions, or obedience to some systematic ceremonies of rites and rituals by which self-sanctification is supposedly achieved. If there were a primary focus of the message of the *Inscriptions* in general, it would be to exalt the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation, and eventual consummation of all things of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must never allow ourselves to be diverted from this objective.

There is one axiomatic principle that is always true in reference to the conflict between gospel and religion: Our common belief in and obedience to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will always bring us closer together; religion, however, will always move us further apart from one another. The more religious oriented we become, the further we move away from one another.

It is my prayer that the reader will not forget this principle when

reading through the *Inscriptions*. Our goal must always be to focus the minds of the people on the gospel, and thus, bring people of faith closer together. Though we may have different opinions on various matters, at least we can all agree on the one gospel as the foundation of our common faith.

As with this third volume of *Inscriptions*, I ask for the help of all recipients of this volume to share it with others around the world. I am indeed thankful for the thousands of partners who have worked with me throughout the years in the distribution of the books of the *Biblical Research Library*. Thousands of volumes of the *Biblical Research Library* have been downloaded and shared worldwide in this partnership. So I appreciate your continued partnership in this mission to both preach the gospel to the world, as well as teach the word of God through the distribution of this and other volumes.

Most people are not writers. Therefore, you can join with us in distributing the volumes of the *Biblical Research Library* in a partnership ministry. Many others are doing this in order to help people find their way out of the quagmire of religion and step into the freedom that we all have in Christ. Your partnership with us in this literary mission, therefore, is a partnership of releasing the captives from the bondage of religion in order to bring them into the joy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Roger E. Dickson
Philadelphia,
South Africa
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Chapter 1

GLOBAL PERSECUTION

Christians around the world are finding it difficult today to live in many societies according to the central code of peace and love by which they are identified as the children of God. This is nothing new. In the very beginning, and before the blood dried on the cross of crucifixion, there was a relentless opposition that was unleashed against the first Christians by the early Jewish religious leadership of Judaism. These leaders sought to stomp out the roots of the Christian faith before it went beyond the borders of Palestine. After the Jewish leaders had nailed the Christ to the cross, they shadowed the early messengers of the gospel from city to city in an effort to silence their voices from proclaiming Jesus as Lord and King of the world. Regardless of their relentless opposition, however, those early Jewish persecutors failed.

And then came the secular persecution by the Roman Emperor Nero in his personal vendetta against Christians. He crucified Christians on crosses and accused them of being enemies of the state. Fortunately, he committed suicide in A.D. 69, and thus failed in his efforts to stymie Christianity in Rome. He failed because Christians would not succumb to his narcissistic obsession against anyone who would not refer to him as lord.

Then came the state persecution of the Roman Empire. Beginning in the latter part of the first century, and continuing for almost 150 years, the Roman state rose up its beastly head in order to vanquish Christians from the Roman Empire. But the early Christians stood up against the Roman state. They bravely hid in the underground catacombs of the city of Rome. When caught, they proudly confessed Jesus as their only Lord while lions came rushing down upon them in the amphitheaters of Rome for the entertainment of the people. But the Christians stood firm, being willing to die for their faith. And because they were willing to die for their faith, Christianity survived. The Roman state persecutors failed. Emperor Constantine finally relinquished

and signed the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 311.

For several centuries after the faith of those early persecuted heroes of faith, there has been only regional persecution of Christians as a whole, that is, until the arrival of the 21st century. In a recent report of the UK Foreign Office the world was recently shocked into reality in reference to the persecution of Christians throughout the world. The Foreign Office reported that **Christians are now the most persecuted religious group in the world**. The Office reported that over **3,000 Christians die every year because of their faith in Jesus Christ**. In 2018 in France alone, over 1,000 Protestant church buildings were vandalized. In the Middle East, the birthplace of Christianity, the number of Christian citizens has dropped from 20% of the population a century ago to less than 4% today. In Iraq, Christians once numbered 1.3 million in 2003. But today the number is less than 120,000. In Syria during the rise and conflict with ISIS the number of Christians in that country went from 1.5 million in 2011 to 450,000 today. It has been reported that the Christians who now reside in Syria live in peace only in government and Kurdish controlled areas. It is now estimated that 245,000,000 Christians in 50 countries around the world live in societies that are hostile to the Christian faith.

Russia Today is an English talk show that is broadcast internationally both out of American and Russia. It is hosted by Peter Levelle. It is a media broadcast that is sponsored by the Russian government. We think it is quite interesting that this talk show out of Russia recently issued a clear message to the world that Christianity is under attack. At the same time, the news media of the West has simply rolled over on its back on this issue. There is total silence on the reality of Christian persecution in the Western news media. In fact, Levelle said on a recent broadcast, **“The secular West has turned its back on Christianity.”**

On a recent *Russia Today* broadcast that aired on May 10, 2019, one special guest stated, “In the West it is no longer politically correct to defend Christians.” On the other hand, if something derogatory is ever said against another religious group, the adherents of the group, and the Western new media, rise up in protest. Western politicians are

quite mute when Christians are persecuted throughout the world.

Levelle added, “There is no penalty in the West for slandering Christians.” He added that in general the liberals in the American political system down play the Christian roots of America. There are no political points to be gained by publicly defending Christianity.

The nation that led the way with a missionary force to preach the gospel to the world, has now to a great extent turned its back on the gospel that built America. Through the motivation of the gospel, hospitals, schools, and orphanages were built around the world. It was a faith in the gospel that stopped the slave trade in the 19th century. But because of the passive attitude of Western “Christianity,” there is little said in the news media concerning the rise of persecution that has now risen its ugly head against Christianity throughout the world. It is simply no longer politically correct in the West to defend Christianity.

The Western political society is vigilant to defend the religious rights of any faith as long as it is not Christianity. The Western Christian has forgotten that it is not the strength of other non-Christian faiths that has led to their rise in the world, but **the weakness of Christians who will not stand up for their faith**. For example, because of the spiritual void that has been left in Europe because the people have largely given up on Christ in the last century, other religions are filling in the gap. The same is happening in America.

But the problem goes deeper. With the rise of the global elite of rich corporations, there is a concerted effort against any world view that teaches social responsibility toward the working class of society. The rich global elite cannot feel at ease when people with Christian values march on the streets of France against financial inequity. The Western elite simply want the value system of Christianity to go away in order that they continue on with a clear conscience that is free from the Christian world view. With a clear conscience, the rich want to continue to exploit the working class for the sake of the shareholders.

Add to the preceding the antagonism of the Western liberals who stand for many moral values and behaviors that are contrary to the Christian world view. Christian moral values have been historically against the moral social behavior of the liberal. Therefore, the social liberal

would just as soon be relieved of those Christians who defend their Bibles against moral social dysfunctions. In view of the self-justification of the global elite and the moral liberal, we are not surprised that the West has little motivation to preserve a conservative faith upon which it was originally built.

Contrary to those who preserved Christianity in the early centuries of its birth, **there are few Christians today who are willing to die for their faith.** No moral liberal will defend the conservative morals of Christianity. No global financial elite class will stand up for economic equality. The shareholders of the corporation will not allow him to do so. And since Christians are considered a soft target because of their world view of peace and love, they will continue to be persecuted by the intolerant of other faiths.

America in its last days is now in the throes of having deserted the conservative world view of Christianity that made it so great. With spiritually weak politicians sitting in seats of government in the West, the West will eventually follow in the steps of all those societies that forsook moral values.

In a democracy, the politicians can only function on the basis of their voting constituency. Their voting constituency will vote them out of office if they do not conform to the wishes of a secular society that despises the conservative moral world view of Christianity. As the Western civilization becomes more anti-Christian in general, such will be reflected in Washington. Subsequently, the politicians who make the decisions for the populous in the present and future will vote the moral status of the people.

In a democracy, the government is only a reflection of society. Therefore, the politicians in a democracy will follow their non-Christian voters into a moral vacancy that will be gladly, as in Europe, filled by any non-Christian faith that comes along. In the case of Europe, it is Islam.

This picture will not get better. We cannot even say that it will get worse before it gets better. This is not the way Satan works. Societies that give up on the King in heaven always end up as the society that is described in **Genesis 6:5**.

The grandchildren and great grandchildren of America will live in a non-Christian society as in the Middle East where the society in general is hostile toward Christianity. It has already begun. Dangers within any society in the present are rarely heeded in order to preserve the future.

Chapter 2

GRACE GIVING

There is a difference between being a Christian in response to law and being the same in response to grace. The difference is often revealed in one's contributions. Those who have become Christians on a legal basis in response to law-keeping often seek to give according to law. On the other hand, those who respond in their lives to the grace of God always give more.

In writing to Christians in Rome, the Holy Spirit, through the hand of Paul, reminded the Roman Christians, "***You are not under law, but under grace***" (Rm 6:14). If we consider this truth in reference to our contributions, a vast difference is seen between those who respond to legal giving according to law and those who give out of their gratitude for God's grace.

For example, in order to extract contributions from the hands of those who live by law, preachers have often resorted to law in order to inspire guilt in the hearts of the "lawgivers." The desired result is that at least a few coins are dropped into the collection plate. At the most, one will confine his or her giving to ten percent (the tithe). When such grudging givers do flip in a couple coins, or give as much as ten percent, they go on their way, having satisfied themselves that they have given according to law. And thus for another week they have the church leaders off their backs until another call for contributions is made again the following Sunday.

This law-obedient religious culture is more common than not. In order to inspire more contributions, therefore, what preachers often do

is ignore the gospel of grace in order to bring the people under law. They take the people back under the tithing commandment of the Sinai law that was given exclusively to Israel as part of the Sinai law. In doing so, they have ignored grace for the sake of law, and thus have reversed what the Holy Spirit said to the Roman disciples. Instead of reminding the people that we are under grace and not under law, we often seek to inspire the contributors to give because of the tithing law of the Sinai law. In doing so, we forget motivating people to give in response to the grace of the cross. If we seek to inspire people to give, we must preach the gospel of grace, not law.

We must not forget that grace is far more powerful than law in reference to motivating people to live and give. To illustrate this fact, we would journey back to the Israelites when they were initially born as a nation at the foot of Mt. Sinai. It had been only three months since they were delivered as a culture of people from Egyptian captivity. But it was at Mt. Sinai that God signed a covenant with the people, and thus the nation of Israel was inaugurated into existence. Tithing was a part of the Sinai law that God gave as a condition for keeping the covenant. We must remember, however, that the people at the foot of Mt. Sinai did not initially give in obedience to the tithing law, for it was not yet given.

On the contrary, at the time when the people were truly grateful to God for His grace in delivering them out of Egyptian captivity, they were inspired to give. It was only by His grace that they stood free at Mt. Sinai. They could not have delivered themselves. So when it came time to contribute, Moses did not quote a “tithing law” to them. He simply informed the people that there was a need to contribute to the construction of the tabernacle that God had commanded them to build. Grace took it from there.

It was grace that motivated the people to give, not law. The Israelites’ appreciation for their deliverance from captivity because of God’s grace was so powerful in their hearts that the builders of the tabernacle had a problem. They came to Moses and said “*The people bring **more than enough** for the construction work [of the tabernacle] that the Lord commanded us to make*” (Ex 36:5).

The Lord had commanded that the tabernacle and its furnishings be built. A specific task was to be completed, and contributions for the materials were subsequently needed. Then the people, because of their gratitude for being delivered from captivity by the grace of God, exceeded what God required. Now notice what the preacher Moses had to say to the people:

Then Moses gave commandment and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, “Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary (Ex 36:6).

Now listen to this: “***So the people were restrained from bringing more***” (Ex 36:6). The people gave in order to fulfill a need, but they gave out of appreciation for God’s grace in delivering them from captivity. Their contribution was so bountiful that they needed to be restrained from giving. This is the power of grace over law in reference to contributions.

This same giving in appreciate for grace was clearly illustrated during Jesus’ ministry. It was revealed in the heart of a poor widow who had not yet experienced the grace of the sacrificial Son of God on the cross. Nevertheless, she spiritually grew past giving in fulfillment of law requirements. On a particular occasion, Jesus witnessed contributions that were being given into the temple treasury. He was standing and watching the people make their contributions. “***He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins***” (Lk 21:2). As a testimony of her heart, He said of the poor widow, “***She out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had***” (Lk 21:4). This contribution was certainly more than ten percent. It was one hundred percent. This is what grace will do to one’s heart in reference to giving. Sometimes we must have so little in order to appreciate how rich we are because of the grace of God.

Law will never move one to the point of giving one’s last two coins. When the traveling salesperson, Lydia, and the government employee, the jailor, responded to the gospel in the city of Philippi, the Holy Spirit gave a testimony as to how far grace will take one’s heart

beyond law. Only a few days (At 16:12) after their obedience to the gospel, and when Paul went on to Thessalonica from Philippi, Paul later wrote of their mission giving: They sent “***once and again for my needs***” (Ph 4:16).

The power of the grace of God at work in the hearts of the first Christians in Philippi did not stop with supporting only the mission efforts of Paul when he went on to Thessalonica. A few years later when there was a famine in Judea, the Philippians’ appreciation for the grace of God once again stirred them into action. Grace worked so powerfully in their hearts that they gave as those Israelites who responded overwhelmingly to give to the special need of building the tabernacle. Paul wrote the following to some forgetful, if not stingy Christians in Corinth who conveniently forgot to follow through with their promise to give to the saints in Judea: “*Moreover, brethren [in Corinth], we make known to you **the grace of God** that has been given to the churches of Macedonia,*” the province wherein the city of Philippi was located (2 Co 8:1).

As the poor widow who gave her last two coins, so also the Christians in Macedonia gave in whose hearts was also the spirit of grace. Paul continued, “*In a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and **their deep poverty, abounded in the riches of their liberality***” (2 Co 8:2).

There are some who ungratefully assume that they are too poor to contribute. They should make this excuse to the crucified Son of God who impoverished Himself of heaven in order to deliver us from the captivity of sin. Some in their knowledge of the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God on the cross are still unwilling to give as the poor widow who had no knowledge of the extent to what the Son of God gave up for us.

Paul was not finished with the gratitude of the poor disciples of Macedonia. “*For I testify that according to their ability [they gave], yes, **and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord***” (2 Co 8:3). We can only imagine what Paul felt when the poor Macedonian saints offered him their contributions to take to the suffering saints in Judea. We are sure he was somewhat reluctant to take their contributions.

The Macedonian Christians seem to have sensed that Paul was reluctant about taking their contributions for the famine victims of Judea. So they did something quite remarkable. Paul wrote of the incident that they were *“begging us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints”* (2 Co 8:4).

The saints in all of Macedonia knew that if they were to have fellowship with the worldwide body of Christ, they too had to give to the special need in Judea. And in their case, no one used his or her poverty as an excuse not to give to the general collection. They knew that they were individually poor. Nevertheless, they also knew that if they gave collectively, then the combined contributions of the universal church would be substantial. But everyone had to give individually. If they did not give individually, then they, as members of the body, would have had no fellowship with the universal body of Christ.

If we allow the grace of God to work in our hearts, then He will do through us *“exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power [of the gospel of grace] that works in us”* (Ep 3:20). Law will never get one to the limits to which grace will take us in reference to giving. A “tithing law” will get one grudgingly to ten percent. But grace will move one cheerfully to give his or her last two coins.

For those who walk in gratitude for the grace of God, the ten percent tithe is too restrictive. Unfortunately for some, because of the power of grace, they would rather stay under the law of the ten percent (tithe) and forget the grace of God that was revealed on the cross. It is more convenient to live under the restriction of the tithe (ten percent) than to be motivated beyond measure by grace.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison, he reminded them of the example of the Son of God: *“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God”* (Ph 2:5,6). Subsequently, on His gospel journey to bring us into the loving arms of God, the Son of God *“made Himself of no reputation”* (Ph 2:7). He was made *“in the likeness of men”* in order to go to the cross for us in order that we go into the riches of eternal heaven (Ph 2:7,8). If the Son of God could do

this for us, then certainly there is no limit to which we can go for Him. If we claim to be disciples of this God in the flesh who was nailed to an old rugged cross, then there is no excuse to withhold our resources from supporting His continued mission.

By the time Paul finished the revelation of Philippians 2 in reference to the awesome sacrifice of Jesus, he was surely overcome with emotion when he inscribed the following words: “*But what things were gain to me [before I obeyed the gospel], **those things I have counted loss for Christ***” (Ph 3:7). The Holy Spirit allowed him to inscribe more emphatically: “***I count them refuse** [Gr. dung] so that I may gain Christ*” (Ph 3:8).

We have too many among us who were baptized according to law, but did not respond to the gospel in appreciation for the grace of God that was revealed on the cross. Those who are disciples by law will often continue to walk according to law. Subsequently, they will often contribute as little as possible in order to comply only with law.

We believe that many Christians are still living according to law in this manner. They do so because they are reminded every Sunday by the preacher that they must tithe according to the Sinai law. But we must remind ourselves that Christians are no longer under the restrictions of the Sinai law (See Rm 7:1-7; Cl 2:14). Christians are under grace, not law. Therefore, when Christians live according to the gospel of grace, it is an entirely different way of life. Paul explained:

*For all things [in reference to the gospel] are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people **may cause thanksgiving to abound** to the glory of God (2 Co 4:15).*

If a Christian does not understand what Paul just said in this statement, then he or she is still living under law and not under grace. It is only when we live by the grace of God that we will be cheerful givers in giving beyond measure, just as the early Christians.

Chapter 3

GLORY ONLY IN CHRIST

Jesus knew that after He departed from this world, those who would be more religious than Christ-centered would do something very interesting. So in His personal instructions to His apostles, He warned them not to be misdirected by the spirit of self-glorifying that resides within the nature of every person. In order to prevent what He knew would come, He first alerted the apostles to the source of the truth that would be revealed to them: “*When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you [apostles] into all the truth*” (Jn 16:13).

This was a specific promise to the apostles concerning the truth that the Spirit would bring to them. In other words, they could not take any credit for the truth that the Spirit would reveal. The apostles would be guided into all the truth that the Spirit would receive from the Father (See Jn 16:14). This truth that was sourced from the Father was a guarantee that any self-seeking disciples could not separate unto himself those who would follow his own doctrines and commandments.

Since religious people often seek glory by deriving “truth” from every source except the Spirit-inspired word of God, Jesus alerted His apostles of the desires of those who would seek to glorify their own teachings, and thus their own unique religious groups. He knew that some would arise among the disciples who would seek to glorify themselves through their own unique groups that were centered around themselves (See At 20:30).

In John 16:14, therefore, Jesus made it clear to the apostles who would be glorified: “*He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify Me.*” **It would not be the purpose of the Holy Spirit to glorify Himself.** We would assume, therefore, that any religious group that glorifies the Holy Spirit over Jesus is not a church that Christ built (See Mt 16:18). But the glory that men seek often violates this principle of who is to receive the glory.

In His final prayer to the Father, Jesus reminds us of the principle

that He spoke personally to the disciples during His ministry: “*And now, O Father, glorify Me with Yourself with the glory that I had with You before the world was*” (Jn 17:5). If we do not understand the principle that all glory is to be given only to our Lord Jesus Christ, then we can never be united on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The glorification of something, someone, or some doctrine or methodology over Christ is often reflected today in minor things as the names that religious people claim for themselves in order to identify and glorify their own unique religious group. We would suggest that one go through their own local telephone book and observe the numerous names by which church groups identify themselves. We seem to be obsessed with identifying ourselves according to different religious heritages, favorite doctrines, famous sages, and whatever seems to bring glory to our unique group.

Our telephone books are a testimony of the extent to which people will go in order to separate themselves from one another with a unique name that glorifies their particular religious heritage.

In our efforts to keep ourselves apart from one another, glory seems to be given to everything and everyone except the One upon whom we are founded, and into whom we came when we obeyed the gospel. We seem to have this urge to glorify the names of men, origins of our particular group, some methodology, some unique doctrine, and for some, to glorify even a Jewish feast – Pentecost. Actually, it is quite interesting to witness the extent to which people will go to keep themselves identified as a unique religious group by standing under the sign of their own unique name. The names of identity seem now to be so entrenched in the religious world that being just “Christians only” appears to be impossible.

We once traveled for several hours in a small airplane into the interior of Brazil in order to meet with a sincere individual who sought to restore simple Christianity in his small town. Once we landed at the local airport, it took us a few hours to actually track down this very sincere Bible student who wanted to do that which was according to the word of God. Once we discovered the truth-seeker, he took us to a small building that he and the other members had constructed in the

bush for their assembly on Sunday.

We noticed a sign above the door as we entered into the small rugged building. The hand-carved sign reflected that by which the small group of disciples wanted to be identified. The sign simply read, “Igreja,” the Portuguese word for “church.” By way of explanation, the truth-seeking leader said, “In reading the New Testament, this was the best we could come up with since there is no specific name given for the identity of us people who meet for Christ.”

Any Bible student knows that there are numerous references to Christians in the New Testament. However, there is no unique name that is given for Christians as the universal body of Christ. The lack of a specific name seems to indicate that the Holy Spirit was saying that we should not divide ourselves from one another by our own favorite name that we would choose in order to denominate ourselves from others who had obeyed the gospel.

In the first century, the disciples were simply identified as “Christians.” And ironically, this identity came from those who were not Christians (See At 11:26). Nevertheless, the early disciples seem to have taken the name and run with it (1 Pt 4:16). The unique identity of all the disciples as a whole in any particular city in which they lived was as the example of how Paul addressed the Christians in Corinth: “The church of God that is at Corinth” (1 Co 1:2).

Here is another example: The Holy Spirit sought to encourage the Christians who lived in the seat of what would eventually become the source of Roman persecution. At the time of encouragement, the disciples were meeting in their homes throughout the city of Rome. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, through Paul, sought to encourage these disciples with news that there were also Christians assembling throughout the Roman Empire.

But before noting the Spirit’s encouragement of the Christians in Rome, we must take a look at the situation in which the Roman Christians found themselves. Suppose you were meeting with your family and a few other friends in your house in the idolatrous Rome (See Rm 16:5). You knew of several other disciples whom Paul mentioned that were meeting in other houses throughout the area (See Rm 16:1-15).

At the time, however, all these disciples in Rome knew only of one another's existence as Christians. They had possibly heard nothing of any other Christians, since the church in Rome was probably established by gospel-obedient Jews who returned from one of their trips to Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast (See At 2:9,10).

Paul had not yet been to the city of Rome. We have no indication in any other New Testament letter that any of the world-traveling evangelists had gone to the city by the time the letter of Romans was written. Therefore, we can only imagine how lonely these Christians in Rome might have felt in the seat of idolatry and Roman government.

So the Holy Spirit wanted to encourage the Christians in Rome with a statement of good news that would reassure them that they were not alone. He wanted to encourage them to remain faithful to the Christ into whom they had been baptized (See Rm 6:3-6). The Spirit subsequently wrote, "*All the assemblies [churches] of Christ greet you*" (Rm 16:16).

Romans 16:16 was a note of encouragement, not a statement to give a specific name to the church. The encouragement was that there were Christ-obedient people throughout the Roman Empire who were seeking to glorify Christ by assembling under His name, just as the saints in Rome. They too were wearing the name of Christ alone. Therefore, the Spirit wrote that the Christians in Rome must take courage in the fact that they were not alone in their homes when they came together to glorify the One who built the one universal church of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 16:18). There were assemblies of Christ everywhere.

We would assume correctly that Paul inferred by the use of the phrase "churches of Christ" that the disciples not separate themselves from one another by dividing over their own unique names. Since all those who had been baptized in the name of Christ, were of Christ, then no unique name other than Christ was needed to identify those who were of Christ (See 1 Co 1:11-15)

If we would seek to identify ourselves as gospel-obedient disciples who were baptized into the name of Christ, then certainly we would want to glorify the One in whose name we were baptized. We are the universal assembly (church) of Christ. Therefore, we seek to assemble

as disciples under the identity of the Christ of whom we claim to be disciples.

In order to accomplish the unity that Christ brings to all believers in Christ, it is worth putting away all those unique names of identity that would divide us from one another. We thus seek to be identified only with the Christ whom we all seek to glorify. Whether “Christian” (meaning “after” or “of Christ”) or “church of Christ,” we will seek in all ways to identify ourselves as belonging exclusively to the Christ of the cross. To identify ourselves with any other name is to minimize Christ, the Son of the living God.

Wearing the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is allowing the word of Christ to dwell in us richly (Cl 3:16). It brings glory to Christ. Therefore, the Holy Spirit instructed, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Cl 3:17). When we do the deed of assembly, therefore, we will not dare to assemble under a name that brings glory to some iconic church leader, Jewish feast day (Pentecost), religious heritage, or some favorite doctrine. We will assemble under a name that brings glory to the One who brought the gospel into our world.

Therefore, the next time someone asks you to what “church” you belong, think about your answer before you utter some name that glorifies some man, some doctrine, some Jewish feast day, or some methodology.

If you are a gospel-obedient disciple, then we would suggest that you assemble under the name of the One who should be glorified throughout the world.

Would we be so audacious, therefore, to scratch off the building of our assembly hall any name that does not bring glory to Jesus Christ—some may need a chisel. In order to restore a united Christianity, it may be that we begin again as the truth-obedient Brazilian disciple who just wrote, “Igreja.” Better yet, just scribble a note on the wall that reads, “People of Christ assemble here.”

Chapter 4

SSSSST!!!!

When God created cats, He embedded within their minds an instinctive fear of snakes. We have no idea why, other than the fact that because He made cats to be instinctively curious hunters, they were also given a “safety sound” in reference to their mortal enemies. When there was a slithering foe in the area of their hunt, the foe would instinctively give a hissing sound when they themselves were endangered. The snake would sound the warning “SSSSST,” and the cat would scat. From the beginning, cats and snakes were destined to be mortal enemies of one another, and thus, were given safety instincts in order that both species survive in the wild.

Now consider the following statement of the Holy Spirit: “*Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Rm 12:2). This is a mandate for direction of growth in our response to the gospel by which we are saved. In another statement the Spirit likewise said, “*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Cl 3:2). So what do these admonitions have to do with cats and snakes?

We all have those grumpy old attitudes of our former life in the wild that we have failed to transform as disciples of Jesus. We get ourselves in trouble. We embarrass ourselves. And still these persistent dysfunctional characteristics of our personality of our former wild life seem to persist. But we must not fret. These lingering shadows of our minds and behavior can too be brought under control.

We must first determine that there is no excuse for a lack of transformation in the mind of a disciple of Jesus. The Spirit instructs, “*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus*” (Ph 2:5). This was not a suggestion. It is our only spiritual road map that we have in our quest to establish a relationship with one another and God through Jesus. We may have been, as the Gentiles, “*a wild olive branch*” who was grafted into the true vine through our obedience to the gospel (Rm 11:17).

But though wild at the time of our initial obedience to the gospel, wild must be changed to the mind of Christ. The wild must become true.

Now consider this wild cat that we rescued from the wild and grafted into the fellowship of our home. Keep in mind that when a cat hears “SSSSST,” he will instinctively flee. However, this natural instinct can be reversed. When we first acquired our wild cat, we locked him up in our house for three days, as one should do when a cat is moved to a new location. Once secured in the confinement of our premises—his new den—our newly acquired friend disappeared into the inner conclaves of his new habitat for three days. We saw him not once during those days of self-imposed confinement. He was a true “scaredy cat” brought in from the wild.

Nevertheless, we would set out food and water for the recluse. In the obscurity of the night, he would sneak out of his self-imposed solitary confinement to eat and drink. After three days, he eventually emerged from the shadows of his den. But then we restricted him to the house for several weeks before we even considered allowing him into the wild of the outside world. If we had opened the door of our house during those weeks, he would have been gone forever.

So we decided that there was no other recourse for the transformation of the mind and behavior of our wild feline friend than to slowly change his behavior. We were challenged with the task of transforming his mind from the wild to an approachable friend of what we knew he could become as a domesticated cat.

After a few weeks, we dared pick him up—which thing he did not initially like—and walked outside with him securely in our arms. After only a breath of fresh air outside, we brought him back into his reassuring den. We became his “duck mother,” for his confidence in us slowly grew in the weeks to come.

When we grow in Christ as a disciple, we grow in the nature of God, who is defined by nothing other than being a loving Father. It is often a slow process of realization, depending on how far and long one was in the wild. Eventually, however, we come to the point in our behavior to be as that which was expressed by the Spirit through John, “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19).

When the Spirit said that we must “*grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,*” He meant that we must grow in the knowledge of this God of love who sent His only begotten Son into this wild world in order to rescue those of the wild (2 Pt 3:18). When we grow in understanding this God of love who sent a love offering to fetch us out of the wild, there is only one natural response: “*We love!*”

So back to the not-so-wild cat who was grafted into our love. We eventually allowed the formerly wild cat to go outside on his own. So he would set out to fulfill his natural urge to explore and hunt, sometimes engaging in mortal conflict with neighborhood wild cats who had already claimed and marked the territory of our back garden.

However, we always left the door open. Our “wild cat” would often come scurrying at lightning speed back to his den of security with another male feline in hot pursuit right behind him. Once in the house, our rescued friend would go wide-eyed and shuttering to cower in his den. But at the same time, we, with a robust threat to the persuer, would let out a threatening “SSSSST!!!!” to the pursuing enemy of our adopted feline. As the other pursuing feline scurried off in fright, our adopted friend generated a purr in the safety of our protective arms. And then something wonderful began to happen. After repetitive incidents of pursuit and deliverance, transformation slowly immersed in our formerly “wild vine” that was grafted into the realm of our grace. His mind was transformed, and subsequently, his behavior.

Paul reminded some who were fearful of their social environment in Rome, “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” (Rm 8:31). In answer to the question, he followed, “*Him who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not with Him also freely give us all things*” (Rm 8:32). He added, “*Who will separate us from the love of Christ?*” (Rm 8:35). No one! “*But in all these things [tribulations and enemies], we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us*” (Rm 8:37).

As time went by, the sound, “SSSSST!!!!” took on a different instinctive meaning to our adopted friend who was now named “Marmalade.” After “SSSSST!!!!” was shouted to the pursuing enemies time

after time, the same sound began to mean something different to the delivered. “SSSSST!!!!” came to mean deliverance and compassion and protection. At the time “SSSSST!!!!” ran away the enemies, the sound meant deliverance for our new feline friend.

We still keep the door open. But the bullies of the neighborhood are all now terrified to step into the reclaimed territory of “my daddy is bigger and tougher than your daddy.”

Marmalade still ventures out at will. He will sit on the fence and stare into distant lands. Sometimes he will venture beyond his secure zone to territory outside our sight, but not beyond our call. When it is time to come into the house for the night, the once instinctive “SSSSST!!!!” sound of a snake has long been transformed into the sound of a loving master who seeks to call his “child” into close fellowship for the night. No matter where our adventurous friend is when he hears the sound “SSSSST!!!!,” we can wait five minutes and he is there at our feet, purring and rubbing our leg for affection and reassurance. When he hears the sound, he has come home every time to a zone of security and love. He has grown in the grace and knowledge of a sound of love that was once a sound of danger. It is now a sound of security. He has been truly transformed in mind and spirit.

(Now Marmalade has yet to encounter a snake, so we do not know what the consequences of that encounter will be.)

Chapter 5

BAPTISM AND DESERTS

We were recently driving through one wilderness town after another in a desert region on planet earth. We felt that it was truly the “lonely planet” at the time. It was more than a wilderness. The small towns through which we ventured were really in a desert area where water was hard to come by. There were no bodies of water. Water was coveted solely for drinking, and on occasions, for the occasional shower, or a bath with a wash cloth. And certainly, bathing in a bathtub full of

water was almost out of the question. The smell of the resident citizen's human body was a testimony to the fact that water was scarce.

What we have found in desert regions as this is that people start believing that baptism in water for remission of sins is not necessary. Salvation is by faith only, apart from obedience to the gospel. Some will provide a tank of water for their livestock, but no water in which to wash away sins (At 22:16).

However, now we better understand why John—the one who immersed in water—carried on with his preaching of the coming Messiah close to the “much water” of the Jordan River. The exact location where he was baptizing was in Aenon that was close to the village of Salim (Jn 3:23). The reason he was there was that the people who came to him could hear his message and be baptized in much water. He was the “reverse evangelist.” Instead of him going to the people, they came to him in the wilderness area of Aenon in order to be immersed in much water for remission of sins. In announcing the coming Messiah, the people come to hear John's proclamation of the fulfillment of all prophecy in reference to the Messiah.

They came to John in the desert for some very important reasons: “*John came in the wilderness baptizing and preaching the baptism of repentance for remission of sins*” (Mk 1:4). The people who believed realized that if they would receive the remission of sins in order to fulfill all the revealed righteousness of God, then they had to go to John. So there “*went out to him all the land of Judea and those from Jerusalem. And they were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins*” (Mk 1:5).

For lack of water, the people who came to John did not write off the necessity of his baptism. People walked across the province of Judea in order to get to the message and water where John was immersing. Therefore, before one discounts John's baptizing for remission of sins, he or she should consider how much people believed in John's message and baptism in order to get to him by the Jordan. How much more should one seek to be baptized today in the name of the One John said was coming, but now has actually come?

There went out to John multitudes from across Judea who wanted

to hear his message and be baptized for the remission of sins. In fact, Matthew historically recorded that “*Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan, went out to him*” (Mt 3:5). “*And they were baptized ... confessing their sins*” (Mt 5:6). They went out to be immersed (baptized) in the Jordan for remission of sins because there was much water there (Jn 3:23). So John stayed in the region and received those who wanted to hear the message of the coming Messiah and be baptized (Jn 3:22). He stayed at the “Jordan River Baptistry.”

Now consider this: **John established a center for preaching and baptizing.** Since much water was needed for immersion, he stayed near much water. It was a similar location upon which Philip and the eunuch came in a desert region (At 8:26). While “driving” along the way in the eunuch’s chariot, they came upon a certain body of water into which one could be completely immersed (At 8:36). So the “desert baptistry” presented the opportunity for the eunuch to say, “*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized?*” At 8:36).

As we made our way across the desert region of the country in which we were traveling at the time, we too came upon a church that had a purpose-built baptistry. When speaking to a local leader of the church, he said, “Yes, people from throughout the region come to our baptistry in order to be baptized.”

So on our personal journey through so many desert towns and villages, we too wondered as to how people who want to respond to the gospel could say, “Here is water!” In order to fulfill the desire of those who sought to be baptized in the name of Jesus in obedience to the gospel for remission of sins, we suggested that someone do as John, and as the church group that we visited. Someone in desert regions should build or dig a “Jordan River Baptistry” for the religious community. At least it should be made known that one has a large bathtub.

The Jordan River offered a natural baptistry. But when there are no rivers running through the region, or bodies of water, at least someone could build a baptistry for all those in the region who realize that they must obey the gospel for remission of sins (At 2:38). Town halls are built for city gatherings. Schools are built for education. Sports fields are built for the gathering of athletes. So why not a community

baptistry for all those in a wilderness village to go in order to obey the gospel by immersion. In the city in which we presently live, some residents have provided their swimming pools as community baptistries.

Remember the 3,000 who were baptized in Jerusalem? Have you ever wondered where they were baptized in one day? There was the purpose-built and public pool of Bethesda that had five entry ways to the water (Jn 5:2). There was the public Pool of Siloam which was a purpose-built pool for cleansing (Jn 9:7). Archaeologists have uncovered other purpose-built public pools in Jerusalem that were specifically made for Jewish ritualistic cleansing. Our question was why could not someone build in a wilderness village a purpose-built baptistry for those who know that they must be immersed in water in obedience to the gospel for the remission of sins (At 2:38; 22:16).

Someone in desert villages and towns needs to accommodate the believers in the region by relieving the “spiritual stress” of those who know that they should follow Jesus to the Jordan River in order to fulfill all righteousness by being baptized (Mt 3:13). Someone can offer them the opportunity to do so by building a “Jordan River Baptistry,” and then announcing to the entire region the baptismal opportunity. They could, as John, wait for the people to come from throughout the region in order to be baptized for remission of sins. Sincere believers know that they must follow Jesus to the Jordan River. Aiding others to be baptized into Christ is something as simple as showing people where to find water.

John was simply baptizing in Aenon **those who came to him for baptism**. He was not laying claim to those he baptized. He was simply fulfilling his God-commissioned mandate to announce the coming Messiah, and then baptizing those who came for the remission of sins (Mk 1:4). After they were baptized, the people went home. John did not establish a data base of those who were baptized. That was God’s business (At 2:47). John was not recruiting baptized believers into his unique sect. God kept track of those who were baptized.

It was not John’s business to organize into groups baptized believers. His business was only to preach the Messiah and baptize those

who came to him. The baptized sorted out the rest. What John offered was the opportunity to hear his messianic message, and then be baptized for remission of sins. He allowed the people to do what Philip allowed the eunuch to do after he came up out of the waters of baptism: “*And he [the eunuch] went on his way rejoicing*” (At 8:39). And just in case Philip might lay claim to a baptized believer, “*the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip so that the eunuch saw him no more*” (At 8:39).

We must keep in mind that some snakes will also show up at the public “Jordan River Baptistry” (Mt 3:7). As some religionists (the Pharisees and Sadducees) showed up at John’s public baptistry near Aenon, so there will show up those to whom a gospel message of rebuke must be delivered (Mt 3:7-12). They must be warned of the wrath they will suffer when Jesus returns with His mighty angels in flaming fire (See 2 Th 1:6-9). Some are indeed baptized with water unto repentance for remission of sins. But for the proud and arrogant religious leaders, they will be baptized with the “flaming fire” that Jesus will bring with him in order to bring down “*vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Th 1:8).

What God did through John’s ministry of baptism in the wilderness was to present the opportunity for both the sincere and the snakes to show up at the baptistry. When both showed up at the “Jordan River Baptistry,” then he had the opportunity to preach the word of God.

Chapter 6

WANDERING EVANGELISTS

We wonder about an evangelist who would wander from one religious group to another, as was the custom of Paul (At 17:1,2). We wonder why he would wander off to speak to a group of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (At 17:16-31). We wonder about him wandering off to a prayer group that regularly met down by a river (At 16:13).

He did not wander off, but was conveniently ushered off to a prison ministry (At 16:25-34). And then there was the time when the church existed in a large city, but he could not help himself but to wander off to preach in a local temple (At 19:29,30).

If we would learn anything from the wandering gospel-motivated Paul, it would be that he wandered everywhere to preach the gospel to religious people who had to hear the gospel. In fact, at one time during his wandering, he wrote to some local brothers, “*For woe is me if I do not [wander off to] preach the gospel*” (1 Co 9:16).

Those who claim to be evangelists for the gospel, but do no wandering, have forgotten their mission. At one time in his life, the same happened to Timothy. He became discouraged because of opposition, which opposition evidently came from brothers who should have encouraged him to wander off to preach the gospel to the lost. Unfortunately, he allowed his opposition to discourage him, and thus he ceased to wander.

In his last letter to Timothy, the wandering apostle Paul hurled a literary manifesto at him. Paul wrote, “*Do the work of an evangelist*” (2 Tm 4:5). Some people think “evangelist” is some type of title. But in this mandate of Paul, it is a work. One who allows himself to be held up from the ministry of preaching the gospel to the lost, is no longer doing the work of an evangelist. He is not, as Paul, wandering from one religious group to another to preach the gospel to free the people from religion. When Jesus uttered His mandate to His future wanderers (apostles - “those whom He sent”), He encouraged them that they should not be detoured by the local needs of lands, houses, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters (Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26). As a personally called wanderer for Him, they had to leave all this in order to preach the gospel to every creature (Mk 16:15,16).

There are too many good-hearted religious people throughout the world who must hear the gospel that will set them free from religion. They need to be informed that there is only one way into eternal glory, and that way is through Jesus Christ, the Son of God (At 4:12).

Our best advice to any prospective “wanderer for Jesus” is to wander off to some market, or synagogue, or center of philosophers, or

pagan temple. It is in these places where there are religious people who must hear the gospel. We have too many self-proclaimed evangelists in name only who are wandering only from one church of the saved to another church of the saved in order to save the saved. We must not forget that **the work of an evangelist is directed to those who have not heard and obeyed the gospel**, not to those who have already obeyed the gospel. Elders must step up to the ministry of teaching the saved in order to set the evangelists free to wander off and preach the gospel to the lost.

Chapter 7

MINIMIZING THE GOSPEL 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 spiritually turned upside down by an initial baptism of about 3,000 people.

Peter’s 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 Someone 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, and 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 with the gospel reign of Jesus. 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, and subsequently, submitted to Peter's instructions to obey the gospel (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 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 Jesus of Nazareth (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 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 His existing reign. They submitted to the King who had already ascended to the right hand of God in heaven only about a week before. 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 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 message 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' 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 gospel message 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 extends from heaven and far beyond the church. 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 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.

To suppose that Jesus' kingdom is confined only to the church of the obedient is a subtle attack against His present kingdom reign over all things. If His reign were limited to the church alone, then it would be easy to be fearful of supposed uncontrollable demons who were creeping around in the night. 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 over the universe. 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 of 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 destruction (2 Th 1:6-9). It will be then that He will return kingdom reign to the Father (1 Co 15:28), and we shall forever be with our Lord Jesus.

Chapter 8

FORGIVING TO FORGET

It is not difficult to define that which is godly. Listen to this pronouncement of God: *“Their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more”* (Hb 8:12). However, it was as if the Hebrew writer knew that by the time his readers arrived at chapter 10 in the book, they would have already forgotten the preceding statement that he wrote in chapter 8. So he said it again: *“And their sins and iniquities I will remember no more”* (Hb 10:17). This is godliness.

This is the character of a godly person. **He or she is forgiving to the point of being forgetful.** This is the way godly people live according to the gospel of God’s grace.

But when those of a society cannot forgive and forget, then they have transitioned into a paradigm of moral digression from which they cannot return. It is a sign of the moral decline of a society when the

citizens of the society continue to hold the sins of the past over the heads of those whom we seek to lead our society. In such a society, each citizen becomes relationally dysfunctional because he or she cannot forgive and forget, and thus move on with a spirit of God's grace. Therefore, the society has become an ungodly society.

Unfortunately, many of those within a declining society who call themselves after the God of grace and mercy, behave themselves hypocritically according to the nature of the God of forgiveness in whom they claim to believe. They can forget their own former sins, but they continue to proclaim the sins of their fellow citizens.

So we pray for those who are in the power of the government "*so that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty*" (1 Tm 2:2). We profess our "*godliness through good works,*" not by ranting and raving in political protests (1 Tm 2:10). We exercise ourselves "*rather to godliness*" (1 Tm 4:7). We do this because we know that "*godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come*" (1 Tm 4:8). Our God reminds us: "*Godliness with contentment is great gain*" (1 Tm 6:6). So for this reason, we "*follow after ... godliness*" (1 Tm 6:11).

Godly living, and the building of society, are founded upon God's character of true forgiveness. This is the spirit of godliness. In 2 Peter 1:5-7, the Holy Spirit explained that upon which a godly society is built:

We claim to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. If our claim is valid, then we must add to or increase our virtue (dignity) with knowledge of that which is always true. We will thus not sell our dignity to some morally dysfunctional politician by being a paid protestor in a political rally to shout obscenities against those with whom we may disagree. We will not be as those to whom Jude wrote in times of political turmoil immediately before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. We will not "*despise dominion, and speak evil of dignitaries*" (Jn 8). On the contrary, because we are knowledgeable of that which is true in all things, we will add self-control to our behavior. We will do so because we have become "*wise as serpents and harmless as doves*" (Mt 10:16). And in our harmless self-control, we will be patient with the

faults of others. We will forgive others as we would have others forgive us (Mt 6:12-14). When we become patient as God was patient with us in our ungodliness, it is then that we begin to emulate His godliness in our demeanor. And in our patient forgiveness of others, even of politicians, we will learn to love our brother instead of raving against his sins of the past. We will love people for who they are at the moment. We will thus keep ourselves off judgment seats in our relationships with others.

“For if these things are in you and abound, they make you to be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pt 1:8).

That’s the way we want to be! If being this way makes us politically incorrect according to the godless society in which we may live, then at least we will know that we are correct in our relationship with God. We would be godly in our spirit of forgiving and forgetting the sins of others. And at the end of the day, or world, that is all that matters. Therefore, here is a question that you must answer: *“Since all these things [of this world] will be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?” (2 Pt 3:11).*

Chapter 9

WHAT GOD CANNOT DO

When we consider who God is, we always view Him as One who is all-powerful. Since He is God, then we assume that He can do all things that can be done. But this is not necessarily true, especially if we understand His nature and character as they are defined in the Bible. In fact, we cannot understand God as He is defined in the Bible if we do not understand that there are some things that God cannot do.

As we cannot fly, disappear, jump over buildings, walk through walls, and foretell the future, there are some things that God also can-

not do, and at the same time, be the God in whom we believe. In fact, we would say that in order for Him to be whom He says He is, it is impossible for Him to do certain things. If God is as the Bible reveals Him to be, then there are some things that are logically beyond His ability to do.

A. God cannot lie.

We have “*hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began*” (Ti 1:2). Reassurance in God’s promises would be meaningless if He at any time in the past “went back on His word.” For example, He made great promises to Abraham. He promised to make a great nation from Abraham’s seed. He promised that Abraham would have a great name. He would give a land to his descendants, and from his seed bring into the world a Blessing for all people (Gn 12:1-3). If God was not able to keep those promises to Abraham, then God would have lied to Abraham. He would be a God who makes promises that He cannot keep.

If He had not fulfilled all His promises to Abraham, then we could not trust any of His promises today. At least we would be apprehensive, or anxious, about any promise He has made to us concerning heaven. Fortunately, because He has kept all His promises in the past we find comfort in His promises in reference to our future. In fact, we remain faithful because through “*two unchangeable things [His promises and oath] in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us*” (Hb 6:18). Therefore, we can be encouraged by the fact that God cannot lie in reference to any promise He has made concerning our future.

B. God cannot sin.

Sin exists only because there is a God who has established an eternal standard by which we must live. If there were no God, then sin would not exist. On the other hand, if we wanted to live without sin, we could

create in our minds a god after our own imagination and desires to live as we please. In doing this, we could eliminate sin. Our social dysfunctions would only be against one another.

But if our “sins” are only social dysfunctions, then we are not obligated to rectify our “sins” against one another. Might would establish right, and the majority would establish our moral and social standards. Even worse, we could allow some in our society to determine what is a “social sin” against others. Some would even lead themselves to believe that the genocide of a particular race of people among us should be justified for the benefit of society as a whole. Remember Hitler?

But since there is a Final Standard—God—then we must conclude that this Final Standard cannot sin against Himself since He is God. However, all of us can sin against Him. It is this God who must be allowed to establish eternal moral standards by which we must live, for *“it is not in man who walks to direct his steps”* (Jr 10:23).

The Holy Spirit said it correctly through John: *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”* (1 Jn 1:5). Therefore, since we as free-moral individuals are tempted to walk in darkness and go our own way, then God cannot be tempted to become darkness in order to ignore our walk in darkness.

We sin against Him when we step into the way of darkness. But God does not sin against Himself by doing the same. So James was right: *“Let no man say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’ [to walk in darkness], for God cannot be tempted with evil”* (Js 1:13). As there is no darkness of sin in God, so there is no unrighteousness in Him. We *“know that He is righteous”* (1 Jn 2:29). Therefore, it is impossible for God to sin against Himself. It is impossible for God to be darkness. It is impossible because the light in which God dwells naturally dispels darkness.

C. God cannot show favoritism.

In reference to salvational matters, Peter deducted a truth concerning the power of the gospel that was revealed to himself and the apostles: *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons”* (At 10:34).

Because the gospel must be preached to all the world, Peter correctly concluded that God cannot pick and choose individuals indiscriminately for salvation.

The gospel must be preached, and thus the gospel becomes the opportunity for individuals to choose for themselves whether they would be saved. Peter continued to explain this correct deduction: “*In every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*” (At 10:35). In other words, anyone in any nation can choose whether to respond to the gospel.

If God respected and selected for salvation only specific individuals in every nation, then Peter would have concluded that there would be no need for any evangelist to go to any nation in order to preach the gospel (See Mt 28:19). If God had already predestined in every nation those who would be saved, then why would one go to all the effort to leave family and lands in order to preach the gospel to the world?

About thirty years after Peter made the preceding statements in the house of Cornelius, he later, in writing, reiterated the preceding truth concerning how God salvationally relates to man. He revealed that the Father, “*who without respect of persons judges according to each one’s work*” (1 Pt 1:17). Therefore, the Holy Spirit concluded through Paul, “*For there is no respect of persons with God*” (Rm 2:11). The free-moral obedience or response to the gospel of every individual is what determines one’s salvation.

The preceding statements should settle the matter concerning the individual’s responsibility to save himself. But we would wonder why God cannot respect one person above another? The truth that God cannot respect one person over another in reference to salvation is not difficult to understand. Since God can foreknow our positive response to the gospel, then we must not erroneously conclude that His foreknowledge mandates the individual predestination of an individual to obey the gospel. If His foreknowledge assumes that He also predestines, then God could be accused of showing favoritism if just one person were lost. He would be fiendish in reference to the one He sends to hell because the condemned individual was not personally chosen and predestined by Him for heaven.

The truth that we must conclude that God does not individually predestine individuals to either heaven or hell lies in the fact that He created each person with the responsibility to free-morally make choices in reference to salvation. In this way, each individual must take ownership of his or her eternal destiny. If God were to show favoritism in reference to our salvation, then we could assign blame to Him for not personally selecting us for salvation if we were lost. Therefore, God cannot show favoritism in reference to the salvation of any person. It is simply something that He cannot do, and at the same time be the just God we read about in the Bible.

D. God cannot remember the sins of the repentant.

We find it quite difficult to understand the following statement in reference to God forgetting our sins: *“Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more”* (Hb 8:12; see Hb 10:17). This was a statement that God initially made in reference to His forgiveness that He bestowed upon Israel after their captivity (See Jr 31). The fact that God brought His people back into the land of promise after their captivity was proof that He had forgotten the sins that took them into captivity. In reference to Israel’s return, the Father said through Isaiah, *“I have blotted out as a thick cloud your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you”* (Is 44:22).

Because God has the ability to blot out sin beyond remembrance, He can always say, *“Though your sins be as scarlet, they will be as white as snow”* (Is 1:18). In His forgiveness, God’s amnesia in reference to our sins is complete. When He forgives, our sins pass from His memory. He simply cannot remember our sins after He has forgiven us. Once we have washed our robes in the blood of the Lamb of God, our souls are as white as snow (Rv 7:14). As we walk in the Light of His way, the blood of His Son continually cleanses our souls of every sin of every day of our faithful walk (1 Jn 1:17).

E. God cannot save the lost without us.

It is as Paul wrote to the Roman disciples, “*How will they hear without a preacher?*” (Rm 10:14). The commission to the faithful disciples is to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Mk 16:15). The world can never hear of the only One through whom people can be saved if they have no idea that the Son of God came into the world for the atonement of our sins (See At 4:12). Therefore, the poet was correct when he wrote the following words:

Christ has no hands
but our hands
to do His work today.
He has no feet but our feet
to lead men in His way.
He has no tongue but our tongue
to tell men how He died.

God cannot save people parallel to the gospel of His Son. If He could, then He would make the incarnational sacrifice of His Son look foolish in the eyes of the world. If people could have been saved directly without the offering of His Son, then why the offering? God cannot save without one’s obedience to the gospel, which gospel we must preach to all the world (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

F. God cannot save without obedience.

Before God, one principle is eternal in reference to our salvation: “*The soul that sins, it will die*” (Ez 18:4). It will suffer eternal death because “*the wages of sin is death*” (Rm 6:23). And since “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*” then God cannot save anyone who has not discovered and obeyed His remedy for our sins (Rm 3:23). So the psalmist was correct, “*The way of the ungodly will perish*” (Ps 1:6).

The world must understand that it is under a sentence of death. It is awaiting a time when the Son of God comes with His mighty angels

in flaming fire. He is coming in order to bring down destruction on all those who have not protected themselves from sin with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. When that time comes, it will be impossible for God to save anyone who has not washed himself in the blood of the Lamb (See 2 Th 1:6-9; Hb 7:14).

G. God cannot save one on the merit of good works.

If He could, then three things would result: First, God would be portrayed as fiendish for committing to hell all those whom He judged to not have enough good works to justify themselves as righteous before God. If God saved on the basis of our accumulated good works, then we would always be in doubt concerning our “bank balance of good works” that we have stored up for the final judgment. Add to this the dilemma that Jesus as the final judge would be in the predicament of having to judge who had enough good works to be saved. Therefore, we must conclude that God cannot save us on the basis of our good works.

Second, meritorious good works cannot be the standard by which we will be judged because such a standard would ignore the incarnational atonement of the Son of God on the cross. As previously mentioned, why would there even be the need for the cross if we could be saved on the merit of just being good people, whatever standard we might set for ourselves to be good people. If we have the right to establish our own standards by which one would be judged a good person, then we have made ourselves judges and lawgivers of one another. But James would remind us, “*There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*” (Js 4:12).

Therefore, and third, if we can set our own standards by which to judge ourselves fit for eternal dwelling, then we would be in competition with one another concerning what works are important to be saved, and the amount of accumulated works that one would need in order to be saved.

Add to this fact that God would have to question the absurdity of those who believe that they are saved through law-keeping. “*You who*

make your boast of law [keeping], do you dishonor God through breaking the law?" (Rm 2:23). Paul then simply asked, *"Where then is boasting"* concerning our legal performance of law? Paul's answer to his proposed question was a necessary conclusion: *"It is excluded"* (Rm 3:27).

We would naturally ask why meritorious law-keeping must be excluded as the foundation upon which we would be saved. The answer is obvious: *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rm 3:23). In reference to our obedience to law, there *"is none righteous, no, not one"* (Rm 3:10). So Paul would remind us, *"Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the [perfect] works of law"* (Rm 3:28). Because no one can keep law perfectly, therefore, we are *"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Rm 3:24). *"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we will be saved from wrath through Him"* (Rm 5:9).

"Knowing that a man is not justified by [perfect] works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus," we must conclude that God cannot save anyone without the justifying work of His Son on the cross (See Gl 2:16). It is for this reason that we have fled to the cross. Since God cannot save anyone parallel to the incarnational offering of His Son on the cross, then we do not trust in our own ability to keep law perfectly. Neither do we assume that there is any atoning merit for our sins by our good works. We can only have faith in the grace of God, for apart from His grace, God cannot save us.

Chapter 10

GOSPEL TROUBLEMAKERS

Seriously, I would have loved to have personally met the prophet Elijah. Here was a hero of faith who was surrounded by God's presence. For example, on one occasion he bravely stood alone with God against the religious prophets and priests of his day, mocking them for

their misguided religious shenanigans. Nevertheless, though brave in the face of misguided religionists, he had his times of apprehension, especially when government officials turned against him. After his victory in the contest of God over the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel, he fled to the wilderness of Sinai in fear of the wicked Jezebel, the king's wife.

Throughout his life as a man, however, he wavered not in the midst of the Baal prophets of Israel. He stood firm on his faith in the one true and living God of Israel. Being in the minority, he stood untouched by the majority of the religious leaders of Israel who had led the majority of the people into apostasy. Only seven thousand people of all Israel continued to believe in the one God with whom the nation had a covenant relationship (1 Kg 19:18).

In knowing that God was near, Elijah had the spiritual fortitude to challenge the religionists of his day. So he challenged them to an "offering contest" on Mount Carmel (See 1 Kg 18:16-45). At the time, King Ahab had confronted Elijah with the question, "*Are you he who troubles Israel?*" (1 Kg 18:17). The one who troubled Israel would again trouble the false religionists on Mount Carmel. Faithful men of God always mean trouble for misguided religious leaders. In the challenge of the Mount Carmel contest, Elijah wanted to present the opportunity for the misguided religionists to reveal their nonsense by being challenged by the one true and living God.

One can often know if he is a faithful man of God if the religionists in the community ask him, "*Are you he who troubles the people?*" True men of God must "trouble" those who have been led astray by misguided religiosity. People must deal with the word of God that reveals the gospel, and the gospel always troubles puffed up religionists who trust in the ceremonies of their own religions (See Jn 12:48). In this way, Jesus was a troublemaker (See Mk 7:1-9).

So the one who troubled Israel challenged the religious leaders of his time. The contest was accepted, and so all the preparations were made to build altars to reveal whose God was alive and whose god was dead. All the prophets of Baal and Asherah were on the government payroll of the First Lady (Jezebel) of the country (1 Kg 18:19). They

needed to be challenged to validate their faith with a miracle from their god.

The Baal prophets were as those religious leaders today who maintain their pomp and positions in apostate religions because they follow the money of the contributors. There are some religious groups today whose leaders are also on a government payroll. In the Mount Carmel “altar contest,” the “profiteers” were to be publicly exposed as Elijah set the stage for a contest between their gods and the one true God.

Elijah sought to proclaim before the nation that the religious leaders—the priests and prophets of Baal and Asherah—had hijacked the faith of Israel. Elijah thus arranged an opportunity for these religious profiteers to expose themselves before the people. So on Mount Carmel, he challenged them to build an altar upon which to make a sacrifice to their god. Elijah also challenged the misguided people, “*How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him*” (1 Kg 18:21). The unsuspecting Baal preachers accepted the challenge that was made by the man of God, and the people subsequently gathered to watch the spectacle.

So the proceedings began. After the Baal preachers had prepared their sacrifice, the account of the incident reads that “*they called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying ‘O Baal, hear us!’*” (1 Kg 18:26). This reminds us of some today who stand up in religious centers across the land and make a similar cry for a miracle from God: “Lord, Lord, please hear us” (See Mt 7:21).

When the preachers of Baal received no answer to their pleas, “*they leaped about on the altar that was made*” (1 Kg 18:26). There they jumped up and down, crying out from their “pulpit altar” in a senseless rant in order that they might bring their audience into a hypnotic trance to “receive a miracle.” There are those today who do likewise, leaping up and down, and falling down on their performance stages before the people in order to “receive a miracle from God.” They plead for an answer from their god that they too have created after their own imagination. But as in the case of the Mount Carmel performers, their god is silent.

Religion is based on specific religious ceremonies that the adher-

ents of the religion must perform in order to identify their religion. Their ceremonies must be legally performed in order to perpetuate the religion, and thus identify those who are aligned with their religion. What the Baal prophets were doing was performing their customary ceremonies of prayer in order to involve some response from the gods they had created after their own desires. This is exactly what Elijah wanted them to do in order to draw out of them their hypocrisy before the people. So when they revealed their religious foolishness, Elijah mocked them for their performances of prayer to their god: “*Now it came to pass at noon that **Elijah mocked them***” (1 Kg 18:27).

Nevertheless, the Baal prophets could not help themselves but to continue to cry out for some response from their god. And Elijah continued to mock them:

Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is meditating or he is busy or he is on a journey. Perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened (1 Kg 18:27).

The infuriated preachers intensified their prayer performance. Notice carefully what the Holy Spirit wrote about their prayer performance before the people:

*So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves **according to their custom** with swords and lances until the blood gushed out of them (1 Kg 18:28).*

They did not just cut a few blood veins, in their rapturous prayer performance. They cut even into main arteries. It was a gruesome sight to behold, one that was deserving of the mockery of the man of God.

We notice something interesting in the preceding statement of the Holy Spirit concerning the gruesome ordeal. The prayer performance of cutting themselves was not an anomaly in reference to their pleading for some miracle from their god only on this occasion. It was their custom to cut themselves in this way when they conducted prayer performances to their god. Their bodies were covered with scars from

previous cuttings in their ritualistic performances of meaningless prayers.

People in various religions throughout the world today do likewise. In the first century, there were certainly some who were carrying on with similar meaningless chatter in prayer performances to their gods that they had also created after their own imaginations. Paul almost walked into a gathering of such performing religionists in Ephesus in order to preach the gospel. Once the mob of fanatical religionists in Ephesus became emotionally out of control, they cried out in a prayer performance for two hours, shouting, “*Great is Artemis [Diana] of the Ephesians!*” (At 19:28).

But there was Paul, just as Elijah. He wanted to trouble the people with the gospel. So, “*Paul wanted to go into the assembly*” of the confused religious fanatics (At 19:30). As Elijah knew that God was the one true and living God who worked in his life without all the performing ceremonial confusion, so Paul wanted to step into the Ephesian crowd of emotionally energized religionists and preach the gospel. In doing so, he would have greatly troubled the multitude.

“*But the disciples [of Ephesus] did not allow him*” (At 19:34). The disciples who lived among these religious fanatics knew that they would beat Paul to death if he confronted them with the gospel that brings freedom from religious nonsense. This gospel is the message of the One who is the Lord of all those lords that men want to create in their own imaginations to condone their misguided religiosity. The goddess Artemis was only the figment of the Ephesians’ imagination. As the prophets of Baal, the religionists of Ephesus could perform with emotional prayer chatter for hours, but there would be no answer. There is never an answer from a god that does not exist. Listen to the Holy Spirit’s final account of the extravaganza:

Now it came to pass when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice nor any to answer, NOR ANY WHO PAID ATTENTION (1 Kg 18:29).

At least we can say that these propheteers were energetically persistent. We can only imagine that they were totally exhausted by the end of the day, dripping with sweat from the ordeal of their altar-pulpit performance. Nevertheless, regardless of their high-powered preaching, there was no god to answer. Even the people became bored with their pulpiteering performance. Sometimes, the more energetic one preaches, the less he believes in the god he supposedly represents before the people.

Chapter 11

PRAYER BEYOND THEATRICALS

It seems that the early disciples witnessed on many occasions the prayer performances of religiously misguided fanatics who identified their religions with the ceremonial performance of their prayers and other ritualistic theatrics. Such religious performances were so prevalent and common in the first century that when John the Baptist came as the forerunner of the Christ, he had to teach his disciples the simplicity of prayer (Lk 11:1).

When Jesus was revealed as the true light, He too needed to teach His disciples how to pray. After determining that there was a significant difference between Jesus' prayers and the prayers of the religionists of the day, one of Jesus' disciples eventually came to Him and asked, "*Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples*" (Lk 11:1). It was then that Jesus taught the disciples the substance of that for which they must pray, as well as how they should make their requests known to the Father (Lk 11:2,3). Jesus and John had to teach their disciples how to pray because of the misguided performance of prayers of the religious world in which the disciples lived.

When the gospel moved out of Palestine and into all the world, there was the continued need that prayer be taught to the new disciples because the gospel had brought many out of idolatry. In the absence of the written New Testament Scriptures, one of the works of the Holy

Spirit among the early disciples was to teach proper prayer. This was Paul's meaning in the statement,

*The Spirit also helps our weaknesses, **for we do not know how to pray as we should**, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered (Rm 8:26).*

If the religious-oriented disciples of Jesus and John needed to be taught how to pray, then certainly the Gentiles, who were converted out of idolatry in their obedience to the gospel, needed to be taught to pray correctly with the help of the Holy Spirit (See 1 Co 14:15). But when the Scriptures were written on the matter of proper prayer, there was no longer the need that the Spirit directly lead the disciples in prayer. The miraculous gift of prayer passed away (See 1 Co 13:8-10). If one seeks to be taught how to pray today, then he or she must study the Spirit-inspired manual on prayer, the New Testament.

We must understand that Jesus **did not** give His disciples a ceremonial ritual of prayer to perform. Neither did He give them a recital of words that should be repeated in order to pray properly. **Jesus did not establish a religion by handing down a legal ceremony of ritualistically worded prayer that would identify His disciples.** Doing such would have established the disciples as just another religion of the day with their own unique ceremony of prayer to perform.

If we would legally use the exact words that Jesus gave to illustrate the substance of correct prayer, then we would be ceremonializing the words, and thus instituting another ritual of religion that should offer prayers exactly as He stated. And then we need to consider the fact that if we used as our prayer the exact words that He gave in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4, then we could not pray for one another, for none of us were mentioned personally in Jesus' example prayer.

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wanted to make it clear that His disciples would not cry out from morning to noon as the Baal prophets with some ceremonial prayer of repetitious words and phrases (See 1 Kg 18:26). He did not want the disciples to cry out in confusion in public places that would bring attention to themselves

as specialists in prayer. Neither would they pray themselves into an emotional frenzy, even to the point of falling down, or cutting themselves as the Baal prophets (1 Kg 18:28). If they prayed in such a manner, then the Holy Spirit said that when the unbeliever witnessed such confusion, he would think that they were mad (1 Co 14:23). At least one principle in the Spirit's instructions concerning prayer is very clear: **The manner of our prayers should never give the pretense of confusion, madness or false spirituality.**

In order to guard His disciples against digression into the confusion and disorder of showmanship prayer, Jesus gave some important principles that should characterize our prayers and the atmosphere in which we should pray:

A. Sincere prayer:

“When you pray,” Jesus instructed, *“you will not be as the hypocrites”* (Mt 6:5). The religious leaders during Jesus' ministry were the Pharisees who gave a pretense of righteousness in public places because *“they love the praise of men more than the praise of God”* (Jn 12:43). They publicly prayed for the praise of men. But at the same time they were inwardly ravenous wolves (See Mt 7:15-20). Nevertheless, they loved to utter public prayers in order to be seen of men to be spiritual in their prayers. If people seek to be seen in public for their boisterous praying, then they are hypocrites as the Pharisees because they pray for the praise of men.

B. Unnoticed prayer:

Jesus continued to teach the disciples, *“When you pray, enter into your closet”* (Mt 6:6). The metaphor of the closet is clear. Once in the closet of secrecy, shut the door to the public. Jesus wanted us to understand that in the secrecy of our “closets” we can pour out our hearts to God without being tempted to draw the attention of the people to us in our prayers. In such a personal location of communication with God in secret, we would not be tempted to use some hypocritical “prayer lan-

guage” to approach God. We would not be tempted to preach in our prayers. We would be motivated to understand that a quiet prayer in seclusion is as effective as a prayer in public before the assembly.

C. Quiet prayer:

The volume of one’s prayer does not enhance its effectiveness. Volume does not guarantee answered prayer. We must not pray as if God were deaf. Some feel that prayer in a loud voice demands that God listen. However, shouting prayers are more self-centered than God directed. When more than one person is praying publicly at the same time, the people who are praying often get into a shouting contest in order to be seen by others that they are praying with earnestness. If one is seeking public attention for his praying, then he needs to find a closet.

D. Prayer without repetitions:

In view of the repetitious words and phrases that were used by the Pharisees in their prayers, Jesus instructed His disciples, “*When you pray, do not use meaningless repetitions*” (Mt 6:7). Some translations render this verse with the phrase “vain repetitions.” In other words, repeating the same words or phrases over and over again is useless, if not senseless. In the eyes of God, it is meaningless to go on chattering with repetitious phrases. God is not one to whom we must repeat what we say in order for Him to hear and understand. Saying the same phrases over many times in prayer is simply meaningless chatter in the ears of God. If we spoke to one another in such a manner, we would think that we were all mad. Why do we think we can speak in the same repetitious manner to God?

E. Few words in prayer:

Those who practice repetitious prayer performances “*think that they will be heard for their many words*” (Mt 6:7). The Baal prophets of Elijah’s day led themselves to believe this. They cried out in prayer

most of the day (1 Kg 18:26). The vain worshipers of the temple of Ephesus believed the same, and thus, they cried out in praise of the goddess Artemis for two hours with the same meaningless chant (At 19:28). If we do the same in our prayers today, then we have followed after the same religious ceremonialism in prayer as the prophets of Baal and the idolatrous worshipers of Artemis in Ephesus. If Elijah were alive today, he would certainly take the opportunity to mock those who behaved as the Baal prophets, as well as those in the temple of Artemis who chanted the same phrase over and over for two hours.

In order that His disciples not lead themselves into believing that repetitious prayer performances are profitable, Jesus reminded His disciples, “*Your Father knows what things you need before you ask Him*” (Mt 6:8). Jesus’ statement does not say that the Father answers our prayers before we pray simply because He already knows our needs. Jesus was revealing the omniscience of the One to whom we pray.

Before we pray, the Father always knows that for which we would ask, and thus, asking over and over for the same thing assumes that we believe God does not know our needs. Before we start a shouting session of repetitious words and phrases in a performance of prayer, therefore, we need to remember that all such behavior in prayer is useless and senseless in view of the fact that the Father already knows that for which we would pray.

We must keep in mind that our Father wants us to communicate with Him. He does not need to be preached to in prayer. Neither does He need repetitious shouting, or confusion. As His children, He simply desires that we lay our hearts before Him in words that come from a dependent child who calls on Him for comfort and reassurance. There is no need to make our conversation with God a performance. Whenever we think of performance, we must always remember that performance is something that we do for men. The Baal prophets of Elijah’s day were masters at performances in prayer (1 Kg 18).

Chapter 12

CHRISTIANS ONLY

My wife and I were peacefully sitting in a local restaurant about to be served breakfast which was our treat for the week. So before the food was served, we engaged in our customary behavior to offer thanksgiving for the food that was soon to be served. The restaurant was only the vehicle through whom God would serve to us our food for the day. So hand in hand, we prayed together.

In our minds, others who were in the restaurant at the time just became invisible while we engaged with our Father in thanksgiving for what was about to be set before us. It was as if we were alone at the moment of intercession. The rest of the occupants of the restaurant did not exist.

And then arrived the blessing of the occasion ... the steaming hot food. As the waitress, who had witnessed our prayer, set the plates before us, she asked, "Are you Christians?" We simply responded, "Yes, just Christians. That's all." That answer invoked a series of requests on her part. She asked these two strangers to offer prayers for her family. As a mother of three, she was in desperate need of supplications for herself, two small children, and one teenager.

It is for this reason that we stand for being known as Christians only. That label was good enough for the Holy Spirit to tag the early disciples (See At 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pt 4:16). So we will stick with the same. We seek to be Christians only without some label for ourselves, or some unique sign post for those with whom we sit on the first day of the week. We are all just Christians. We are not "A" Christians, or "B" Christians, or even "C & D" Christians. We are Christians after Christ. Please don't tag a label on our Christianity.

The restaurant encounter reminded Martha and myself again what it means to present ourselves before the world as just being Christians, without the shroud of some religious institution. In the midst of a religious world that has invented every imaginable name under which ad-

herents would hang their religion, we have chosen to exalt Christ alone by being known to identify ourselves to be simply “of Christ.” This is gospel business. In doing this we are focusing on and exalting Christ, not on ourselves or some favorite religious sect, or common religious heritage. We choose to focus exclusively on Christ, not on some man, some movement, some doctrine, or some imagination of men that would huddle individual adherents under the banner of a particular sect that maintains a common traditional heritage.

When Paul wanted to encourage the frightened Christians in Rome that they were not alone in their stand for Christ, he did not refer, as some would today, to a particular religious institution that was identified by some favorite name of man. He simply wanted the Christians in Rome to know that the “churches of Christ” sent their greetings to them (Rm 16:16). He gave them no “brand name” reference that would bring them comfort in a time of isolation in the seat of Christian persecution. Neither did he seek to give a unique name to all those who had obeyed the gospel of Christ. He simply wanted the Christians in Rome to know that there were Christians meeting everywhere under the name of Christ alone.

If we would be literal in our interpretation of his encouragement after mentioning several groups meeting in homes throughout Rome, then we would justly translate the Greek word *ekklesia* (“assemblies”) to be used in the common era of the times. Those in Rome thought that they were alone in meeting for Christ in the seat of Roman government, and a center of Nero’s persecution of Christians. So Paul wanted the disciples in Rome to know that there were assemblies for Christ throughout the Roman Empire. They were indeed not alone.

What is strikingly different today is that if some would presume to write a letter of encouragement to a group of persecuted Christians, they would probably state that there were people assembling under the name of a Jewish feast day—Pentecost—who send their greetings. Others would possibly write that there are people assembling under the name of a favorite doctrine, or methodology, or even a favorite personality. Some would even try to encourage the persecuted in Rome by saying that they were assembling under a sign post outside their build-

ing that glorified themselves. And to emphasize their point, they would refer to themselves as either "first," or "second," or "full."

But the Holy Spirit did not resort to such sectarian misdirection. He directed the hand of Paul to encourage the Christians in Rome that there were others throughout the Empire who were assembling under the name of Christ alone. And that is good enough for us. When people observe us in public, we want to be identified to be of Christ only, not people who have institutionalized as a unique sect under the name of Paul, or Cephas, or Apollos (See 1 Co 1:12,13). We were not baptized into the name of any man, neither was any man crucified on our behalf. So when the world observes our gospel behavior, we do not want them to feel that we have ulterior motives. We seek to exalt Christ alone.

Therefore, we will absolutely not allow ourselves to be called after any man, or Jewish feast day, or unique doctrine, or unique history, or whatever. If you don't mind, we will be called after Christ, which means that we will be known as Christians only. So don't try to pigeonhole us with some sect. That by which we allow ourselves to be called reveals whether we are of the gospel of Christ . . . or not. We are not brand-name disciples of Christ. We are Christians only. Therefore, when people see us living the gospel of Christ, they will inquire concerning our hope, knowing that they are not going to be converted to some religious institution.

Chapter 13

THE "BIBLICAL YEAR"

There is coming a year in the history of mankind that has never before occurred, and will never occur again in the millennia to come. It will be a year of remembering a legacy that forever changed human history in the past. History was changed by the actions of a few driven people who had a message on their hearts that they had to proclaim to the world. Two thousand years ago, this small band of driven individuals set themselves on a course of action that changed the world. A

noted historian once recorded the example of what just one gospel-driven individual did in order to accomplish this feat:

*I kept nothing back that was profitable,
and teaching you publicly and from
HOUSE TO HOUSE.
– Acts **20:20** –*

Two thousand years ago it was an “Acts 20:20” revolution that changed history. And now we are set for another “Acts 20:20” year wherein we have the opportunity to repeat history. As a dated year of history on our calendars, the coming year has never before been recorded in history, nor will it ever again be noted on our calendars as long as time will exist on this earth.

THEREFORE, I CALL ON EVERY HOUSEHOLD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD TO REPEAT HISTORY BY DEDICATING THE YEAR 2020 TO A RENEWAL OF THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE.

Join with me in a restoration of gospel preaching from house to house. As those early gospel-driven saints of the first century, we too can again change the course of history by the power of the gospel. This is an opportunity to change our “church house” religiosity from singing “standing on the promises,” when all the time we have been “sittin’ on the premises.” From a “rust and decay” faith, while singing, “trust and obey,” we have the opportunity once again in history to go from house to house with the message of the gospel. We can again get excited about sowing the gospel seed by reviving our excitement about the gospel needs of every living soul on earth.

2020 is a year to stop going to church. It is a year to **be church** from house to house. It is a year during which our personal response to the gospel must spill over into the streets of every village, town, and city of the world. If you live in a house on some street in the world, then in that house let there be invited thirsty souls who seek the thirst-quenching message of the incarnate God who came into our world in

order to fetch souls out of this world.

Our houses must become beacons for broadcasting the gospel. We must use our houses to hone in on our neighborhoods with the heavenly message of our reigning King Jesus. Our huts must become centers of hope. Our mansions must be transformed into manifestations that there is a mansion far beyond brick and mortar that is reserved for every gospel-obedient believer. The world must be informed that every Christian home has been invaded with the gospel of King Jesus. Therefore, the world must be informed that we are not alone in this universe. We have received communication from beyond the celestial bodies of our galaxy.

By December 31, 2020, I envision feeling good about the "biblical year" of Acts 20:20. I want to have given it my best to have restored the gospel first in my home, and then from the beach head of my home to have preached out to my street, my village, my city, and into all the world.

In this coming "Acts 20:20 year," I dedicate my house to King Jesus. I dedicate my bank account to King Jesus. I dedicate my health to King Jesus. I dedicate my time to King Jesus. And if by the grace of God I make it to December 31, 2020, I want to be able to offer to King Jesus a year that I have exhausted myself in order to populate the heavenly home of King Jesus that is yet to come.

Therefore, I challenge everyone who might read this declaration that you too join with me in making the year 2020 a "biblical year" by going into all the world from house to house with the message of the gospel. Therefore, as Joshua challenged Israel, so I would challenge you:

Choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods that your fathers served on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. BUT AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15).

Chapter 14

GOOD NEWS FROM KING JESUS

Here is some very exciting good news from the Holy Spirit:

He raised Him [Jesus] from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name [authority] that is named (Ep 1:20,21).

The Holy Spirit continued in this most exciting announcement with the declaration: “**He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things**” (Ep 1:22). And if that news does not excite you, the Spirit declared that the Lord Jesus “*is the blessed and only Potentate, the **King of kings and Lord of lords***” (1 Tm 6:15). Jesus is the King of the universe!

The preceding statements reveal the unlimited extent of the present gospel reign of King Jesus. Jesus’ present reign is so expansive that the Holy Spirit directed the hand of a faithful writer to inscribe an entire book on this matter. Hebrews is a gospel message of the present ministry of our King. The power of the gospel reign of Jesus is in the fact that His kingdom extends far beyond the limits of the submitted.

Sometimes it takes only one passage of Scripture to reveal a profound truth. One of these passages is in reference to the present reign of King Jesus. The Holy Spirit guided the hand of Peter to proclaim that Jesus “*has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, **angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him***” (1 Pt 3:22). The good news revealed in this proclamation is that the kingdom of Jesus and His reign extend far beyond the church of faithful subjects.

It is good news that the kingdom of Jesus is not limited to the church of believers. It is good news to know that angels and earthly authorities and powers are all part of the kingdom of Jesus, but these

personalities are not in the church. On the contrary, the Father set His Son King Jesus “*far above all principality and power and might and dominion*” of this present world (Ep 1:21). All the kings and lords and presidents and chiefs and princes of the world at this time are under the gospel reign of King Jesus. This is gospel news!

The unbelieving potentates of this world are not a part of the church of our Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, they are under the universal control of King Jesus. This is gospel news! The insubmissive subjects of the kingdom of King Jesus are not members of the church. Regardless of their insubmission, however, our King is still far above them in all things. This is gospel news! All the members of the body of Christ are subjects in the kingdom of Jesus, but the kingdom of Jesus extends far beyond the body of obedient subjects.

Every kingdom has insurrectionists and rebels, and so it is with the kingdom of Jesus. Of these insubmissive subjects, the Hebrew writer declared the following in reference to the sovereignty of Jesus 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).

The presence of insurrectionists assumes that the insurrectionists are rebelling against the authority under which they are to be submissive. In other words, demons are demons because they are under the reign of One who declares them to be rebellious demons. This means that the King has power to eventually cast Satan and His demons into destruction (Mt 25:41).

Though all things are under the gospel reign of King Jesus, we do not see this happening at this time because there is so much rebellion in the world today. But this does not mean that the rebellious kings and lords of this world, and Satan himself, are not under the control of King Jesus. We must not allow the existence of rebellion to deceive us into believing that Jesus is not in control of all things with all authority.

The good news is about all those who are submissive to the present kingdom of King Jesus. They have submitted to His kingdom reign in their hearts. These are those who make up the church of King Jesus.

All the church is composed of the submissive subjects of Jesus' present kingdom. However, we must not make the mistake of thinking that all the subjects of the universal kingdom of Jesus are the submissive subjects of the church. This would put angels and Satan, over which Jesus now reigns, in the church. Therefore, all the church is composed of kingdom subjects, but not all the subjects of the galactic kingdom of Jesus are members of the church.

This great reassuring truth was revealed by Jesus during His earthly ministry. In Matthew 16:18,19, Jesus gave a personal privilege to Peter in reference to making the first official announcement on earth of His coming gospel reign from heaven. Jesus introduced this privilege to Peter with a specific statement: *"I also say to you, that you are Peter, and upon **this rock** I will build My church"* (Mt 16:18). Understanding what Jesus was promising in reference to building His church, depends on understanding the "rock" upon which it would be built.

Peter had just confessed the "rock": *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Mt 16:16). The "rock" was what Peter confessed, that **Jesus was the Christ** (Messiah) and **Son of God**. In the near future after Peter made this confession, those who would believe and respond to these two truths in reference to Jesus would become the church of Christ. The church of believers that Jesus would establish would be composed of all those who believed that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God (See Jn 20:30,31). The establishment of the church in the near future after Peter's confession would not be the gospel. On the contrary, the church would be composed of all those in the universal kingdom of Jesus who would believe and obey the gospel of the incarnate offering of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary.

In the context of the Matthew 16 pronouncement and promise, Jesus then turned to another subject in verse 19: *"And I will give you **the keys of the kingdom of heaven.**"* Jesus turned from the people who would believe that He was the Christ and Son of God to His kingdom reign that would extend from heaven. His coming exaltation to be King would generate a response in the hearts of men. Those who responded on earth would be the church of His submitted disciples. However, we must keep in mind that this kingdom would not be established

in heaven while He was still on earth.

After His ascension, coronation, and finally the announcement of His reign at the right hand of the Father was made, there would be a response on earth. This response would be His church of people who believed that He was the reigning Christ and Son of God. When the time came, therefore, the church would be all the submitted people on earth who surrendered in submission to the gospel reign of King Jesus from heaven.

After the cross and ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father to reign as King (At 1:9), and throughout the week leading up to the day of Pentecost, everything was ready for Peter's official announcement of the reign of King Jesus. About a week after the ascension, therefore, Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and announced that God had raised up Jesus and set Him on the throne of David (At 2:24-35). He was now Lord and Christ. When about three thousand people heard this good news of the reign of the resurrected Jesus, they submitted to the King on that very day. The church began on the Pentecost of A.D. 30 when people first submitted to the existing reign of King Jesus.

We must not forget that the gospel reign of King Jesus had already been established at the right hand of God BEFORE the announcement was made on Pentecost and the church established. Therefore, the kingdom reign of Jesus is not limited to the church of submitted subjects, because Jesus was King of all kings before the first person obeyed the gospel of the Pentecost of A.D. 30. The church was the assembly of people who obeyed the gospel of the kingdom reign of Jesus that Peter made on Pentecost. Kingdom reign was in existence before church began.

If one maintains the teaching that the church and kingdom of Jesus are the same, then he has marginalized, if not attacked the gospel reign of King Jesus. He has limited the gospel reign of King Jesus only to a church of believers. The result of this attack against the gospel reign of Jesus has led many to believe in a limited kingdom theology, which theology is a subtle attack against the present gospel reign of King Jesus over all things. In fact, the attack is actually against the gospel reign of Jesus over all things for the sake of the church (See Ep 1:22). If Jesus'

reign is limited, then His reign on our behalf is weakened.

When we fail to understand the extent of the kingdom reign of the Messiah that was prophesied by the prophets, we will certainly start promoting theologies that are subtle attacks against the gospel reign of Jesus. In other words, if the kingdom of Jesus is limited only to a body of submitted believers (the church), **then all the prophecies of the kingdom reign of the Messiah have not been fulfilled.** This is true because the Old Testament prophets spoke of a “mountain” of authority that would extend above the mountains of all authorities on this earth (Is 2:2-4; Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). But if these prophecies have not been fulfilled in the present gospel reign of Jesus, then there must be another fulfillment yet in the future. The belief that there is another kingdom of Jesus to come has led to another subtle attack against the present gospel reign of King Jesus.

It is believed by some that Jesus will in the future forfeit His present gospel reign over all things in order to come and reign over the inhabitants of this one speck of dust (the earth).

Because of the concept of the limited kingdom reign of Jesus that is promoted by many today, there is a subtle attack against the present gospel reign of Jesus over all things (See Ph 2:9-11). The attack is against those clear statements in the New Testament that affirm Jesus to be the fulfillment of all those prophecies that refer to the kingdom reign of the Messiah (See Lk 24:25,44). If we limit the kingdom reign of Jesus to the church only, then it is logical to conclude that the prophecies have not been fulfilled.

Since the Old Testament prophets prophesied a universal kingdom reign of the Messiah over all that exists, but supposedly Jesus now reigns only over a small group of people referred to as the church, then we must assume that the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament have not yet been fulfilled (See Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). It is necessary, therefore, to conclude that there will be another kingdom yet to come, during the existence of which kingdom, King Jesus will finally fulfill all Old Testament prophecies.

If the present church and kingdom of Jesus are the same, or if Jesus did not fulfill all prophecies concerning the kingdom reign of the

Messiah, then there is a subtle attack against the present gospel reign of King Jesus over all things. This has led some to believe that Jesus is coming again in order to reign on this earth in fulfillment of those prophecies that speak of the totality of His reign.

There is great excitement in the religious world concerning the rapture to come because it is assumed that King Jesus is coming in order to reign on this small planet for a period of one thousand years. If this teaching is correct, then Jesus would have to give up His present galactic reign over all things. He would have to give up His reign over Satan, angels and all the creation that exists as a result of His creation work in the beginning (Cl 1:16). He would have to give up being King of kings and Lord of lords. He would have to do this in order to reign on a speck of dust of all the galaxies of the universe over which He now presently reigns.

But this is a reverse theology of the present gospel reign of Jesus simply because of what Paul revealed concerning what will happen when Jesus comes again.

*For He [the Father] has put all things under His feet [at this present time]. But when He says all things have been subjected, it is evident that He is excluded who put all things in subjection 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, so that God may be all in all** (1 Co 15:27,28).*

This is a picture of the end of Jesus' present reign. When Paul revealed this profound event that is yet to come, he did not mention a one thousand year period between the time when death is destroyed and the time when the Son will submit all things to the Father. When the Scriptures speak of the final coming of Jesus, they speak of the consummation of all things, not continuation (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

Those who are so excited about a supposed one-thousand year reign of Jesus on earth should be concerned about what will happen at the end of this supposed earthly reign of Jesus. If we believe all our carnal desires to reign over our fellow man will be fulfilled during the

one-thousand year reign of Jesus on this earth, then we have spiritually disqualified ourselves from being with Jesus in a spiritual realm beyond the supposed one-thousand year reign. We must remember, "*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable*" (1 Co 15:50).

If King Jesus is not now reigning over all things, which reign will end when He comes again, then the gospel of His reign is attacked. Therefore, what Peter announced on the day of Pentecost was actually a lie. At the time Peter was stating that Jesus was reigning, in reality Jesus was not actually seated at the right hand of God and ruling over all things. The Father had not actually given Him authority over all things. Therefore, what cut the people to the heart concerning the reign of King Jesus, as Peter announced, was actually a lie? The people thus believed in a fictional reign of King Jesus over all things from the right hand of God.

We must keep in mind that on the day of Pentecost, people initially responded to the gospel reign of King Jesus. It was with many other words that the apostles connected all the dots from the prophecy of the redemption and the atoning death of the cross. After the people were cut to the heart because they had crucified their King, they were later told how to reconnect with this now resurrected King through obedience to the gospel (At 2:38).

In the case of those who teach that the kingdom and church are the same, they must assume that Jesus sat at the right hand of God after the ascension, and then twiddled His thumbs on the throne of David until He could actually start reigning about a week later over three thousand people on the day of Pentecost. But then this reign would have depended on whether anyone would obey the gospel on Pentecost. Did Jesus' kingdom reign exist on the condition of people on earth responding to the gospel of His reign? Or, was He reigning over all things before there was even an announcement on earth that He was seated at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords, reigning over Satan, demons and all angels?

Subtle attacks against the gospel come from different perspectives, which attacks have major consequences in reference to a denial of the

gospel of the Son of God from His incarnation to His consummation of all things.

[Download Book 3, *The Sovereignty of Deity*, from africainternational.org]

Chapter 15 IN THE YEAR A.D. 30

Acts 2 marks a paradigm shift from the Old Testament era to the New Testament era. All history of God's people that took place before the Pentecost of Acts 2 would be judged by their living under the Sinai law. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are records of Jesus' ministry under the Sinai law in order to prepare Israel for His ascension to the right hand of God to assume all authority from the throne of David.

It is difficult to determine the year for the crucifixion of Jesus, and thus, the year for the establishment of the church in Acts 2 in reference to our calendar today. In order to come to some conclusions concerning the year of the Acts 2 Pentecost and establishment of the church, however, there are some specific historical facts that we should know. These are historical facts that we cannot ignore, neither can we discount them because of any previous assumptions, or mistakes on the part of past scholarship. It is the objective of the biblical scholar to absorb all known facts concerning a proposition. Objective minds seek to base beliefs on facts, regardless of traditional beliefs. Therefore, we are challenged with the following points in order that we draw a conclusion for ourselves concerning the date of the Acts 2 Pentecost and the establishment of the church.

A. Jesus was crucified immediately before the Passover feast.

There is little debate over the fact that Jesus was crucified at the beginning of the Passover feast of the Jews, though there is some debate over the exact day of the week Jesus ate the Passover feast with

the disciples. The Passover lamb was traditionally eaten on the 14th of Nisan, on Friday evening before the Sabbath and the Pentecost that followed the Sabbath. Because the 14th of Nisan was determined by the new moon, it would be very difficult to determine the exact day in reference to our calendar today when Jesus ate His last Passover meal with His disciples. The biblical text is not clear as to when Jesus ate this meal with His disciples. Because the New Testament writers left us little information on this subject, we would conclude that the Holy Spirit does not want us to ponder the matter in reference to an exact day, even the exact day of the week Jesus ate His Passover meal with the disciples. Our focus should be on the event, and that He was three days in the tomb as He prophesied (Mt 12:40), with His resurrection early on the first day of the week (Mk 16:9). The important thing to remember is that He was the Passover lamb, and the crucifixion took place during the Passover feast of the Jews.

B. Jesus visited Jerusalem on possibly three Passovers.

It is not easy to determine how many times Jesus visited Jerusalem during His adult earthly ministry. For this reason, it is difficult to determine the length of His earthly ministry. Estimates for the length of the ministry have been anywhere from two and a half to five and a half years. Since the record of the gospel according to John seems to be the most historical in recording the number of visits Jesus made to the feasts of the Jews, we use John's document to establish a possible number of visits Jesus made to Jerusalem during His ministry.

1. First visit to Jerusalem: During His ministry, Jesus first went up to Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast that is mentioned in John 2:13. This visit took place after the first signs of Jesus in Capernaum (Jn 2:11). We are not told how long He was into His ministry when He made this trip, but we could assume that it was about six months.

2. Second visit to Jerusalem: There is another "feast of the Jews" mentioned in John 5:1 when Jesus again went up to Jerusalem. How-

ever, the difficulty is to determine whether this was the annual Passover/Pentecost feast or another feast of the Jews. Some have suggested that this “feast of the Jews” could have been the feast of Tabernacles that took place in the month Tishi. If this is true, then regardless of John 5:1 being a specific reference to the Passover, reference would be to a second trip of Jesus to Jerusalem to a feast that was an annual feast of the Jews. It would represent a year in which a second Passover visit took place in His ministry. However, we do not know if Jesus attended any other feast of Tabernacles except the one that is mentioned in John 7:2. We might assume, therefore, that the “feast of the Jews” in John 5:1 was the annual Passover/Pentecost feast of the Jews. However, some have also suggested that the “feast of the Jews” in John 5:1 was the feast of Dedication, or even the feast of Purim. It is difficult to determine which specific feast is intended. Nevertheless, many biblical scholars believe that John 5:1 was a Passover feast, and thus, Jesus’ second visit to Jerusalem.

Another Passover/Pentecost feast is mentioned in John 6:4. Because of the increased hostility that was mounting against Him, however, Jesus did not attend this Passover. John simply recorded, “*He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews sought to kill him*” (Jn 7:1). Now what complicates the matter is the fact that this may have been the second Passover of Jesus’ ministry, not the “feast of the Jews” mentioned in John 5:1. But if the “feast of the Jews” in John 5:1 was a Passover, then John 6:4 was the third, and the John 13:1 Passover the fourth. This would make Jesus’ ministry the traditional three and a half years in length.

3. Third visit to Jerusalem: The last feast of Passover that Jesus attended is recorded in John 13:1. This was the feast during which He was crucified. Since John 2:13 was the first Passover visit, and assuming John 5:1 was a Passover, and thus the second Passover visit, with John 6:4 being a Passover that was not attended, then the John 13:1 would be the third Passover visit.

John specifically records that Jesus attended two mentioned Passover feasts, the one in John 2:13 and the one in 13:1. He did not attend the John 6:4 Passover. If the “feast of the Jews” in John 5:1 is another

Passover, then He attended three during His ministry, but over a period of four Passovers, one just after the beginning and the last at the time of His crucifixion. If there were four Passovers during Jesus' ministry, then Jesus' ministry would have been over three years in length, possibly over four years. Assuming that He was into His ministry several months before the John 2:13 Passover visit, we conclude that His ministry was not shorter than three and a half years.

C. Jesus began His ministry when He was about thirty years old.

“Now when He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age ...” (Lk 3:23). Under the Sinai law, this was the common age when priests began their ministry (Nm 4:1-3,22,23,29,30). The word “about” in Luke 3:23 adds some ambiguity to the matter, but we assume that Jesus was somewhere in His 30th year at the beginning of His earthly ministry. We could assume that the Holy Spirit added the word “about” in order for us not to focus on exactly what we are doing here, that is, trying to determine an exact date for the crucifixion and establishment of the church. Nevertheless, when we add “about” thirty with the time of the earthly ministry of the preceding point, we come up with Jesus' approximate age at the time of His death. Jesus would have been at least thirty-three years of age when He was crucified.

D. Jesus was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus.

In reference to the Roman Empire, Jesus was born when Augustus was Caesar of Rome. Luke records that a census was taken during this time, which census affected the lives of Joseph and Mary (Lk 2:1-4). It was because of this census that Joseph and Mary made their way to Bethlehem, the prophesied place of the birth of the Messiah (Mc 5:2).

E. Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great.

Jesus was born during the latter years of the reign of Herod the Great (Mt 2:1-6). It was Herod who commissioned the slaughter of the

Bethlehem babies who were two years of age and under (Mt 2:16). He made this proclamation of genocide in order to make sure that Jesus would be included in the slaughter. However, this does not mean that Jesus was as old as two years by the time of the slaughter. It simply means that Herod was not sure about the time of birth, and thus wanted to make sure that Jesus was included in the slaughter.

In reference to the birth of Jesus, here are some historical facts that must be considered:

1. *The testimony of encyclopedias and dictionaries:* Since Jesus was born during the final days of Herod, then it is imperative that we determine the date of the death of Herod in reference to our calendar today. Now keep in mind that the establishment for the birth of Jesus is dated from our modern-day calendars. We are not judging the date from the Roman calendar, though the Roman calendar must be considered in order to determine the date of Herod's life history. As will be pointed out later, there was a discrepancy made in affixing the Roman calendar dates with our modern-day calendar, which discrepancy was noted and corrected over a century ago. But in reference to our calendar today, all secular and biblical encyclopedias and dictionaries establish the date of Herod's death to have occurred in Jericho the last of March in 4 B.C. *The World Book Encyclopedia* states, "Herod the Great (73? - 4 B.C.) ruled all Palestine from 37 to 4 B.C." (1976, Vol. 9, p. 198). Other encyclopedias or dictionaries do not contradict this statement. Though first published in 1917, the 1939 edition of the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states that Herod died in 4 B.C. (1939, Vol. 2, p. 668). The *New Bible Dictionary* affirms the 4 B.C. date, as well as A. T. Robertson in his renowned *Harmony of the Gospels*. Historically speaking, therefore, one will not find any encyclopedia or dictionary that will disagree with the 4 B.C. date for the death of Herod.

2. *The record of Josephus:* Josephus was a Jewish historian whose work transitioned from the latter part of the 1st century into the 2nd century. In his *Antiquities*, XVII, 6, 4, he alluded to an eclipse of the moon that occurred shortly before the death of Herod. Thus the birth of

Jesus could not have occurred after the death of Herod, or after this eclipse since Jesus was born during Herod's reign. The eclipse establishes the time of Herod's death, which eclipse also helps us to determine the time of Jesus' birth in reference to our calendar today.

Now here are some conclusions to ponder. According to our calendar today, Herod died in 4 B.C. Jesus was about thirty years old when He began His ministry. His ministry was about three and a half years in length, which means that He was about thirty-three years old when He was crucified. We can place the birth of Jesus somewhere in the two-year window of Herod's slaughter of babies. Add the figures and we come up with the crucifixion and establishment of the church around A.D. 30 according to our calendar today. This is the date that all current Bible resource books use in reference to the events that transpired and were recorded in Acts 2.

Chapter 16

THE REIGN OF MIRACLE MONEY MAKERS

We were all young and innocent and not quite in our teens in the 1950s. We were vulnerable country people who knew little of the world outside the county in which we lived. Going to another town (village) fifty miles away in another county was an adventure into another world. You may not believe it, but we had no television and hardly ever listened to the radio, of which there was only one on the farm. We were too busy with the exciting life of farming fourteen to sixteen hours a day, to be interested in televisions or radios.

During the school months, a school bus would come by our farm house and pick up us children for a forty-five minute drive to town (village) where we all went to a small school. Preston, Kansas was a town of 265 in population. You can imagine how vulnerable our minds were to things that we did not understand outside our small village.

And then we had an experience at school one day that opened our minds. When we arrived at school, something happened that educated

our young innocent minds for the rest of our lives.

The school principals throughout central America in those years realized that the young minds in their small rural schools needed every opportunity to be educated concerning things outside their small communities. Therefore, they would invite special guest educators to visit their schools in order to teach for a day on subjects that were not a part of our regular curriculum. These special educators offered a tremendous opportunity for all of us to learn of those things that were outside our isolated cocoon of rural America.

Because our minds were so innocent and vulnerable, if not naive, one particular educator in the field of psychology offered his services to schools throughout middle America. Our school principal took the opportunity to invite this psychologist to come to our school in order to educate us rural farm children in the phenomenon of mind control. This special guest lecturer informed all of us in the science of hypnotism, or as it is called in the field of psychology, mind or thought suggestion.

Before his demonstration of hypnotism began, he clearly explained to all of us the practice of suggestive thinking. He explained how the mind could be convinced to have no pain in specific parts of the body, or to have pain. In his field of psychology, this was called psychosomatic healing. In other words, it was the power of the mind over the physical body. One could actually think himself to be without pain, and thus we psychosomatically healed.

The visiting psychologist also carefully explained that individuals could be convinced to submit to the suggestions of the one who would hypnotize them. He was cautious to explain that hypnotism was simply mind control by one individual over another. There were no abnormal lasting effects. He also explained that the one who would be hypnotized must willingly make a decision to submit to the suggestions of the hypnotist. In those days in the middle of the Cold War, no one could be “brain washed” against his or her will. To be so brain controlled, one’s will would first have to be changed.

It was then time for him to demonstrate all that about which he educated us in reference to hypnotism. He informed us that not only could individuals be hypnotized, but also entire groups at the same

time. In order to demonstrate how groups could be brought under the suggestions of a skilled psychologist, he called about six or eight of our fellow students to the stage. He sat them down in chairs, facing all of us who were gathered in the auditorium of the school.

And then his demonstration (performance) proceeded. After he had relaxed the willing volunteers, it took him only a few minutes to take them into a “hypnotic sleep.” However, one of the students did not go to sleep. The lecturer then made a statement that stuck in the minds of all of us. He said, “One can be hypnotized only if he or she is willing to be hypnotized. No one can be hypnotized against his or her will.” In other words, one had “to believe” in the hypnosis before he or she would submit his or her will to the will of another person. (Is this sounding familiar?)

Now the show began. He asked these willing friends of ours to do all sorts of things that the rest of us thought were hilarious. He took the volunteers on a fishing trip. They all cast their lines into the water and reeled in supposed fish. He ask them to jump up and down, kneel on the floor, lay on the floor, stand at attention, light a pretend cigarette and smoke it. He would push on the foreheads of some and they would fall back into the arms of others. The enthralling show went on with a number of other requests. We were not only fascinated, but in some sense stunned to realize our own vulnerability.

As the rest of us uncontrollably laughed at times until our sides hurt, those who were “under his spell” did not laugh, neither did they crack a smile. They were in another world under the spell of the psychologist’s suggestions. To those willing volunteers, it was as if the entire auditorium of students was not there with all their laughter.

And then the “show” was over and all the volunteers were awakened and asked to return to their seats. The psychologist then explained to all our innocent minds that we must always be careful to guard ourselves against those who would seek to take control of our minds by changing our wills. If we were willing to be controlled, then we would submit to a great deal of foolishness throughout our lives. So the visiting psychologist warned that we should not allow others to control us with any thoughts that conflicted with the reality of truth.

And so we heeded his admonition. By informing young minds in small rural schools in middle America, minds were prepared for a world of deceptive religious practitioners who paraded themselves about from one church to another with “hypnotic trances” in order to make people believe that the Holy Spirit was at work. But in the thinking of the rural Kansas farmers of those days, we were all educated in the fact that the healing of the religious practitioners was simply psychosomatic “healing,” and the claims of the “snake handlers” of the time were all “hogwash.” Those farmers have not changed their minds on the matter even to this day.

Since the days of our innocent youth, we have experienced the same hypnotic demonstrations that were taught across rural America over a half century ago. The scene of the performances, however, has changed. The performances have moved from school auditoriums into packed church houses. The practitioners have also changed from trained psychologists to religious prognosticators who prey on the minds of the innocent.

The environment of such performances is no longer in the field of the science of psychology, but now in the field of deceptive religion. Religious prognosticators have hijacked the phenomenon of hypnosis in order to captivate thousands of innocent minds who willingly bow down to them in assemblies of hyperventilated emotionalists who have long forgotten the reality of the word of God. On the contrary, people come to “healing assemblies” (performances) in order to find relief from some pain or evil spirit they are struggling to overcome.

Thousands of deceived subjects have subsequently submitted willingly to these fake healers around the world. People come to assemblies for healing, not to hear the gospel of the incarnate Son of God. Adherents are no longer called into assembly to exalt the Son, but to find some psychosomatic healing.

Unknowingly, that psychologist who came to our small school on that day years ago prepared all of us for a world of religious frauds who seek a following from misguided and deceived prey. These are those who devour the innocent and vulnerable, who are primarily in underdeveloped countries. Thousands show up at their “miracle meetings.”

Millions turn on their televisions and willingly believe all the nonsense these fake healers propagate around the world. When these fake healers call on faith from those who seek to be “healed,” they are calling on the willingness of deceived minds to submit to their skills in group hypnosis. Masses of people subsequently fall before them.

The incarnate Lord Jesus Christ has now been moved to a seat in the auditorium. With Him are all the spectators who must now observe the performance of charismatic miracle workers who pose to unleash the power of the Holy Spirit on the stage of the world.

As young children over a half century ago, we had the advantage of being taught by wise educators of yesteryear. Unfortunately, millions of people throughout the world today have been cheated by not being educated in the psychology of hypnotism, or suggestive thinking. If thousands around the world had been so educated as we were, then there would certainly be less nonsense performed in the religious world by those who go about as devouring lions preying on the innocent for the sake of money.

But Satan would have his way. There are countless millions of deceived people who would eagerly give their will and money over to the masters of deception who masquerade themselves as apostles of Christ. It is all as the Holy Spirit warned us two thousand years ago:

*“And with all deception of wickedness among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved. **And for this reason God will send them strong delusion so that they should believe a lie, that they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness**” (2 Th 2:10-12).*

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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

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

NEW TESTAMENT

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