

# FOUNDATIONS FOR FAITH



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Chuck LaMattina

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This book is dedicated to my three sons, Joseph, Michael and David. I pray that you love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and that you become men who are valiant for the truth.



# CHAPTER 1

## Knowing the Scoop

A number of years ago a college professor began to notice that his freshman students were lacking in some very basic general knowledge. So he put together a test to see exactly what his students knew. The results were later published in Newsweek magazine. Here is a little of what the professor discovered. Many of the students were confident that Ralph Nader is a famous baseball player. And the students were just as confident that Charles Darwin invented gravity. Socrates was most likely an American Indian Chief. And Jefferson Davis played guitar for the Rock band Jefferson Airplane.<sup>1</sup>

The students didn't have a very good knowledge of geography either. Belfast they believed to be located somewhere in Egypt. Cape Town was somewhere in the United States, and Leningrad was once the main city of Jamaica. Since the college professor's test things haven't gotten any better. On the Tonight Show with Jay Leno there is a segment called "Jay Walking." In this segment Jay walks around on the street and asks people some general knowledge questions. Some people were asked, "What year did the War of 1812 occur?" Several people responded, "I don't know." When asked to name two states on the US Pacific coast the people he asked couldn't even name one, even though the show is taped in Los Angeles, California!

This is all funny until you realize that as a society we no longer share a common sense of general knowledge. And what many people take as cold, hard fact really isn't. Everyday we are bombarded by tons of information from radio, TV, newspapers,

the internet, and a lot of it is slanted, full of spin and lacking in detail. As a result we could say what one comedian has said, “It’s better not to know so much than to know so many things that ain’t so.”<sup>2</sup> I might rephrase that to “What you know ought to be so.”

Sadly this lack of knowledge is even worse in the area of biblical knowledge—our knowledge of God. In the 2004 Democratic presidential primaries one candidate said that his favorite New Testament book was Job! A recent survey of incoming seminary students revealed that almost 80% didn’t know the names of the books of the Bible. And a lot of what the Bible students did know just wasn’t so.

There is a tragic famine in our world today and it is not a famine of food and water. It is a famine of the true knowledge of God and it is destroying us. A similar famine occurred in ancient Israel. Here’s how God through the prophet Hosea described it.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.  
Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will  
reject you from being priest for Me. Because you  
have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget  
your children.

(Hosea 4:6)<sup>3</sup>

The destruction faced by the people of Israel was not due to their lack of knowledge of arts, entertainment, business, sports or politics. It was from a lack of knowledge about God. And because these people not only lacked knowledge about God but also rejected it their society was filled with lying, stealing, adultery and bloodshed. There was no truth or mercy in the land.<sup>4</sup> This sounds very much like our world today doesn’t it?

There is a different picture given to us in Psalm 1 concerning the person who does know about God and who applies this knowledge in his life.

Blessed *is* the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly;  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
He shall be like a tree  
Planted by the rivers of water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
Whose leaf also shall not wither.  
And whatever he does shall prosper.  
The ungodly *are* not so,  
But *are* like the chaff which the wind drives away.  
(Psalm 1:1-4)

Verse 1 declares, “Blessed *is* the man” and the Hebrew word translated “Blessed” can also mean truly, supremely and abundantly happy. People who lack or reject a true knowledge of God are destroyed but those who learn about God and apply that knowledge are supremely blessed. In which category would you like to be? Psalm 19 also tells us about the benefits of knowing what the Bible, the Word of God, is all about.

The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise  
the simple;  
The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the  
heart;  
The commandment of the LORD *is* pure,  
enlightening the eyes;  
The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous  
altogether.  
More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than  
much find gold;

Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
 Moreover by them Your servant is warned,  
*And* in keeping then *there is* great reward.

(Psalm 19:7-11)

In verses 7 and 8 we have four parallel lines which contain a synonym for God's Word. Each describes what God's Word is and what effect it produces. The Hebrew word for "law" in verse 7 might be better translated as the "teaching" or "instruction" of the Lord. And the instruction we get is perfect. All that we need to know about God, and about life is revealed to us in the Scriptures. As a result of this instruction our soul is converted or more accurately, restored.<sup>5</sup> And isn't this what so many people long for—a sense of revival and restoration of their lives? This is what knowledge, an applied knowledge of God's Word can give us. Life can be reinvested, restored, refreshed.

The "testimony" of the Lord is sure or trustworthy. When we follow God's commands and believe His promises, we will find salvation, contentment, joy and peace. The word translated "testimony" comes from a root word that means to bear witness. The Bible is God's self-revelation, His witness to the world of His person and character and will. What He says can be trusted.

The "statutes" of the Lord are right. So much of what people and even church leaders say about God just isn't so. But the knowledge we gain from the Bible we can take to the bank. What we read in the Bible is right on the money. When we understand the Scriptures we know the score! An accurate understanding of the Word of God gives us a sure foundation for our faith. Romans 10:17 states,

So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by  
 the word of God.

Faith, our trust in God, our confidence in God, our beliefs, convictions and expectations come from hearing the Word of God. If our faith is fragmented, feeble and unsure, if life's trials

weigh too heavily on our hearts, if we are uncertain about who God is and what He will do, it is due to the fact that we have not heard and understood the words of the Bible. But in hearing God's Word we are warned of life's dangers and in keeping His commands we gain great reward. In the midst of his great trial and suffering Job had this to say about God's Word,

My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary *food*.

(Job 23:11, 12)

Food, good food is essential for a healthy physical life. Good spiritual food is just as essential. The Lord Jesus Christ understood this necessity for spiritual food. Look at what he had to say after his great trial in the wilderness.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "if You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

(Matthew 4:1-4)

We are told that after forty days and nights without food Jesus Christ was hungry. I'll bet he was ravenous. But instead of giving in to the temptation to turn the stones into bread, to meet a genuine need, Jesus quotes the Word of God from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. In the face of temptation, in the midst of a real and pressing need Christ proclaims our

crucial need for the Word of God above all else. And in doing this he lifts our vision from the purely material side of life to the more important spiritual perspective.

We are to live, not merely exist, but live life to the fullest measure by taking heed to every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Sadly though too many times we have fed on the opinions, philosophies, psychologies and man made religions of our world that never really seem to satisfy. And often what many Christians think they know about God is in error not being based on Scriptural insight. In gaining a knowledge of God we need to know the truth. As the old newspaper reporters used to say, we need to get the scoop!

The Chicago Tribune newspaper ran an article about people having religious altars in their homes.<sup>6</sup> The article featured one woman who performs her daily devotions at a bedroom table filled with statues. She has one of the Virgin Mary and then also a collection of other female gods and deities from various other religions. She also has a bowl of sand from Hawaii blessed by an American Indian, and a collection of ten dimes given to her by fate which she has found over the years. Her religion is a kind of smorgasbord spirituality where she has borrowed from here and there according to her religious tastes. Is this woman sincere and earnest in what she believes? Most likely. But is sincerity any guarantee of the truth? The answer is no. Is knowing the truth important when it comes to one's religion and faith? Yes! The truth is crucial in all of life and in our knowledge of God. What we believe is important. Sincerely thinking that a bottle of poison is really medicine is deadly. You need to know the truth. You need to know the scoop!

The very first commandment in the Ten Commandments is, "I am the LORD [Yahweh] your God . . . You shall have no other gods before Me. (Exodus 20:2, 3)." Therefore we need to know the scoop on who Yahweh is. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6)." We need to get the scoop on who Jesus is and how he brings us to God. What we understand and believe about

God makes a big difference in life. It certainly made a difference for Adam and Eve who believed Satan's lie rather than God's own word.<sup>7</sup> Let me give you several benefits of an accurate and applied knowledge of the Bible.

### *It plants the feet of our faith on solid ground*

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.

(Matthew 7:24, 27)

If we aren't learning and applying the truths of the Bible then we are just making it all up as we go along, and this puts us on shaky ground.

### *It gives us strength, hope and joy for the trials of life*

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.

(Colossians 1:9-11)

Knowing the scoop, the truth, will allow us to live pleasing lives before the Lord and to have His strength and power for all the needs of life.

*It helps us to sniff out and confront error*

. . . that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.

(Ephesians 4:14, 15)

If we are not grounded in the truth we can fall victim to false teachings. But when we know the truth and live it we are kept safe and grow to be more and more like Christ.

*It gives us joy and peace in believing*

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Romans 15:13)

Knowing the scoop on the one true God, who He is, what He is like, and what He can do gives us hope, joy and peace as we trust in Him for all of life. And finally,

*It will bring you a full salvation*

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

(James 1:21)

The cartoonist, Charles Shultz, in one of his “Peanuts” comic strips, shows Lucy and Linus looking out a window, watching a very heavy rain. Lucy begins the conversation and says,

“Boy, look at it rain. What if it never stops? What if it floods the whole world?”

Linus responds,

“It will never do that. In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that this would never happen again, and the sign of that promise is the rainbow.”

Lucy then says,

“You’ve taken a great load off my mind.”

Linus concludes,

“Sound theology has a way of doing that.”

I say, “Amen!” to Linus. Sound theology, an accurate knowledge of God, is crucial for a firm foundation for our faith. My prayer is that the chapters in this book will help you gain that foundation for your good and the glory of God.

# CHAPTER 2

## God's Word

**I**n the first chapter, I wrote about the importance of knowing the truth—getting the scoop. Every day we are bombarded with tons of information and much of what we take to be cold, hard fact really isn't. As I mentioned much of what people know just ain't so. Sadly, this is true when it comes to a knowledge of God. Most people don't know much about the Bible. For example, here are some statements from an article titled "Kids Explain the Bible."

"Noah's wife was Joan of Arc."

"The Egyptians were all drowned in the dessert. Afterward Moses went up on Mt. Cyanide to get the ten amendments."

"Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day but she was a ball of fire by night."

"David was a Hebrew King skilled at playing the liar. He fought with the Finklesteins."

And finally,

"Jesus said the Golden Rule, which is to do one to others before they do one to you."

Now that is all cute and funny coming from children. But when it comes to a true knowledge of God, when it comes to knowing the truth about salvation, when it comes to having the scoop on the meaning and purpose of life, we don't want jokes, we want answers. We want solid, accurate information that we can take to the bank. And there is no more reliable source of information on all the important issues of life than the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God. It reveals to us the will of God. It is the timeless, trustworthy source of all truth. It is truth unchanged and unchanging.

But how do we know that the Bible really is the Word of God? There are other sacred books in other religions. What makes the Bible stand above them all? Here are three important reasons why you can trust the Bible to be the true Word and will of God.

1. The claims of the Bible itself. It claims to be the infallible, inerrant, complete and effective Word of God.
2. The Bible's historical authenticity. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are unquestionably the most reliable and authentic documents of the ancient world.
3. The witness of biblical prophecy. The fulfillment of predictions made in the Bible, testify to the fact that the Bible is true.

### *The Bible claims to be the Word of God*

Writing to encourage his young associate Timothy, the apostle Paul had this to say about the Scriptures,

All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

All Scripture from the first book of Genesis to the last book of Revelation is given by inspiration of God. In the Greek manuscripts the phrase “given by inspiration of God” is *theo pneustos* which is literally translated as “God breathed.” Every Scripture is God breathed and this is a figure of speech that places the emphasis on the source of the words in the Bible. They all come from God. Do you recall Christ’s statement in Matthew 4:4? He said “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” The words we have in the Bible are the inspired, revealed Word of God.

It is true that there were various human writers but each and every one of them had the Spirit of God at work in their hearts and minds.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the will of God came through the words they wrote. So we know that the Bible is the true Word of God because it says that it is.

Now this may sound like circular logic. We say that the Bible is the Word of God and someone asks, “Well, how do you know that for sure? And we respond, “The Bible says so.” But let me point something out to you. Almost none of the other religious books make this claim! The Koran claims to be the Word of God but where it does it is in light of things already revealed many years before in the Bible. And where Mohammed makes a divine claim for what he speaks his statements are often contradicted elsewhere in the Koran.<sup>2</sup> But the Bible makes no contradictory statements and it claims all the way through to be the Word and will of God. And this is significant because if it did not make this claim the critics would argue that Christians are making a claim about Scripture that it never makes on its own.

The Bible tells us that it is indeed the Word of God and that it is infallible. It is incapable of error, incapable of deception. What we read in both the Old and New Testaments is without error in the truth it conveys.

Your righteousness *is* an everlasting righteousness,  
And Your law is truth.

(Psalm 119:142)

You *are* near, O LORD, and all Your commandments are truth.

(vs. 151)

The entirety of Your word *is* truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments *endures* forever.

(vs. 160)

The laws, wisdom and promises that we read in the Bible are true and trustworthy. When everything and everyone around you proves false, the Bible stands sure. Its wisdom, principles and promises will work for you, your children and your grandchildren. What a comforting thought. Though the Scriptures were written centuries ago there is a perennial freshness to them. The Bible's wisdom is never out of date. Its power to change lives for the better is never diminished.

The Bible also claims to be inerrant. Not only is the truth conveyed in the Bible infallible, every word within its pages is without error.

The words of the LORD *are* pure words, *like* silver tried in a furnace of fire, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

(Psalm 12:6, 7)

Like silver that has been refined there are no impurities, no man made additions to the words of the Bible.

Every word of God *is* pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.

(Proverbs 30:5)

The Hebrew word for “pure” means to be tested, refined, to be found flawless and without error. God knows exactly what He wants to say and when and where and how to say it. There is

a divine design in what He makes known to us. The Bible is also a complete communication from God to us.

Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you,  
and you be found a liar.

(Proverbs 30:6)

Nothing needs to be added to the Bible to make it more useful. Nothing needs to be added with respect to our opinions or political preferences. We don't need to add the latest trends in society or the findings of psychology. The apostle Peter wrote,

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us **all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue**

(2 Peter 1:2, 3) [my emphasis]

All that we need for life and for our most important relationship with God is given to us in the knowledge we gain from the Bible. And finally, the Bible claims that it is effective. It works. It does what it says that it will do.

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

(1 Thessalonians 2:13)

The Bible works effectively in those who believe. It saves us, it teaches us, it counsels us, it revives us, it judges us and it makes us free. And the word of God works even in spite of our unbelief. In the Old Testament book of Isaiah it says,

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

(Isaiah 55:10, 11)

These are the claims of the Bible itself. Now let's move on to the historical authenticity of the Bible.

### *The Old and New Testaments are historically reliable*

Let's begin with the Old Testament. Where critics once scoffed at the mention of certain people, places and events recorded in the Old Testament believing they never existed or happened, archeology has now turned the tables. No archeological discovery has ever disproved an Old Testament statement. In fact the discoveries have only confirmed what the Bible has said. Scholars used to say that places like Jericho and Nineveh never existed but now they know that they did. It was thought that many of the Assyrian kings mentioned in the Scriptures never lived but now through archeology they know that they did. Archeologists have even discovered chariot wheels at the bottom of the Red Sea validating the claim that Pharaoh's army was destroyed as they pursued after Moses and the people of Israel.

What about the Old Testament manuscripts themselves, are they reliable? The Old Testament copies were made with such fine precision to detail that if even one mistake was found the whole scroll was thrown out. Each copy had to be transcribed in a specific number of columns of thirty letters each. And there had to be a certain number of lines to each column. Not even the tiniest letter could be copied from memory. The scribe had to look at each and every letter of every word. Every letter on every

page was counted and compared against the original, making sure that there was a complete and accurate copy made.

And the copies of the Old Testament manuscripts are of a far superior quality than any other equivalent document. The oldest books of the Old Testament date from around the same time as some of the oldest Egyptian works. And where scholars find significant differences between Egyptian documents relating to the same events, they find almost no differences in Old Testament documents that cover the same material. And where there are differences they are minor ones like spelling and make no changes in the actual material covered. For instance the British spell theatre with an "re" at the end but Americans spell it with an "er" (theater).

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1950's confirms the historical reliability of these ancient documents. The Dead Sea Scrolls contained hundreds of copies and fragments of copies of biblical material that were hundreds of years older than any previously known Old Testament manuscript. When the scrolls were compared to what had been available there were virtually no errors found between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the documents already in hand. Over thousands of years copies were handed down flawlessly.

What about the New Testament? From an historical point of view the New Testament is unquestionably the most reliable ancient document in the world. Two factors are crucial in determining the reliability of an historical document. These are the number of copies in existence and the time between when the document was first written and the oldest copies. Take for example the writings of Julius Caesar. His works were written between 100-44 B.C. The oldest copies of his works come from one thousand years after the fact and there are ten copies. With the writings of Plato there is a span of twelve hundred years between when he first wrote and the date of the oldest copies of which there are seven. And with Aristotle there are five copies of his works and the oldest manuscripts date from fourteen hundred years after he wrote.

Now let's compare the New Testament to these other works. Whereas we have ten copies of Caesar's works and seven copies

of Plato's, and five copies of Aristotle's, there are over twenty four thousand ancient copies of the New Testament! And the oldest copies date not from one thousand years after the fact, nor even five hundred years but from twenty-five years after the originals were written. No other ancient document even comes close to meeting the test for historical authenticity and reliability as does the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Finally we come to the third factor in testing the authenticity of the Bible being the very Word of God to us.

### *The witness of biblical prophecy*

In Deuteronomy 18, we have an answer to the question, "How do we know if a prophet is sent by God?" Here is the answer.

And if you say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the LORD has spoken?"—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

(Deuteronomy 18: 21, 22)

If a prophet says something and it does not come to pass then he is just flappin' his gums! But if it does occur, what was spoken was the will of the Lord. This is an important point to mention because prophecies predicting people, places and events are amazingly absent from most other religious writing except for the Koran. And in the case of the Koran there are only self-fulfilling prophecies made by Mohammed. For instance he predicted that he would go to the city of Mecca and then he did.<sup>4</sup> This is very different from the predictive prophecies of the Bible.

The prophecies of the Bible were written hundreds of years before many of them were fulfilled. And they were fulfilled in exact detail. We'll examine a few. Our first prophecy is from Ezekiel 26 and concerns the city of Tyre. The ancient city of Tyre

was the capital of the middle eastern world for over two thousand years. But then Ezekiel prophesied the destruction of the city.

Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I *am* against you, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock.

(Ezekiel 26:3, 4)

They will plunder your riches and pillage your merchandise; they will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses; they will lay your stones, your timber, and your soil in the midst of the water. I will put an end to the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps shall be heard no more. I will make you like the top of the rock; you shall be *a place for* spreading nets, and you shall never be rebuilt, for I the LORD have spoken,' says the Lord God.

(Ezekiel 26: 12-14)

There is the prophecy. So what happened to the city of Tyre? King Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city of Tyre for thirteen years before he finally breached the city's defensive walls. Some of the walls were destroyed and the city was set on fire. But the prophecy was not fully fulfilled. There were still walls and stones and timbers on the land. Two hundred and fifty years later much of the old city still stood. And Tyre was rebuilt on an island just off shore in the Mediterranean.

But then along came Alexander the Great who waged war against Tyre. But he could not prevail against the island city so he conceived one of the most ambitious plans in ancient battle. Alexander took all of the stones and timbers of the old city and

cast them into the sea to make a bridge to the island. His army then marched on Tyre, destroyed it completely, reducing it to dust and he scraped it all into the depth of the sea! The island city was laid bare and even to this day it is only a place for fisherman to spread their nets. The prophecy was fulfilled.

Other prophecies like this abound in Scripture but let me give you one more concerning the greatest city of the ancient world. Babylon far surpassed in grandeur and beauty any city of its day or ours. But a prophecy of its destruction was made by the prophet Jeremiah.

“They shall not take from you a stone for a corner, nor a stone for a foundation, but you shall be desolate forever,” says the LORD

Thus says the LORD of hosts: “The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; the people will labor in vain, and the nations because of the fire, and they shall be weary.”

(Jeremiah 51:26, 58)

The specifics of this prophecy are that the walls of Babylon would be utterly broken. And the city would be desolate, empty and void. This is but one of a hundred prophecies about Babylon. So what happened to this glorious city? The destruction of the city took hundreds of years as both the Medes and the Persians fought against it. But parts of the city still stood firm. Then along came Alexander the Great. He had conquered most of the known world. And after winning in battle near Babylon he decided to rebuild the city and to make it his capital. The very day, however, that he made that decree he died. And so the remaining walls and populace of Babylon stood in place all the way up to the time of Christ and beyond.

But in the fourth century the Roman Emperor Julian waged war with the Persians and completely destroyed the

remaining walls of the city. He burned the city to the ground and the place is desolate to this very day. Besides these two dramatic examples there are over three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. And every one of them has been fulfilled in the New Testament except for the predictions of his return. But if the prophecies of his birth, person, ministry and death and resurrection have all been fulfilled, so too will be the prophecies of his glorious return, the resurrection of believers, the judgment of the wicked and the kingdom of God.<sup>5</sup> In closing let us read the Word of God as given to us in Isaiah 46.

Remember the former things of old, for I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all all My pleasure.'

(Isaiah 46:9, 10)

The Bible and no other book tells us the future without error. The Bible and no other book gives us the true wisdom for daily living. The Bible and no other book shows to us the way of salvation. The Bible and no other book is the sure and certain Word and will of God.

Having shown to you the importance of knowing the scoop and that we get the truth in the Bible, I have now shown you that the Bible can be trusted. It is the Word of God. Now we must go to the Scriptures to see what it tells us of God, Jesus, salvation and so much more. I'll end this chapter with the words from an old hymn.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord Is  
laid for your faith in His excellent Word! What  
more can He say than to you He hath said, To  
you, who for refuge to Jesus have fled.<sup>6</sup>

# CHAPTER 3

## The Attributes of God—Part 1

A kindergarten teacher told her students to draw a picture of something that was important to them. One little boy named Johnny began to work hard at his drawing. When the other students had finished and turned in their pictures, Johnny was still hard at work. So the teacher walked over to the boy, put her hand on his shoulder and asked, “Johnny, what are you drawing?” The young artist didn’t look up, he just kept working with great determination and said, “God.” “But Johnny,” said the teacher, “no one knows what God looks like.” Johnny answered, “They will when I finish this picture!”

This cute story brings up a good question. What is God really like? Agnostics and skeptics tell us that we cannot know if God exists, let alone what He is like. According to them if God exists He has hidden Himself from our sight and therefore we must remain in the dark about who He is and what He is like. The Bible on the other hand boldly states that God is—He exists. And we can know a great deal about Him.

In the gospel of Mark, chapter 12, Jesus Christ is asked a question about the first and greatest commandment. Let’s listen in.

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together . . . asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments *is*; “Here, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.

And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

(Mark 12:28-30)

This command is a life consuming command! We are to love God totally, completely, with all that we are. But how can you truly love God like this unless you know who He is and what He does. Thankfully we are not left in the dark about God. The light of Scripture tells us that God has revealed Himself to us in three ways:

1. God has made Himself known in a general way through creation.
2. He has revealed His nature and character to us in the Bible.
3. God has given us a special revelation of Himself through His Son Jesus Christ.

### *Creation makes known God*

We will begin to examine the fact that creation makes known the existence of God by looking at Psalm 19.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. *There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*

(Psalm 19:1-4)

The witness of the universe comes forth clearly and consistently, there is a Creator, there is a God. When you look up into the starry night sky or when you look at a sunrise over the ocean or the beauty of a forest, a question comes to mind,

“Where did all of this come from?” Psalm 19 tells us that every day and every night all over the world creation proclaims the glory of God, its Creator. One of the great early scientists, Sir Isaac Newton, had this to say about creation,

The most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets could only proceed from the counsel and domain of an intelligent and powerful being.”<sup>1</sup>

Newton was correct! In fact modern science began as a result of seeing order in creation and realizing that this complex order could not happen by chance. There had to be a Creator. And since there was a divine design and order to creation it could be studied and understood. The New Testament reveals the same truth as Psalm 19, creation makes known a Creator.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. **For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being seen by the things that are made, *even His eternal power and Godhead*, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, And their foolish hearts were darkened.**

(Romans 1:18-21) [my emphasis]

Verse 20 tells us that creation makes known two invisible attributes of God, His eternal power and His Godhead. To those who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a humble heart, creation proclaims there is a Creator and He is awesome in intelligence and power. But these verses from Romans also tell us that there are people who just cannot see this or who refuse to see it. They

suppress the truth. They are fools who say in their hearts that there is no God (Psalm 14:1). And they teach that all of creation, even human life, came into existence by mere chance and progressed through the process of evolution.

And yet when push comes to shove many scientists who want to deny the existence of God readily admit the absurdity of their position. In fact two famous scientists of recent years, Francis Crick, who discovered DNA and Carl Sagan the famous cosmologist, have estimated that the difficulty of humans evolving by chance alone is 1 in 10 to the negative 2 billionth power. Now I can't wrap my mind around that statement but I get the next one easily. Sir Fred Hoyle, the founder of the Cambridge Institute for Theoretical Astronomy, said,

The chance that higher life might have emerged [through evolution] is comparable with the chance that a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the material therein.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, in reality, it takes a bigger leap of blind faith to believe that creation began by chance than it does to believe in the Creator! Everyday the wonder and beauty of creation declares that there is a God and that He is powerful and glorious.

### *The Bible reveals God's nature and character*

Besides nature, the Bible reveals God to us, specifically His nature and character. The Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah proclaims something wonderful about God to us.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.

(Isaiah 40:28)

The first thing that we learn about God from this verse is that He is everlasting. He is eternal. He has existed before all time and He will exist forever. When life is shaky, when changes come like a whirlwind, our all powerful, all knowing God is the same. He never loses heart. He never wearies. His understanding is infinite and unsearchable. But He does not stay above the fray of life. He is involved and strengthens His people.

He gives power to the weak and to *those who have* no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

(Isaiah 40:29-31)

What a glorious truth we learn here about God. The everlasting God, the Creator, the Almighty gives His people power and strength. Those who wait<sup>3</sup> on the Lord find their lives renewed and borne up like on eagle's wings! God also has a perfect knowledge of us.

O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.  
 You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
 You understand my thought afar off.  
 You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
 And are acquainted with all my ways.  
 For *there is* not a word on my tongue,  
*But* behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.  
 You have hedged me behind and before,  
 And laid Your hand upon me.  
*Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me;  
 It is high, I cannot *attain* it.

Where can I go from Your Spirit?  
 Or where can I flee from Your presence?  
 If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there;  
 If I make my bed in hell,<sup>4</sup> behold, You *are there*.  
*If* I take the wings of the morning,  
*And* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
 Even there Your hand shall lead me,  
 And Your right hand shall hold me.  
 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall fall on me,”  
 Even the night shall be light upon me;  
 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,  
 But the night shines as the day;  
 The darkness and the light *are* both alike *to You*.  
 (Psalm 139:1-12)

God knows our every thought. He understands the deep motives, fears, concerns and hurts of our hearts. There also is no place where God is not. If I fear that I am left all alone I am not for God is with me. If I am surrounded by people God is still there by my side. If I am in outer space or in the depth of the earth the Almighty is near. There is never, ever a time when God cannot hold me and lead me. What a comforting truth to hold in our hearts.

I will extol You, my God, O King;  
 And I will bless Your name forever and ever  
 Every day I will bless You,  
 And I will praise Your name forever and ever.  
 Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised;  
 And His greatness *is* unsearchable.  
 One generation shall praise Your works to another,  
 And shall declare Your mighty acts.  
 I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty,  
 And on Your wondrous works.

*Men* shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts,  
And I will declare Your greatness.  
They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness,  
And shall sing of your righteousness.

The LORD *is* gracious and full of compassion,  
Slow to anger and great in mercy.  
The LORD *is* good to all,  
And His tender mercies *are* over all His works.

All Your works shall praise You, O LORD,  
And Your saints shall bless You.  
They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom,  
And talk of Your power,  
To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts,  
And the glorious majesty of His kingdom.  
Your kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom,  
And Your dominion *endures* throughout all generations.

The LORD upholds all who fall,  
And raises up all *who are* bowed down.  
The eyes of all look expectantly to You,  
And You give them their food in due season.  
You open Your hand  
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.

The LORD *is* righteous in all His ways,  
Gracious in all His works.  
The LORD *is* near to all who call upon Him,  
To all who call upon Him in truth.  
He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him;  
He will also hear their cry and save them.  
The LORD preserves all who love Him,  
But all the wicked he will destroy.

(Psalm 145:1-20)

This Psalm is a song praising God's great majesty and love. Here we learn that God is not just good but full of goodness. His blessings to His people are never given with a restrained hand. God is righteous, always doing the right thing at the right time. His generosity towards us is never skimpy, it is super sized. The Lord is full of compassion. He understands our frailties and our needs. God is slow to anger leaving us room to repent. The Lord God is good to all and His tender mercy, His loving kindness, is over all His works. Our God is a great King and His dominion endures throughout every generation. He cares enough to uphold and lift up all who fall. He is near to all who call upon Him in truth. And He will utterly destroy all the wicked.

This knowledge of God's awesome majesty and goodness is lacking in many people who call themselves Christians. This is one reason why our faith is often so feeble, our worship weak and our impact on the world so diminished. Our knowledge of what God is like is too small, too limited. But those who believe in a big, gracious, righteous and loving God live big, love big, they serve without reserve, they give generously, and they are bold in their witness for Christ. The prophet Daniel said, "the people who know their God shall be strong and carry out *great exploits* (Daniel 11:32)."

We also learn from the Bible that God is holy.

Who *is* like You, O LORD, among the gods?  
 Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness,  
 Fearful in praises, doing wonders?

(Exodus 15:11)

In this song of Moses' we learn that God is glorious in holiness. Did you know that God is called holy more often than He is referred to as good, powerful, loving or anything else? God's holiness refers to His moral perfection. He is the sum total of all that is morally good and pure and beautiful. The core of His character is spotless and flawless. There is no microscopic trace of evil in Him at all. Here is how the apostle John portrays God's holiness.

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

(1 John 1:5)

There is no error or falsehood in God. His agenda is not hidden. His promise of salvation is not deceptive. His love is not hypocritical. And His judgments on the wicked will be absolute and full of justice. The apostle James wrote,

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

(James 1:16, 17)

God is holy and pure and this never changes. He is never fickle or unsure. He never says one thing but means another. His blessings are always good and perfect and given at the right time. And because God is holy, full of light and unchanging, His moral laws are pure and righteous and in force yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The Bible also informs us that God is sovereign.

Remember the former things of old, for I *am* God and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.'

(Isaiah 46:9, 10)

And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever. For His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and His

kingdom *is* from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?”

(Daniel 4:34, 35)

God’s sovereignty can be defined as the free exercise of His will. God is supreme over all and is Lord Almighty in fact as well as in name. When God declares His purposes and His plans He carries them out. When He makes a promise He fulfills it. In the gospel of John we have a promise made by Christ concerning the believer being secure in the hand of God.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father’s hand. I and *My* Father are one.

(John 10:27-30)

Here is a comforting promise that all who believe in Christ for salvation are secure in that salvation, safe in the Father’s hand. But how do we know that this promise is true? What gives us the assurance that no one will be able to snatch us out of God’s hand? The answer is our solid knowledge of the power and sovereignty of God!

Some people think that our world is like a great stage play produced by God. As the curtain goes up all is lovely to behold. The characters are wonderful and beautiful. The set design is fantastic. And all goes well until the leading man steps on the leading lady’s dress. She then trips over a chair and knocks over a lamp. He falls into a table which crashes into the stage set which brings the whole thing falling down. And all the while God is running around back

stage frantically trying to get the show back on track. But nothing is further from the truth, God has not lost control. And there should be no truth more encouraging and comforting to us than the fact of God's sovereignty. It means that God rules and overrules in the affairs of our world. He is Master over creation. His plan of salvation will be fulfilled. He will make good on His Word!

### *We have a special revelation of God in Jesus Christ*

Finally, besides creation and the Scriptures, we have a special revelation of God given to us in and through His Son Jesus Christ.

No one has seen God at anytime. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.

(John 1:18)

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.

(John 14:8-10)

All that Jesus said and all that he did unveiled to us the heart of God. In his sinless life Jesus portrayed God's holiness. In his teachings and his miracles Christ displayed the wisdom and power of God. And in his sacrificial death on the cross the Lord proved that God loves us individually, passionately and infinitely. When we see Jesus Christ we see into the heart of God, the one and only true God. God is someone that you can know. And in knowing Him we find life, everlasting life.

# CHAPTER 4

## Attributes of God—Part 2

### One God

**I**n the last chapter we examined from the Scriptures several of the attributes of God. And our hearts were thrilled and encouraged as we discovered that our God is glorious in holiness, sovereign, all powerful, everywhere present, full of goodness, righteous in all His ways, and that His tender mercies are over all of His works. As the worship song proclaims,

Our God is an awesome God. He reigns from  
heaven above with wisdom, power and love. Our  
God is an awesome God.<sup>1</sup>

In this present study we will learn another truth about God, one that the Bible declares in very clear and simple terms. There is only one true God and one person who is God. All Christians agree that there is only one true God. But all Christians do not agree on whom precisely that one God is. Millions of Christians profess that God is a Trinity of persons. They have been told that God consists of three distinct persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who together make up one God. And they have been told that this doctrine is the foundation of all Christian Truth. For example, here is a statement on the doctrine of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity—that God the Father,  
God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each

equally and eternally the one true God—is admittedly difficult to understand, and yet is the very foundation of Christian truth. Although skeptics may ridicule it as a mathematical impossibility, it is nevertheless a basic doctrine of Scripture as well as profoundly realistic in both universal experience and in the scientific understanding of the universe.<sup>2</sup>

Some questions come to my mind after reading this statement. How can something that is “admittedly difficult to understand” and a “mathematical impossibility” be the “very foundation of Christian truth”? And how is the teaching of one God in three persons “profoundly realistic in both universal experience and in the scientific understanding of the universe”? What does that mean? If you ask me it is just a lot of gobble-de-gook! The teaching that the one true God consists of a union of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit would have been absolutely unknown and repugnant to the earliest Christians. So how did the belief in the Trinity come about?

To put it simply, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, church leaders known as apologists, tried to make Christianity more attractive to those who were educated in Greek philosophy and paganism. And so they borrowed ideas and concepts from these philosophies and religions and united them to Christian themes. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century Emperor Constantine, who wanted to unite the empire under a new faith, put pressure on theologians to affirm the belief that God was a Trinity of persons.<sup>3</sup> Following are two quotes on the development of the Trinity.

... the reinterpretation of biblical theology in terms of Greek philosophers has been both widespread throughout the centuries and everywhere destructive to the essence of the Christian faith ... Neither Catholic or Protestant theology is based on biblical theology. In each case we have the domination of Christian theology by Greek thought.<sup>4</sup>

If Paganism was conquered by Christianity, it is equally true that Christianity was corrupted by Paganism. The pure deism [belief in one person who is God] of the first Christians . . . was changed by the church of Rome, into the incomprehensible dogma of the Trinity. Many of the pagan tenets, invented by Egyptians and idealized by Plato, were retained as being worthy of belief.<sup>5</sup>

Now I don't deny that many Trinitarian Bible scholars would reject those statements. They would say that biblical evidence exists for belief in the Trinity, especially that Jesus is God, but consider the words of Bible scholar William Barclay,

It is when we begin to examine the [biblical] evidence that we run into very real difficulties [in proving the Trinity]. The evidence is not extensive . . . on almost every occasion in the New Testament on which Jesus seems to be called God there is a problem of textual criticism or of translation.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, many if not all of the supposed biblical proofs for the Trinity are unclear, stand on shaky ground and are often wrongly translated. If you ask me that is not a firm foundation for our faith!

So let's go to the Bible and see for ourselves what it reveals about the one true God and who He is. And we will begin with the Old Testament. The Old Testament makes up 75% of our Bible. Our Lord Jesus Christ was nourished from these Scriptures, they are the root and stem of the New Testament flower. Cut off from the Old Testament the New Testament quickly withers and becomes something it was never intended to be. In the Old Testament God is declared to be a single person. Let's begin with the classic command to love God recorded in Deuteronomy.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

(Deuteronomy 6:4, 5)

In this classic command to love God, Moses declares that the Lord our God is one. And the intent of this declaration was to make clear the truth that there is only one true God and one person who is God. Thus this statement has also been correctly translated as follows,

The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.<sup>7</sup>

The words “The LORD” are a translation of the Hebrew word *YHWH* meaning Yahweh.<sup>8</sup> This word “Yahweh” is not a title, it is rather the personal name for God and it means “I am who I am.” It is always a singular name and it is always associated with singular pronouns like, “I”, “me”, “he”, and “him.” The word “God” in Deuteronomy 6:4 is translated from the Hebrew word *elohim* which is not a name but a title. *Elohim* is used to express the reality or fact of deity or godhead. It is never used as a personal name.

For some reason Yahweh is always translated in our English Bibles as “The LORD” with capital letters. So when Deuteronomy 6:4, says, “The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one!” it is really saying, “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone!” There is only one true God and one person who is God and that is Yahweh. The first of the Ten Commandments states this same truth as well.

And God spoke all these words, saying; “I *am* the LORD [Yahweh] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.

(Exodus 20:1-3)

The first commandment declares that the person of Yahweh is the only true God. There is only one person who is God and His name is Yahweh.

Now, there are Trinitarian scholars who teach that the Hebrew word *elohim* is another personal name for God. And since *elohim* is a plural noun this points to the fact that God is more than one person. But *elohim* is not a personal name, it is a title that signifies godhead or deity. As a plural noun it describes awesome majesty, infinite fullness and unlimited greatness.<sup>9</sup> Here are some examples of *elohim* as a title meaning god and not used as a personal name.

And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; . . . so they said to one another, “Who has done this thing? . . . But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? . . . If he *is* a god, let him plead for Himself . . .

(Judges 6:28-31)

In Judges 6, the word “god” is *elohim*, the same title given to Yahweh as God. The personal name of this pagan god is “Baal.” Here is another example from Judges 16.

Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god.

(vs. 23)

The “god” or *elohim* of the Philistines was “Dagon.” That was his personal name. Dagon was a sea god with the head of a fish and the body of a man. Let me give you one more example from 1 Kings 18, where we read about the great conflict between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal to determine whether Yahweh or Baal was the true God.

So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD [Yahweh] *is* God [*elohim*] follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.

(vss. 20, 21)

*Elohim* is not a personal name. It is simply the Hebrew word for deity, for god. This may seem like a boring grammar lesson but it is important to grasp in our study of who God is. Let's return to Deuteronomy 6:4 for one more lesson in Hebrew words.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one!

The Hebrew word translated "one" is *echad*. It is the normal word for "one" in mathematics. It denotes a single unity, a single item. Again let me cite a few examples.

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one [*echad*] of his ribs . . .

(Genesis 2:21)

When God made Eve from Adam He took one of Adam's ribs not a full slab!

So the LORD did this thing on the next day, and all of the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the children of Israel not one [*echad*] died. Then Pharaoh sent, and indeed, not even one [*echad*] of the livestock of the Israelites was dead.

(Exodus 9:6, 7)

And the LORD turned a very strong west wind, which took the locusts away and blew them into the Red Sea. There remained not one [*echad*] locust in all the territory of Egypt.

(Exodus 10:19)

Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one [*echad*] was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth.

(Ruth 1:4)

There is one [*echad*] alone, without companion . . . Two *are* better than one [*echad*], because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one [*echad*] will lift up his companion . . .

Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one [*echad*] be warm *alone*?

(Ecclesiastes 4:8, 9, 11)

I could give you many, many more examples like these and they would all point to the fact that the Hebrew word *echad* means one and no more than one.<sup>10</sup> When Deuteronomy 6:4 declares, ““Hear, O Israel: The LORD [Yahweh] our God, The LORD *is* one!” it should be clear to anyone with any sense of logic at all that there is only one God and one person who is God—Yahweh.

The Old Testament tells us nothing explicitly or by necessary implication of a Triune God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There is no evidence that any sacred writer even suspected the existence of a [Trinity] within the Godhead.

Even to see in the Old Testament suggestions or foreshadowings or “veiled signs” of the Trinity of persons, is to go beyond the words and intent of the sacred writers.<sup>11</sup>

Isn't that amazing? Even to suggest that there is a Trinity in the Godhead is to go beyond the words and intent of the holy men who wrote the Bible! And if you go beyond the words of the Bible you no longer have the sure and certain Word of God, all that we are left with is the speculations of men. “The doctrine of the Trinity . . . is the very foundation of Christian truth”—I don't think so! The Bible says that there is only one God and one person who is God.

To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD [Yahweh] Himself *is* God; *there is* none other beside Him.

(Deuteronomy 4:35)

Now see that I, *even* I, *am* He, and *there is* no God beside Me.

(Deuteronomy 32:39)

O LORD [Yahweh] of hosts, God of Israel, *the One* who dwells *between* the cherubim, You *are* God, You alone . . .

(Isaiah 37:16)

“You *are* My witnesses,” says the LORD [Yahweh], and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I *am* He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, *even* I, *am* the LORD [Yahweh].

(Isaiah 43:10, 11)

I *am* the LORD [Yahweh], and *there is* no other;  
*There is* no God besides Me.

For thus says the LORD [Yahweh], who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: I *am* the LORD [Yahweh], and *there is* no other.

(Isaiah 45:5, 18)

But the LORD [Yahweh] *is* the true God; He *is* the living God and the everlasting King . . .

(Jeremiah 10:10)

And the LORD [Yahweh] shall be King over all the earth. And in that day it shall be—The LORD *is* one, and His name one.

(Zechariah 14:9)

The doctrine of the Trinity is not the teaching of the Old Testament. It is a corruption of the clear and simple truth that there is one true God and one person alone who is God. The teaching of one God in three persons is not a firm foundation for our faith. It is a shell game that hides the glory of the one true God in the garments of paganism. The clarion call of the Old Testament proclaims there is one true God who is one in person, alone and unique. Now that's a firm foundation!

# CHAPTER 5

## Attributes of God—Part 3

### One God in the New Testament

If you were to ask most Christians (and I am speaking of good, Bible believing Christians) who Jesus Christ is, you will get answers like, “He is my Lord and Savior,” “He is the Son of God,” and “He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.” And all of those answers are correct. But another answer you will receive from most sincere Bible believing Christians is that Jesus Christ is God. They will tell you that he is a part of a Trinity, where the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. And these three persons, in some mysterious way, make up one God.

For many Christians this belief in the Trinity is the acid test for real faith. There is only one problem with this acid test, however. Nowhere does the Bible ever claim that God is a Trinity of persons. As we saw from the last chapter the Old Testament states that there is only one God and one person who is God. The great creed of Old Testament faith was, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one!” And this creed of one God who is one person is repeated over and over again in the Old Testament like an echo rolling through a canyon.

But now, when we come to the New Testament is there some new revelation given about the nature of God that teaches a Trinity? Or are we told the same great truth that there is only one

God who is one person? Let's begin our investigation with the words of Jesus Christ in Mark 12.

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment . . .

So the scribe said to Him, "Well *said*, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He . . .

Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

(Mark 12:28-34)

In answering the scribe's question about the first commandment Jesus clearly confirmed the Old Testament creed. And when the scribe affirmed what Christ had said, saying, "Teacher, You have spoken the truth" the Lord saw that he had answered wisely as well! This statement from the Lord Jesus did not swerve as much as one millionth of a degree from the strict monotheism of the Old Testament.

Surely if there was indeed a Trinity in the Godhead, here was a good place for Jesus Christ to reveal it, but he didn't. The Lord Jesus wasn't trying to be secretive about the matter; there was no Trinity to reveal. In John 17, in his high priestly prayer before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus again makes a clear statement about the person who is God.

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, **that they may know You, the only true God**, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent,

(John 17:1-3) [my emphasis]

Once again, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, God is strictly one person and that person is Jesus’ Father. Good and sincere Christians who believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, should seriously consider Christ’s words here to be authoritative and final as to the person of God! The New Testament consistently and clearly reveals to us that God is not a Trinity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Rather God is one person and one person only and that is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To re-quote the scholar, William Barclay, those verses that could be understood as Trinitarian are:

. . . not extensive . . . [and] on almost every occasion in the New Testament on which Jesus seems to be called God there is a problem of textual criticism or of translation.

And therefore, the hundreds of clear verses about who God is should take precedence over the few difficult verses. And the difficult verses should be interpreted and understood in the light of the clear verses.<sup>1</sup>

Another great opportunity for Jesus to declare that he was God occurred right after his resurrection. But let’s read what he said to Mary Magdalene when he appeared to her.

Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My

brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and *to* My God and your God,’”

(John 20:17)

Speaking to Mary, the Lord Jesus revealed that his Father was his God. That’s right! Jesus Christ is not God and like us he serves and worships the one true God who is his Father and our Father. This verse is one of the strongest proofs that there is no Trinity. If Jesus is God, than he cannot have a God. But here he clearly states that he, Mary and his brethren share the same God. Here are a few more sections of the New Testament that proclaim that the Father of Jesus Christ is the one and only true God.

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Romans 15:5, 6)

These verses call us to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If language has any meaning and logic then verse 6 states that the Father of Jesus Christ is God alone.

If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

(2 Corinthians 11:30, 31)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

(2 Corinthians 1:3)

Here again God is referred to as both the God and Father of our Lord Jesus. The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort is not a Trinity of persons, rather He is one person and the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us *there is* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live*.

(1 Corinthians 8:4-6)

This is another powerful statement about the person of God. The context surrounding these verses is about meat offered to idols. The local butcher shops in Corinth received meat to sell that had been offered up in sacrifice to pagan gods. The city was awash in paganism and polytheism. Christian believers were concerned. Could they buy those steaks and grill those burgers? After all, they had been dedicated to a pagan deity. The apostle Paul calmed their fears by saying that for us believers there is only one God, and then he designates who that one God is, “the Father.” In defining who God truly is Paul could have made it very clear that for us Christians there is one God who consists of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, but he didn’t. In the flood of “many gods and many lords” the Christian serves only one true God, the Father, and one Lord who is Jesus Christ.

Now Jesus is not called our Lord because he is God. Rather Jesus is Lord because the one true God exalted him to that position of honor and power because of his obedient, righteous life and his sacrifice for our sins. Remember, just because God is called LORD in the Old Testament and Jesus is called Lord in the New

Testament, this does not mean that Jesus is God. LORD in the Old Testament is a name, Yahweh. Lord in the New Testament is a title of honor given not only to Jesus but to other men as well.<sup>2</sup>

When we say that Jesus is Lord, what we mean is that God has glorified His Son and made him to be the head over the church and all things. The following section of Scripture from Acts 2, is from Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost after Christ's resurrection and ascension. On this Jewish festival the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on all the believers just as it had been promised in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> Having the Spirit the believers spoke in tongues and magnified God<sup>4</sup>. In his address Peter explains that this occurred because Jesus had ascended into heaven and been made Lord and Christ.

Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, he would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades [the grave], nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:

“The LORD [Yahweh] said to my Lord [*adoni*],  
‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies  
Your footstool.’”

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

(Acts 2:29-36)

First, please notice that “This Jesus **God has raised up** (vs. 24),” and also Jesus was “exalted to **the right hand of God** (vs. 33).” And secondly, notice the truth that “**God has made this Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ** (vs. 36).” Jesus isn’t Lord by virtue of his being the eternal God, he was made Lord as a reward for his obedience to God. To support his point that God exalted Jesus and made him Lord and Christ, Peter quotes from Psalm 110:1 (“Sit at my right hand . . . vs34, 35).

This Psalm is a song of David’s which he wrote as a royal coronation song for a future king. It is a prophecy of God’s anointed Messiah, the Savior, the Christ. It tells us that God would one day exalt this king called “Lord” to His right hand. And in its detail the Psalm also tells us of the relationship between “The LORD [Yahweh]” and this other person who is called “Lord.”

The first word “LORD” in Psalm 110:1 is the Hebrew word *Yahweh*, the personal name of God. The second word “Lord” is the word *adoni* and this word is always used in the Old Testament of human beings.<sup>5</sup> It is a word that designates a high position of honor but it never makes one God. Here are two examples of how *adoni* is used.

Then Saul knew David’s voice, and said, “*Is that your voice my son David?*” David said, “*It is my voice, my lord [adoni], O king.*”

(1 Samuel 26:17)

So David said to Achish, “But what have I done? And to this day what have you found in your servant as long as I have been with you, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord [*adoni*] the king?”

(29:18)

In Psalm 110:1, when David wrote “Yahweh said to my Lord [*adoni*], sit at My right hand,” he calls his future son and heir to the throne “Lord” not because Jesus is God, but because the Messiah is David’s superior. In Psalm 110: 1, the “Lord” is the one who will be “King of kings and Lord of lords.” This makes the Messiah second in authority to Yahweh, God himself. But it is still Yahweh who sits on the throne as God supreme. God has made Jesus Christ to be Lord. God has exalted Jesus to His right hand and given him all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:19-23), but Jesus is not a part of the one unique and true God. The Father alone is God.

Those who believe in the Trinity assert that Jesus Christ as a part of the Godhead is co-equal with God the Father. But nowhere is this ever taught in the Bible. The Bible always presents the Father as greater than the Son. Here is the truth in Jesus’ own words.

You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming *back* to you.’ If you loved Me you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.

(John 14:28)

If Jesus Christ were truly co-equal with the Father then why didn’t he say, “Rejoice—I am going to the Father and we are equal in glory and honor”? The words of Christ however are clear and simple to all who have a humble heart. The Father is greater than the Son. In pointing out this truth it’s as funny as trying to convince someone that the sun is not the moon!

In Scripture, God the Father is greater than His Son Jesus Christ in knowledge, in power and even in divine authority. As for knowledge, Acts 15:18 states, “Known to God from eternity are all His works.” The one true God is omniscient, He knows all things, even the end from the beginning. But the Bible reveals that Jesus didn’t know certain aspects of his second coming.

But of that day and hour [of Christ's return] no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

(Mark 13:32)

If Jesus were truly God then he would know the end from the beginning. He would know the day and hour of his return. But it is evident that he doesn't. What Jesus does know about the future, God His Father revealed to him as the following verse from Revelation shows.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place.

(Revelation 1:1)

Secondly, God is greater than Jesus Christ in power. Though our Lord Jesus did many wonderful miracles, they were not accomplished because he was God. The Bible tells us that the miracles resulted from the power of God at work in Christ.

Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but whatever He sees the Father do; for whatever He does the Son does in like manner.

(John 5:19)

The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the work.

(John 14:10)

Peter, in Acts 2, makes it very clear that Jesus Christ's miraculous power was not due to the fact that he was God but that God was at work within him.

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst . . .

(Acts 2:22)

Jesus of Nazareth is a man, a very unique man being the only begotten Son of God, but a man none the less. And God attested or verified that Jesus was the Messiah through the miracles that God worked through him. Again, if Jesus were truly God this would have been a very good place for Peter to reveal this truth. In Acts 10, Peter makes a very similar statement.

how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

(10:38)

Jesus, our Lord did wonderfully good things not because he was God but because God was with him and worked within him. So God is greater than Christ in knowledge and in power, and also in divine authority.

1 Corinthians 15 tells us about the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of his world wide kingdom. And it also tells us that one day Christ himself will be subject to the Father.

Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him [God] who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

(1 Corinthians 15:24, 25, 28)

In the end, Christ himself will be subject to the Father that God may be all in all! Nowhere do we find in holy Scripture a declaration that Jesus is co-equal with God the Father. And logically if Jesus is not co-equal then he cannot possibly be the one true God. Here are what the scholars have to say:

There is no trace of ‘three divine persons in one’ in the New Testament . . . No apostle would have dreamed of thinking that there are three divine persons . . . The mystery of the Trinity proclaimed by the church did not spring from biblical doctrine.<sup>6</sup>

The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are of equal essence.<sup>7</sup>

Christianity derived from Judaism, and Judaism was strictly Unitarian [believing that God is one person]. The road that led from Jerusalem to Nicea [where later church councils developed the Trinity] was scarcely a straight one. Fourth century Trinitarianism did not reflect accurately early Christian teaching regarding the nature of God; it was, on the contrary, a deviation from this teaching.<sup>8</sup>

Neither the word Trinity, nor the explicit doctrine as such, appears in the New Testament, nor did Jesus and his followers intend to contradict the Shema in the Old Testament; “Hear, O Israel, YHWH [Yahweh] our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4) . . . the doctrine [of the Trinity] developed gradually over several centuries . . . By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century the doctrine of the Trinity took substantially the form it has maintained ever since.<sup>9</sup>

The formulation ‘one God in three persons’ was not solidly established, certainly not fully assimilated into Christian life and its profession

of faith prior to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century . . . Among the Apostolic Fathers, there had been nothing even remotely approaching such a mentality or perspective.<sup>10</sup>

If no original apostle would have ever dreamed that there were three divine persons in the Godhead, and if the early Apostolic Fathers who followed couldn't conceive of it either, then why should we blindly accept the belief? The answer is that we shouldn't. It's not the truth. It is not a sure foundation for our faith.

Over and over the Bible, the Word of God, asserts that there is only one God and one person who is God. This person is Yahweh, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, fully human, but absolutely unique because he was conceived through the power of God's Spirit<sup>11</sup>.

Jesus is the seed of the woman as foretold in Genesis 3. He is the prophet like Moses to be raised up from among the people as promised in Deuteronomy 18. He is the descendant of King David as declared in 2 Samuel 7. And he is the perfect reflection of the one true God as stated in Hebrews 1. He is the one and only begotten Son of God. He is my Lord and Savior but he is not God.

The stark simplicity of this truth may be shocking and even threatening to some but it is only years of wrong teaching that make this hard to accept. The Bible is clear in both the Old and the New Testaments that God is one person. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is the God of Moses and David. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Take your stand on that foundation. It's a firm one.

# CHAPTER 6

## The Origin, Nature and Destiny of Man—Part 1

In our quest for a firm foundation for our faith, we have seen the need to get the scoop, to know the truth. We have learned that the Bible tells us the truth and that it is a reliable and authentic communication from God. We have also seen the great attributes of the one true God. In this chapter we begin a journey into the origin, nature and destiny of man. What is man? William Shakespeare wrote,

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason!  
How infinite in faculties! In form and moving how  
express and admirable! In action how like an angel!  
In apprehension how like a god!<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the always perceptive Mark Twain, wrote,

Man is the only animal that blushes—or needs to.<sup>2</sup>

Those two quotes fit us well, don't they? Sometimes we humans can do the most wonderful things. But then we are also capable of doing very horrible things. Throughout the centuries scientists and philosophers have sought out the answers to the questions that have always haunted humanity. How did we get here? Who are we? Where are we going?

Often philosophers can be confusing about these topics. What they present to us as sound, deep thinking often sounds dull, vague or confusing. Someone once said that philosophers are people who talk about things they don't understand but they make it seem like it's your fault! Sometimes though philosophers hit the nail right on the head. For example, there is an old philosophical axiom that says,

Wherever there is a thing, there must have been a preceding thought, and where there is a thought there must have been a thinker.

That statement is true. Take the place where you are right now. The room that you are in reflects thought. Someone planned the room knowing that someone would use it. The room and all that is in it didn't just happen. The room was preceded by a thought and that thought was in the mind of a thinker, a designer, a creator.

Or think about a car. A car is the result of someone thinking and designing. But imagine someone coming up to you and saying, "Psst! Hey buddy, some people think your car had a designer but I know what really happened. Millions of years ago all that metal, glass, rubber, plastic, leather and wires in your car came up out of the ooze in the ground. Over the years by a process of blind chance, pieces of your car fashioned themselves into their own unique shapes. Then holes evolved in the right places and bolts and nuts came into existence. After a fierce lightning storm engine parts crawled next to one another in just the right places. Upholstery weaved itself together and glass shaped itself into the correct patterns. Then out of some sense of necessity air flowed into tires. Finally through their own evolutionary forces, all of these parts came together and formed your car."

Now if someone told you that story and he believed it, you would say he was nuts, and you'd be right! Yet there are people who believe that the origin of mankind, infinitely more complex than a car, was a product of blind chance and evolution. Automobiles are the product of someone's thought, design and

craftsmanship. The same is true for mankind, and the Someone who thought about us, designed us and made us is God. The book of Genesis tells us so.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

(Genesis 1:1)

In the first ten words of the Bible we have an illustration of the philosophical axiom I mentioned earlier. We have a thing, creation, which reflects a thinker, God. Our universe and world is not the result of blind chance. If the earth is a product of blind, purposeless causes then our lives are just cosmic accidents. And if we are accidents then there is no special dignity or purpose or meaning for life, and there are no moral absolutes. But if on the other hand there is a Creator then there is a divine purpose to our lives and there are moral absolutes.

As we read on in the first chapter of Genesis, there is a repeated phrase that I would like you to notice.

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed, *and* the fruit tree *that* yields fruit *according to its kind*, whose seed is in itself on the earth . . ."

And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed *according to its kind*, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed is in itself *according to its kind*. And God saw that it was good.

(Genesis 1:11, 12)

So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, *according to their kind*, and every winged bird *according to its kind*. And God saw that it was good.

And God made the beast of the earth *according to its kind*, and everything that creeps on the earth *according to its kind*. And God saw that *it was good*.

(Genesis 1:21, 25)

The repeated phrase is “according to its kind.” But what does this mean? It means that when God made things he maintained a precise distinction between all plants and animals. He gave every living thing its characteristic and nature. A tomato was first a tomato. It didn’t evolve from an avocado. The first tomato was red, juicy and tasty and it could only reproduce other tomatoes. That tomato seed could not produce a carrot or a watermelon or an elephant. Everything that God made was according to its kind and reproduced according to its kind. And this includes mankind.

Then God said, “Let us make man in Our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

(Genesis 1:26, 27)

There is the fact of humanity’s creation by God. Adam’s and Eve’s kind was a first. Mankind was and is unique among all of God’s creation. Humans are made in the image of God. Both male and female are made in God’s image. And because this is so, every person is worthy of honor and respect. On this basis Scripture forbids us to murder or even to curse another human being.<sup>3</sup>

How is man made in the image of God? The above verses do not tell us but the context gives us some good ideas. We see God

as having personality, reason, intellect and a will. He communicates and creates. He has power and authority. And we know that He is good because everything He made was good (Genesis 1:25, 31). Therefore being made in the image of God, we have personality, we think, we have a will, we can make things, we communicate. And mankind in the original creation was both morally and physically good. And just as God had power and authority, He delegated to mankind power and authority over the earth.<sup>4</sup>

Then God blessed them, and God said to them,  
“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue  
it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the  
birds of the air, and over every living thing that  
moves on the earth.”

(Genesis 1:28)

No other living creature is like mankind. We are the crown jewel of creation. Everything on earth was made for man and man was made for God. There is the fact of our creation. That is how we originated. Let us now look at what we are by nature.

And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of  
the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the  
breath of life; and man became a living being.

(Genesis 2:7)

This one verse gives us a clear explanation of what we are by nature. We are made of the dust or elements of the earth. And the first dust formed man was inanimate until God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Picture if you will mouth to mouth resuscitation, only, the first breath given by God did not resuscitate, it vivified. It brought Adam into life. I want to examine this verse 7 in three sections to better understand the nature of mankind.

Genesis 2:7 declares that God made man from “the dust of the ground.” The dust of the ground refers to the elements that make up our bodies. We are made of the stuff of the earth and a chemical analysis reveals that we are:

72 parts oxygen  
 13.5 parts carbon  
 9.1 parts hydrogen  
 2.5 parts nitrogen  
 1.3 parts calcium  
 1.5 parts phosphorus

Along with this there are smaller parts of potassium, iron, sodium, chlorine, sulfur, magnesium and so on. You and I are derived from the elements of the earth and when we die these elements return to the earth. In Genesis 3:19 God told Adam, “For dust you *are*, and to dust you shall return.”

In the second phrase in Genesis 2:7 we learn that “God . . . breathed into [Adam’s] nostrils the breath of life.” The Hebrew word for breath is *neshamah* which literally means breath life. The breath life or the breath of life animates us and makes us alive. It enables our nervous system, organs, muscles and brains to work. When you take your last breath, that’s it, you’re dead. This breath life or breath of life comes from God and it enables both man and animals to live, as we can see from Genesis 7.

Now the flood was on the earth forty days . . .  
 The waters prevailed and greatly increased on the earth . . .

And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils *was* the breath of the spirit of life, all that *was* on dry *land* died.

(Genesis 7:18-22)

During Noah's flood all in whose nostrils was the breath of life died, both man and beasts. The book of Ecclesiastes tells us that man and beast both share this breath life.

For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so does the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over the animals.

(Ecclesiastes 3:19)

There is absolutely no difference between the life force or breath life in man and the breath life in animals. This does not mean however that we are little more than animals because we are made in the image of God. God has crowned us with glory and honor and given us dominion over the earth (Psalm 8: 3-9). Nevertheless the life force which animates the animal world animates the human world.

Finally, the last phrase in Genesis 2:7 states, "God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." The last two words in verse 7, "living being" are translated from the Hebrew words *nephesh chai*. *Chai* means living. The word *nephesh* means being or creature. It is this word *nephesh* that has brought so much wrong teaching into religion concerning the nature of man.

In some older versions of the Bible, like the King James Version, this word *nephesh*, in verse 7, is translated as "soul." And it has been taught that the *nephesh* or the soul is the invisible and immortal part of humanity. In other words you have a body, but the soul is the immaterial part of you that goes on living beyond death. But this is not a biblical teaching. It has crept into the church through the speculations of the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato,<sup>5</sup> who advanced the notion that man possesses an immortal nature that preexisted birth and which survives death. He taught that the immaterial, spiritual world was good but that all matter was intrinsically evil. When a person dies their "soul" is freed from the restraints of an evil body and enjoys life as an immortal.

Parts of Plato's teachings were accepted by the church after the first century and incorporated into its doctrine of the nature of man. But nothing could be further from the truth. Immortality is not a part of the nature of man. God said, "dust you are, and to dust you shall return." He did not say "a part of you is dust and the other part immortal." Even the New Catholic Encyclopedia understands this truth.

Soul in the OT is 'nephesh', in the NT 'psyche' . . . Nephesh comes from an original root probably meaning to breathe, and thus . . . since breath distinguishes the living from the dead, nephesh came to mean life or self or simply individual life.

There is no dichotomy [division into two parts] of body and soul in the OT . . . The term nephesh, though translated by our word 'soul,' never means soul as distinct from the body or individual person . . .

The term psyche is the NT word corresponding to nephesh.<sup>6</sup>

Human beings are not immortal by nature in any manner. Human immortality has always been conditional upon man's obedience to God as the following verses from Genesis 2 explain.

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

(Genesis 2:15-17)

Adam was free to enjoy the delights of Eden with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God warned him saying, “the day you eat of it you shall surely die.” The phrase translated “you shall surely die” literally reads “dying you shall die.”

When Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:1-7) their lives were corrupted and the process of death began. And sin and death have been passed on to humanity ever since that fateful day (Romans 5:12-17). If you want the scoop—the truth is that man does not so much have a soul as he is a living soul or living being or creation<sup>7</sup>. Animals are living beings (*nephesh*) too as these verses from Genesis 1 reveal.

Then God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures (*nephesh*)”  
(Genesis 1:20)

So God created great sea creatures (*nephesh*)  
(vs. 21)

Let the earth bring forth the living creature (*nephesh*)  
(vs. 24)

Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which *there is* life (*nephesh*)  
(vs. 30)

The translators of our English Bibles have done us a disservice by hiding the fact that both man and animals are living souls or beings. The *nephesh* and its New Testament equivalent, *psyche*, can be used figuratively for our emotions or thought life but nowhere in the Bible is the concept of immortality ever associated with our being a living being or soul.

If He should set His heart on it, *if* He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.

(Job 34:14, 15)

For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over the animals

(Ecclesiastes 3:19)

These words are hard to take to heart. But as far as our human nature is concerned we are dust, of the earth, sharing the same breath life as animals. And since the sin of Adam we die. Here is what the Bible says about the state or condition of those who have died.

For in death *there is* no remembrance of You; In the grave who will give You thanks?

(Psalm 6:5)

Nevertheless man, *though*, in honor, does not remain; He is like the beasts *that* perish

Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall be consumed in the grave . . .

(Psalm 49:11, 14)

Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? *Or* Your faithfulness in the place of destruction? Shall Your wonders be known in the dark? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

(Psalm 88:11, 12)

His spirit departs, he returns to his earth, in that very day his plans [thoughts, thinking] perish.

(Psalm 146:4)

But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing . . .

Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

(Ecclesiastes 9:4-10)

Both for the righteous and the unrighteous death brings an end to one's existence.<sup>8</sup> There is no thought or emotion in the grave. The dead do not praise God. When one is laid to rest the body is eventually consumed and returns to dust. The dead person figuratively sleeps,<sup>9</sup> he or she is in a state of unconsciousness.

But is there any hope of life beyond the grave? Does our destiny lie only in the dust of the ground? With great joy I can tell you that there is great hope! The hope of everlasting life beyond the grave is a gift of God to those who trust in Him for salvation. Thus David could proclaim,

But God will redeem my soul [life] from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me.

(Psalm 49:15)

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory<sup>10</sup> rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul [life] in Sheol [the grave] . . .

(Psalm 16:9, 10)

As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.

(Psalm 17:15)

Even ancient Job exclaimed,

For I know *that* my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I *know*, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold and not another. *How* my heart yearns within me!

(Job 19:25-27)

Both Job and David were confident that death would not be the last word because they had a Redeemer. God would raise them up from death and grant them everlasting life. Their hope was not in living on past death as a disembodied soul or spirit. Their hope for life beyond the grave was rooted in the promise of a resurrection from the dead. And this promise of resurrection and life finds its fulfillment only in and through the Lord Jesus Christ who has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).”

Mankind’s origin was no accident or fluke of evolution. Our lives are the result of divine design. We are made in the image of God but we have been tainted by sin therefore we are mortal and subject to death. Yet all of this can change. Our destiny is not bound to the grave: resurrection awaits all who hope in God,

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life

(John 3:16)

# CHAPTER 7

## The Origin, Nature and Destiny of Man—Part 2

**W**e saw from Genesis that mankind was made in the image of God. But we also saw that we are mortal: we are subject to death. I'm sure that you have heard of the two inescapable realities of life, death and taxes. Someone once said, "Maybe death and taxes are inevitable but death doesn't get worse every time Congress meets!" That's true. But that is because death is bad enough on its own!

God placed immortality before Adam on a conditional basis.<sup>1</sup> If Adam obeyed God then all would be well. Tragically Adam sinned and sin and death have plagued humanity to this very day.<sup>2</sup> Psalm 89:48 asks the question,

What man can live and not see death? Can he  
deliver his life from the power of the grave?

The answer is no man, and no, he cannot deliver himself. As we have seen all men are mortal and *all* of man is mortal. There is not one verse in the entire Bible that teaches that man or any part of man is immortal. Although Adam's sin brought death to humanity, in mercy God promised a Redeemer for mankind. He made this promise in Genesis 3 speaking to the serpent representing Satan.

So the LORD God said to the serpent: "because  
you have done this, you *are* cursed more than all

cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

(Genesis 3:14, 15)

God's pronouncement promised that a descendent of Eve would enter into combat with Satan. We now know this descendent to be the Lord Jesus Christ. And although Satan would bruise (literally, "crush") the Redeemer's heel, in the process of combat the Redeemer would crush Satan's head. Obviously more is meant here than mere physical suffering. All of Satan's plans, purposes and power would be overcome by the Redeemer, whose victory would overcome the power of sin and death.

As we have seen, Job held confidently to this hope of overcoming the power of the grave. King David too was confident that God would not abandon him in death. Old Testament believers looked forward to a day of resurrection when they would receive everlasting life. This hope is clearly spelled out in the book of Daniel.

At that time Michael<sup>3</sup> shall stand up, the great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, *even* to that time.<sup>4</sup> And at that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.

(Daniel 12:1-3)

This message to Daniel is part of a larger message on the end times. Among the events of the last days will be the resurrection. All human beings will one day arise from the sleep of death. Those who have faith in God will arise to everlasting life in His coming kingdom.<sup>5</sup> The unrighteous will arise only to face shame and everlasting contempt along with the second death from which there will be no escape.<sup>6</sup> True Christianity is distinguished from every other religion by this doctrine of everlasting life by means of a resurrection alone. All other religions teach that life goes on somehow in the spiritual world after death. But the teaching of life through resurrection is the only firm foundation for our faith.

Let me turn your attention just for a moment back to verse 3. The Scripture says that those who are wise “shall shine like the firmament” and those who turn many to righteousness “like the stars forever.” Here is a wonderful promise that we should all take to heart. The wise, those who know God and believe His Word, they shall one day shine in glory in the resurrection. And the believers who influence others to faith in Christ and to a greater commitment to walk in the truth, they will shine like the stars! Here is something to keep in mind, the faithfulness of your walk with God and your witness to the truth will determine your capacity to shine in glory in the kingdom of God.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear from the Old Testament that the hope of everlasting life centered in a physical resurrection from the dead. But when we come to the New Testament do we have the same teaching? Yes, we certainly do.

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have

life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also because He is the Son of Man.<sup>8</sup>

Do not marvel at this; the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

(John 5:24-29)

Notice that Jesus said that “all who are in the graves” will hear his voice. He says nothing about immaterial souls in heaven or hell.<sup>9</sup> When people die the whole person dies and they reside in the grave in an unconscious state, like sleep, until the Lord calls them forth to life or condemnation. But when will the resurrection take place and what will we be like? The New Testament gives us the answer to both of those questions.

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out . . . This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.<sup>10</sup>

(John 6:37-40, 44, 54)

The great resurrection of God's people will occur at the "last day." This phrase refers to the coming of Jesus Christ at the close of this age, when he will grant life to God's people, punish unbelief and establish his kingdom over the world. This kingdom will last for a thousand years and at the end there will be a second resurrection of the unjust that will lead to judgment, condemnation and the second death from which there is no escape.<sup>11</sup>

The most detailed teaching in the New Testament on the resurrection of believers is in 1 Corinthians 15. When the apostle Paul wrote this letter there were false ideas about life after death in the church. Many believers had come out of a pagan background where the idea of an immortal soul was widely held. For these people the very idea of resurrection was reprehensible. They viewed the body and all material things as intrinsically evil. Therefore to reunite a liberated soul with a body was repulsive. Others in the church may have come from the Jewish sect of the Sadducees who did not believe in a resurrection at all. Paul corrects their thinking, bringing them back to the truth that there is no hope for life outside of a resurrection from the dead. And the hope for our resurrection is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who

have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

(1 Corinthians 15:12-19)

The apostle's argument begins by stating that if there is no such thing as a resurrection from the dead, then Christ is not risen. And that prospect is horrible to contemplate because then our faith is futile, we are still unsaved sinners, and in death all perish without hope of life. If there is no resurrection and Christ is not risen from the dead, then let's eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Thankfully that is not the case! Christ has been raised up from the dead and this guarantees our own victory over the grim grip of death.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.

(vss. 20-23)

The Lord Jesus is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, having been raised up from the dead. The word "firstfruits" provides us with a beautiful picture of what has happened and what will happen. Suppose you have an apple tree in your backyard and as spring approaches your tree is full of blossoms and these blossoms promise apples. In the same way, God's promise of everlasting life in the Old Testament through resurrection is like those apple blossoms. But then one day, one of those blossoms produced an apple—Jesus rose up from the dead. That is the first fruit and that one apple shows you that all the other blossoms will produce fruit as well. When Jesus rose up from the dead, his resurrection demonstrated and guaranteed our own resurrection,

which will occur when he returns at the last day. Through Adam death passed upon all men, but through Christ life is given to those who believe.

But someone will say, “How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other *grain*. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.

(vss. 35-38)

With these verses we now get into the subject of how we will be raised and in what manner. Using an illustration from nature, Paul explains that God has the power to bring life from dead things. And this new life is not just a reproduction of the former life; it is better, fuller, like a corn stalk with ears of corn is fuller than a corn seed. When a seed is planted in the ground it breaks down and ceases to exist as a seed. But then new life springs up from the seed and blossoms into a full, lush plant. In the same way God will bring us forth from the grave into a richer and fuller life.

All flesh *is* not the same flesh, but *there is one kind of* flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, *and* another of birds. *There are* also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another. *There is* one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for *one* star differs from *another* star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.

(vss. 39-42a)

The point so aptly made here is that there are so many different bodies and forms in the universe. And each is suited for its sphere

of existence. When we are raised from the dead God will give us a body and a form suited for everlasting life. Here is a little of how we will be different than we are now.

*The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body,<sup>12</sup> it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit.

(vss. 42-45)

Our new body will be similar to the one we have now but it will be a new and improved version! We will no longer get sick and die, we will be full of power and honor and glory. Our existence will be fuller and richer than we can imagine. Now we have a body animated by breath life and limited to time and space. But in the resurrection we will live on a higher, spiritual level of existence totally free from the limitations of the natural body. The life force flowing through us will not be breath life rather it will be the Spirit of God. Just as Adam’s body was the prototype for our present bodies, so Jesus Christ in his glorified state is the prototype for the one to come.<sup>13</sup>

However the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of the dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *was* the *man* of dust, so also *are* those *who are made* of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *Man*, so also *are* those *who are* heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*.

(vss. 46-49)

All of humanity from Adam onward is like Adam, natural. We are all born of the same nature. We have breath life and consist of the elements of the earth. Adam was the first man and the federal head of fallen, sinful humanity. He came into existence by a direct act of God. Jesus the Christ is the second man, who came into existence by a direct act of God. And as we have borne the image of the first man, by the grace of God we will one day bear the image of the second Man, Jesus Christ. We shall be glorified in both beauty and holiness.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

(vs. 50)

You and I cannot live eternally in the coming kingdom as we are now. A complete transformation must take place bringing us from one form of life to another.

Behold, I tell you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—

(vs. 51)

Paul has skillfully drawn back the curtain to reveal to us more fully the hope of everlasting life through the resurrection. But now a sudden new twist comes into the story and he will now reveal a mystery. Biblically a mystery is a hidden truth which is now revealed. The mystery is that not every believer will experience a resurrection because not every believer will die. When Christ returns there will still be believers alive. And although they will not experience a resurrection from death, they too must be and will be changed in order to receive and enjoy everlasting life.

. . . we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—<sup>14</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an

eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible [the dead] must put on incorruption, and this mortal [the living] *must* put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”

The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

(vss. 51-58)

The quotations in verses 54 and 55 are from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14. They are used by the apostle as a cry of triumph over the enemy of death (1 Corinthians 15:26). Contrary to what you hear in church after church at funeral services, death is not a friend that brings you into the presence of God. Death is an enemy, it is a punishment. It is the result of sin. It is an enemy that robs us of fellowship with God. It rips us away from our loved ones. It is a terrorist that attacks the whole world. But it is an enemy that will be totally destroyed by God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The hope of the people of God is the return of Christ. At his return God’s people will receive glorious new bodies for the enjoyment of new life. We will truly be ourselves only much better. We will be resplendent in glory like the stars in the night sky. We will have limitless energy. We will be in perfect health. We will hear sounds and see colors that we’ve never experienced before. Our lives will be full of joy and peace which no one will ever be able to take away. We will be united to our loved ones

never again to be torn apart. We will have a share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the greatest benefit of all is that we will be able to know and delight ourselves in God and worship him as we never imagined we could!

It was sin that brought us under death's grip. But Jesus Christ has broken death's grip on us through his life, message, death and resurrection. Two destinies await every single man, woman and child. One is death and the other is everlasting life in the coming kingdom of God. And the way to life is open to all through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

# CHAPTER 8

## The Problem of Sin

I love to preach on the great blessings associated with the gospel of Jesus Christ. I prefer to emphasize the power and beauty of a life lived by faith. The problem however is that this is only a part of the message of the Bible. The other part deals with sin. It is essential that we come to understand what the Bible says about sin because a recognition of our sin is the beginning of our salvation. Just like a diamond's brilliance is clearly seen when set against black velvet, we cannot fully appreciate the gift of salvation until it is placed against the backdrop of sin.

It isn't popular to preach on sin. You don't see too many preachers pounding the pulpit concerning the "S" word. We just don't like being told that we are sinners, even though we are. The conventional wisdom is to soft sell sin. We call it a mistake or poor judgment or a psychological maladjustment. More often than not we say that nothing is wrong at all, it's all a matter of a personal life-style choice.

But re-labeling sin with a new name won't change what it is. You can take a bottle of poison and label it apple juice but it will still be poison, and if you drink it you will die. Here's the scoop—sin is a poison and it is killing us!<sup>1</sup> We need to fully understand that it is the presence of sin in our lives that keeps us from being truly happy. All sorrow, all bitterness, all hurtful words and actions, every tragedy, heartache and sickness, whether physical or emotional springs forth from the tap root of sin.

The consequences of sin affect us all because we are all sinners. Proverbs 20:9 asks the question, “Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin?’” And Ecclesiastes 7:20 answers, “*For there is not a just man on the earth who does good and does not sin.*” The apostle Paul in Romans 3 sums up the human condition with these words,

As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one;  
There is none who understands;  
There is none who seeks after God.  
They have all turned aside;  
They have together become unprofitable;  
There is none who does good, no, not one.”

“Their throat is an open tomb;  
With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;  
“The poison of asps is under their lips”;  
“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”  
“Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
Destruction and misery *are* in their ways;  
And the way of peace they have not known.”  
“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

(Romans 3:10-18)

We all want to make excuses and remove ourselves from verses like these. We say to ourselves, “Well, O.K., I know I’m not perfect, but I’m not as bad as some people!” That may be true, but a small piece of dirt in a carburetor can keep the most powerful truck from climbing a mountain road, and a small amount of sin keeps us from God. Romans 3:23 declares that we “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” It doesn’t matter if we are a freshman or a senior in the school of sin, all of us have failed. We are all like the moon—we have a dark side that we don’t want anyone to see. No one has pointed this out more clearly than the Lord Jesus Christ when he ripped the mask of hypocrisy off the religious leaders of his day.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

(Matthew 23:27-29)

Now before we all come under the delusion that this dark side is the sole problem of religious hypocrites and Darth Vader, let's think about our own lives. Most of us behave well outwardly most of the time, but what about inside our heart? What about our impulses, drives and motivations, are they always one hundred percent pure? Do our outward actions always reflect the true attitude of our hearts? Are we always striving to do the right thing? Do we consistently love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves? You know as well as I do that the answer to those questions is a resounding no. We all have a dark side and the reason for this is an inherited spiritual disease called the depravity of the heart. The prophet Jeremiah put his finger on this problem thousands of years ago.

The heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

(Jeremiah 17:9)

When Jeremiah speaks about the heart he is not talking about the physical organ in our body, he is speaking about the essence of who we really are. And at the core of our being we are deceitful and desperately wicked. The Hebrew words translated "desperately wicked" literally mean "incurably sick." Here is how the Amplified Bible renders this verse.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly perverse *and* corrupt and severely, mortally sick!<sup>2</sup>

Behind all forms of human deception is the treachery of our own hearts. With one stroke of the pen Jeremiah lays bare the cause of all of our problems. And he is not alone in his diagnosis of the human heart. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ says virtually the same thing.

So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.<sup>3</sup> These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.

(Matthew 15:17-20)

The Lord's comments are set in the context of the religious leaders scolding Christ because his disciples did not wash their hands before eating a meal. In the light of their traditions a person became defiled by the dirt of his or her environment, whether socially or physically. Thus there was the need for ceremonial washings. But Jesus takes these leaders back to the authority of the Scriptures and reveals that defilement stems from a flawed human heart.

Theologians call this defilement "original sin" or "total depravity." Webster's Dictionary defines depraved as "marked by corruption or evil, perverted, crooked." Let's remember now, this is an internal disease, you can't always see it by what we do or say. Most people don't look depraved. A lot of us do a good job of covering it up! But deep inside, at the core of who we are, there is a disease called sin<sup>4</sup> that does damage to our thoughts, words and actions.

The doctrine of depravity doesn't mean that we are always as bad as we can be. There are many people who do good things.

There are people who are kind and who love their families and desire to make life better for others. The doctrine of depravity teaches that we are always *as bad off* as we can be. No matter how hard we try to be good and righteous, we cannot always avoid sinning. We can never meet the standard of goodness set by a holy God.

We always try to measure how good we are by comparing ourselves to other people. You know, "I'm not as bad as that guy!" But the Bible never measures us against the other guy, we are measured against the goodness and righteousness of God. And by that standard, we miss the mark. Isaiah 64:6 declares,

But we are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our  
righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags<sup>5</sup>

This uncompromising statement tells us that even our best efforts fall short of being truly righteous. The story is told of two men who were trying to escape an erupting volcano. As the fiery molten rock gushed from the crater, the men fled in the only path open to them. In their escape, they came to a stream of hot sizzling lava about thirty feet across. Sizing up the situation, they realized that their only hope was to get across the smoking lava. One of the men was old and the other was young and strong. And so, with a running start they each tried to leap across to safety. The old man went only a few feet into the air before falling into the molten rock. The younger man took a stronger running start and with his strength and skill went much further, but he too missed the other side. It didn't matter that he was better than the other guy, he couldn't reach the other side either. In the same way, our sin nature keeps us from measuring up to the goodness of God.

In order for us to grasp the true nature of sin we need a clear picture concerning what underlies all our wrong doing. Therefore, let's look at the first act of sin revealed in the Bible. To do this we will look at a section of Scripture in Isaiah 14. Does this surprise you? Did you think we would look at Genesis? Well, surprise!

Sin did not originate on earth, it originated in heaven. Satan, the covering cherub, the angel who guarded the throne of God, perhaps the most glorious of God's angels refused to be subject to God.

The words that we will read from Isaiah 14 were directed at the evil king of Babylon. But behind the king, running the show, so to speak, was Satan, and the true spiritual intent of the message is aimed at him.

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.

(Isaiah 14:12-15)<sup>6</sup>

Please note that Satan in arrogance, pride and rebellion cries out five times "I will." This shows us that the essence and nature of sin is selfishness. Sin equals self against or apart from God. Like Lucifer we sin because we are self centered rather than God centered. The first and great commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And the second is to love our neighbor as our self. Therefore all sins against God and man have their roots sunk deep in selfishness. It was Satan who brought this selfish, rebellious attitude to mankind.

God created man and placed him in a beautiful garden. By preparing a lush garden for Adam, God showed His purpose to care for man's every need. It follows then that the only proper attitude for man was one of complete loyalty, dependence and trust towards God. Man started out this way but it didn't last very long.

God gave Adam great freedom in the Garden of Eden. The only prohibition was that he should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The penalty for breaking this command was death. But Satan, represented as a snake, questions the veracity of God's statement, leading Eve and then Adam to doubt God's loving care.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

Then the serpent said to the woman, "you will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

(Genesis 3:1-7)

In Satan's first question ("Has God indeed said . . . ?) the seed of doubt was cast and this led to the seed of selfishness. Notice also that Eve adds words to God's command ("nor shall you touch it") and she softens the penalty for disobedience ("lest you die"). Eve no longer took God's Word at face value. She

doubts God's intentions and begins to decide for herself what would be good or bad. Selfishly she thought God was keeping something good from her and Adam. Then coming in for the kill, Satan promised Eve knowledge and god-hood. The selfishness now could not be avoided and Adam and Eve sinned against God. By this one act of selfishness Adam and Eve fell from a state of moral innocence into depravity. And this depravity was passed on to their descendants, which includes all of us.

Sin is replacing God's good will for our own will, either because we do not trust God or feel the need for Him, but the bottom line is selfishness. Some people think of sin like hanging ugly Christmas ornaments on a pretty tree. In other words they think they are basically good but occasionally do wrong things. In reality we are all ugly trees trying desperately to cover up with tinsel.

Photographers sometimes touch up a photo to make a person look better than he or she really is. The Bible never does this. It pictures people just as they are, warts and all. We see Noah's drunkenness, Abraham's lies, Jacob's schemes, David's adultery and murder, Solomon's idolatry, Peter's denial of Christ and Paul's persecution of the church. Why? Why did all of these heroes of the faith sin? The answer is the depravity of their hearts. They were sinners by nature. You can put a tuxedo on a gorilla and take him to a very fancy restaurant. But at some point, he is going to act like a gorilla because that is what he is.

Our nature is tainted by sin and we cannot fulfill righteousness or please God on our own. The apostle Paul said that the natural mind, the mind of the unsaved person, is at enmity with God and cannot please God.<sup>7</sup> It has been corrupted by sin. There is a computer virus in our programming. Thus we cannot find the way to become righteous any more than a scorpion can find a way to become a butterfly.

But all of this can change by the grace of God and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Adam's wrong doing is overcome by the righteous work of Jesus Christ.

Therefore as through one man's offence *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

(Romans 5:18-19)

There is deliverance from the power and penalty of sin through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Through faith in Christ sinners are declared righteous and they are empowered to live holy lives through the gift of the Spirit which gives us a new nature. We will learn exciting truth about this salvation in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 9

## Salvation—Part 1

**I**n the last chapter we learned a sad lesson—we are all sinners. And sin is the root cause of all the evil in the world and ultimately the cause of death itself.<sup>1</sup> But we also learned that there is a way to escape the power and penalty of sin. Let's read the promise again in Romans 5:19.

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

One man, Adam, opened the door to sin and death, but another man, the Lord Jesus Christ by his obedience to God opened the door to salvation. The gospel or good news of salvation is centered in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> He is the redemptive contact point between God and man.<sup>3</sup> As Acts 4:12 declares, "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

When we believe the good news of Jesus Christ, we are saved. As a result a radical transformation takes place in four areas of our lives.

1. Our relationship with God is changed.
2. Our relationship with a fallen and sinful world is changed.
3. Our very nature is transformed.
4. We pass from a sentence of death to the gift of everlasting life.

Let's begin with the first point.

## *Our relationship with God is changed*

In Acts 10 the apostle Peter is sharing the gospel with a man named Cornelius and his household. As Peter ended his presentation he said,

And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.

(vss. 42, 43)

Everyone and anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior receives the remission or forgiveness of their sins. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are sinners by nature and we commit sins by our own choice. In our sins we have offended and hurt the heart of God. But God took the initiative to change all of this and He gave His only begotten Son to save us from our sins<sup>4</sup>. In his earthly ministry in Israel, Jesus came to do three things: he proclaimed the good news of the coming kingdom, he revealed more fully than ever before the heart of God, and he came to pay the penalty for our sins by his death on the cross<sup>5</sup>.

And you being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He [God] has made alive together with Him [Christ], having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross

(Colossians 2:13, 14)

The “handwriting of requirements” refers to a certificate of debt. In the accounting office of heaven there is a ledger book that contains a listing of all your sins. When Jesus Christ went to the cross that

ledger book, spiritually speaking, was nailed to the cross with him.<sup>6</sup> And his shed blood washed that ledger clean! In his sufferings and death Jesus Christ bore the full fury of God's wrath against sin in your place. In today's terms, someone was busy totaling up all of my sins on a calculator and was ready to call in the debt, but Jesus Christ at the cross pressed the clear button.

In the forgiveness of our sins, it is not that God simply overlooks our faults. The penalty for our sins has actually been paid in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.<sup>7</sup> At the very moment of your faith in Christ your past life of sin, regardless of what it was, ceased to exist in the eyes of God. The slate was wiped clean. The bridge to those sins was burned, and the gates to yesterday were closed and locked.

This forgiveness of sins and our salvation is something that we cannot obtain by our own efforts. Even in the Old Testament no one could be saved by trying to keep the Mosaic law, for no one could keep it with a pure heart.<sup>8</sup> But through our faith in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven of our sins and justified before God. The Bible says that Jesus,

was delivered up for our offenses, and was raised  
because of our justification.

(Romans 4:25)

To be justified is to be legally acquitted or set free from all charges of wrong doing. In a court of law this occurs because there is little or no evidence to convict you of a crime. Through God's mercy and the sacrifice of Christ there is no evidence of our sins. The ledger book is clear because the blood of Christ washed it all away. And where our sins once filled the pages of the ledger book, the only words recorded there now are "righteous in Christ." Here is a powerful passage of Scripture that declares that we are righteous in Christ.

For He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no  
sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the  
righteousness of God in Him.

(2 Corinthians 5:21)<sup>9</sup>

At the cross Christ became sin for us and the punishment for our sins was laid upon him. When he died, our sins died too. And by faith in Christ the righteousness of God becomes ours. United to Christ by faith, we share in his righteousness which gives us a holy and blameless standing before God<sup>10</sup> and this changes our relationship with God. Where we were once sinners alienated from a holy God, we are now reconciled to Him and we can enjoy peace with God.

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have  
peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ  
(Romans 5:1)

Our highest destiny as human beings is to know God, love Him, and delight ourselves in Him.<sup>11</sup> Our chief claim to nobility as humans is that we were made in the image of God and therefore we are capable of having a relationship or fellowship with God. But sin changed all that. And just as Adam and Eve hid themselves from God because of their sin, so have we hid ourselves from Him in one way or another. But having peace with God, having been justified by faith and made righteous we are able to stand before God without shame and guilt, secure in His grace.

through whom also we have access by faith into  
this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope  
of the glory of God.  
(Romans 5:2)

Having peace with God through Jesus Christ we can stand secure in God's unlimited grace. And we can expect to experience His help and kindness on a daily basis.<sup>12</sup> And we never need to fear facing God's terrible wrath against sin.<sup>13</sup>

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a

good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled we shall be saved by His life. And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we now have received the reconciliation.

(Romans 5:6-11)

God demonstrated or proved His love for us in that while we were still sinners He gave His Son for our salvation. Now being reconciled to Him we shall never suffer His wrath, and we can rejoice in our relationship with Him as our heavenly Father. In salvation we are forgiven, justified, and declared righteous in Christ. And like the prodigal son who returned home (Luke 15:11-32), we are now united in love with our heavenly Father.<sup>14</sup>

### *Our relationship with a fallen, sinful world is changed*

The second aspect of our salvation is that our relationship with a fallen and sinful world has dramatically changed.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway of* the wicked one.

(1 John 5:19)

Sin had not only estranged us from God it had enslaved us to a way of life. The Bible tells us that Satan is the “god [or ruler] of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4).” He spiritually blinds the eyes of those who do not believe the gospel. The Bible tells us that the

whole unbelieving world is in his wicked grip. Here is how two other versions of Scripture translate 1 John 5:19.

We know that we ourselves are children of God, and we also know that the whole world around us is under the power of the evil one.<sup>15</sup>

We know that we are held firm by God; it's only the people of the world who continue in the grip of the Evil one.<sup>16</sup>

There are only two kinds of people in the world, not rich and poor, not capitalists and socialists, but those who belong to God and those who are trapped in an evil world manipulated by Satan. We were once trapped in that world too.

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as others.

(Ephesians 2:1-3)

Once, before being saved, we all lived our lives according to the values and standards of this world. We held philosophies and opinions, and were motivated by desires and fears that were ungodly. And all of these values, opinions and desires were manipulated by Satan's management of the world. But because of God's great mercy, we were set free.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we

were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus.

(Ephesians 2:4-6)

God has given us new life in Christ and He spiritually makes us sit together with Christ in the heavenly realm. This means that we share in our Lord's exaltation over a sinful world. We no longer have to live in sin. We can overcome it. This is called being sanctified. Jesus prayed for this in his high priestly prayer in John 17.

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

(John 17:14-17)<sup>17</sup>

Through our hearing and believing of God's Word, we are sanctified or spiritually separated from an unrepentant world. We are now a special class or category of humanity. We are God's people and we are called to live differently. We are to live for Him and by His Word.<sup>18</sup> The world's beliefs and values are not to determine how we live. God's will is to be our will. And as we live this way we will be set free from the fears that a sinful world generates, and free from the vicious sinful habits that enslave people. We are people who have been redeemed.

In whom we have redemption through His blood  
(Ephesians 1:7)

To be redeemed is to be set free. It is to be ransomed from the power of sin. John 8: 34 tells us that "whoever commits sin

is a slave to sin.” Therefore redemption is the liberation of a slave to sin by a payment, and that payment was the life of Jesus Christ. Scripture pictures us all before our salvation as slaves to sin up for sale to the highest bidder<sup>19</sup>. As a slave we could not redeem ourselves, redemption had to come from another. Therefore Matthew 20:28 declares that

the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

The apostle Paul declared that God,

Has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

(Colossians 1:13, 14)

In our salvation we are forgiven of our sins, we are justified and declared righteous, we are sanctified and redeemed. Our relationship with God is changed—we have peace with God. And our relationship with the world has changed—we have been set free. So how does a person gain salvation? It cannot be earned, it is the gift of God. John 3:16 states,

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

And Romans 10:9, 10 declares,

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with

the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame."

(Romans 10:9-11)

Do you believe that God gave His Son for you? Do you believe Jesus' words and mission? Do you confess him as your Lord and believe that God has raised him from the dead? Then the miracle of all miracles has taken place in your life and all the blessings of salvation are yours!

# CHAPTER 10

## Salvation—Part 2

Everyone knows the story of the Titanic. It was the most magnificent cruise ship of its day. The ship's builders claimed that the Titanic would never sink. But on a tragic night in 1912, the Titanic struck an iceberg that ripped through one side of the ship. The mighty Titanic began to sink and hundreds of people died in the frigid waters of the north Atlantic.

Back at the ship's headquarters in Liverpool, England, a huge crowd had gathered to find out about the fate of their friends and loved ones who were on the Titanic. On either side of the main entrance to the office was a large board. Painted at the top of one board were the words "Known to be saved" and on the other board the words "Known to be lost." Every now and then a man would come out of the office with a new list of names. And the crowd would grow silent as they waited to see on which board the names of the friends or loved ones would be posted. Would their names be posted on "Known to be saved" or "Known to be lost"?

Much like the two categories of passengers on the Titanic there are only two kinds of people in our world, those who are lost and those who are saved. But unlike the Titanic's list, people can move from the lost list to the saved list when it comes to their relationship with God. Jesus told us that,

... God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

(John 3:16)

The gift of salvation that is received through our faith in Christ, is the most wonderful gift in all the world, for it takes us out from under condemnation and a sentence of death, to justification and everlasting life.

In the last chapter, we learned that when we are saved a radical transformation takes place in four areas of our life. First we saw that our relationship with God had changed. Once we were sinners and enemies of God, but now we have been forgiven of all our sins. We have been justified and declared righteous, and the result is that we have been reconciled to God. We have peace with God and we stand secure in His wonderful grace, able to receive and enjoy all of His blessings. We also discovered that our relationship with the world has changed. We have been redeemed or set free from the deceptive manipulations of Satan, who holds the whole world in his grip. We have been sanctified or set apart. We are not of this world even as Jesus Christ is not of this world. Through faith in Christ, we have been delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into Christ's kingdom.

Now we are going to examine two other areas where salvation has made a change. First, in the gift of salvation our very nature is transformed. And secondly, we pass from a sentence of death to the gift of everlasting life.

### *Our human nature has been transformed*

As we have learned, our sins should not be seen as a series of unrelated incidents. They are symptoms of a spiritual disease called depravity. As both Jeremiah and the Lord Jesus have said, our sins spring from a wicked and depraved heart. Therefore an improvement in our character and conduct depends on a change in our heart—in our nature. In Matthew 12:33 Jesus said, “make the tree good” and “its fruit [will be] good.”

But how can our human nature be changed? Is it possible to receive a new heart and be changed at the core of our being? Is it possible to make an arrogant person humble, a sour person sweet, an ungodly person godly? The answer is yes! It is a part of the

glory of the gospel that Jesus Christ brings to us, not only a change in our standing before God, but also a change in our very nature. The Lord Jesus spoke of this miraculous transformation with a man named Nicodemus.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night, and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

(John 3:1, 2)

It’s important to understand the kind of man Nicodemus was because it has relevance to what Christ says about entering the kingdom of God. First, Nicodemus is spoken of as a man, a descendent of Adam. As such, he possessed Adam’s fallen sinful nature. He was also a believing Jew, a member of God’s chosen people. He was a Pharisee, one who earnestly endeavored to live by the Old Testament law and the traditions of the fathers. He was a ruler in Israel, which meant that people looked to him for guidance. To put it simply, he was probably as good a man as one can be on his own. He came to Jesus because he saw a teacher come from God and he wanted to learn more about God’s ways. And God must have revealed to Christ the heart of Nicodemus’s concern because Christ answers Nicodemus’s question before it’s even asked!

Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

(John 3:3)

The phrase “born again” can also be translated “born from above.” When we are saved or born again, it is an act of God whereby a new birth takes place in us spiritually and we are given

a new heart, a new nature through the gift of the holy Spirit. No one by his or her own effort is good enough to gain salvation and everlasting life in the kingdom because our human nature has been corrupted by sin. Therefore a change needs to take place at the very core of who we are.

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

(John 3:4-7)

Christ’s point is that no one, on their own, is good enough to be saved and enter the kingdom of God. The promise of salvation and everlasting life in God’s kingdom, which will be over all the earth, was first made to the people of Israel. But many had come to believe that mere physical descent from Abraham and keeping religious rituals enabled one to gain salvation. Jesus however tells Nicodemus that a real spiritual transformation of the individual needs to take place before one can enter the kingdom. Our hearts, the inner core of who we are needs to be cleansed from sin and renewed. There needs to be a new birth of new life within our hearts. In Matthew 19:28 Jesus Christ calls the coming of God’s kingdom to this earth the “regeneration” of this world. Thus a regeneration of our hearts is required before we can enter the kingdom. We must be born again.

The word “birth” always carries the meaning of new life. And this new life always partakes of the nature of the parents. A little puppy has the nature of a dog within him and nothing will change that. A human being has the nature of fallen and sinful

Adam—that which is born of the flesh is flesh. But when we are born again or born from above, we receive the Spirit of God, His own life, and we now partake of the very life and nature of God.

Jesus said that this new birth takes place when we are born of water and the Spirit. What does this mean? In the Old Testament the terms water and Spirit are often linked together to express the cleansing from sin and the giving of a new heart. Here is an example from Ezekiel.

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness, and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh.

(Ezekiel 36:25-27)

The Old Testament is full of such rich imagery like this.<sup>1</sup> The gift of a new heart signifies a regeneration or spiritual new birth. This truth is revealed in many ways in the New Testament.

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom<sup>2</sup> He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that we having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

(Titus 3:3-7)

We are saved through the “washing of regeneration” and the “renewing of the Holy Spirit.” We are born from above and transformed at the very core of who we are. In the new birth God implants new life, His own life, into us, making us partakers of His divine nature.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.

(2 Peter 1:2-4)

Having been born again by God’s grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are now partakers of the divine nature!<sup>13</sup> Once, according to Romans 5, we shared in Adam’s fallen nature. Once, according to Ephesians 2, we were by nature children of wrath. Now, through faith in Christ, we are partakers of the very nature of God. His life, His love, His goodness can now be seen in us when we believe His Word and act on it. This does not make us all little gods, but it does make us a new creation.

Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Here is a most wonderful truth. When we are saved a tremendous, inward, spiritual change occurs where we receive a new heart giving us a new nature that can reflect some of God’s

own heart. We are a new creation, rescued from Adam's fallen race, freed from the power of sin and its penalty, death.<sup>4</sup>

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regards to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 6:20-23)

### *The gift of everlasting life*

There is only one of two destinies for every man and woman either death or everlasting life. The final blessing of salvation is this change from a sentence of death to the gift of life. Like the Titanic, our world is sinking and without grasping for the life-saver, the Lord Jesus Christ, all will be lost.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever.

(1 John 2:15-17)

This fallen and sinful world is passing away and one day it will be replaced by the kingdom of God. And only those who believe God and do His will, will abide in it forever.

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has

the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the Son of God.

(1 John 5:11-13)

The moment we come to God through faith in Jesus Christ we are forgiven of our sins. We are justified and made righteous. We are redeemed from a fallen world. We are given a new heart, a new nature and the gift of everlasting life. If you have Christ you have life, everlasting life. He is the only life boat for a sinking world.

# CHAPTER 11

## The Church

**D**id you ever play the little hand game where you intertwine your fingers to look like a church? You clasp your hands together with your fingers intertwined and point your two index fingers to look like a steeple. Then you say, “Here’s the church and here’s the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people.” Then you open your hands and wiggle your fingers. In this little game the church is the building. That is how many people think of the church—it’s a building, a little country church painted white or a red brick church or a huge stone church. Others see the church as some kind of business institution.

But according to the Bible, the church is not a building or an organization, the church is people, God’s people. At the end of Acts 2 we have a snapshot of the early first century church. Let’s take a look and see what our ancestors looked like.

And with many other words he [Peter] testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to *them*. And they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold

their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.<sup>1</sup>

So continuing daily with one accord<sup>2</sup> in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

(Acts 2:40-47)

### *The church—called to belong*

In this family photo of the early church we see the believers committed to learning God's Word, loving and serving one another, worshipping God and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others. The Greek word translated "church" is *ekklesia* and it means a called out assembly of people.<sup>3</sup> The church is people who believe in God and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is an assembly of people called out of a larger body of people for a special purpose—God's purpose. What matters with an *ekklesia* is not just the assembling of people, but the reason why they are assembled. It is the purpose of the assembling that gives it meaning.

When you come to the point of saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you were called out of a fallen sinful world, not just to believe certain truths, but to belong to the people of God.<sup>4</sup> We are going to examine the activities that are central to healthy church life, but first I want you to understand that as believers in Christ we are part of a community, a living organism, a family. The Bible never portrays believers as isolated, alone and living out their faith separately from other believers. In the Bible you never read of a believer saying, "Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ but I see no reason to belong to a church. I live my faith on my own." What you do see is a family living their faith together.

Acts 2:44 tells us that “all who believed were together, and had all things in common.” In other words, they were united in heart and mind. They were linked together in love. United to Christ they felt lovingly bound to each other. As Christ cared for each individual believer, each believer cared for the other believers. The apostle Paul demonstrates this attitude in his opening words to the church at Rome.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of me and you.

(Romans 1:8-12)

Paul prayed to find some way, any way to be with the church in Rome. He wanted to bless them with his ministry and also to be encouraged by their love and faith. Being saved means that we belong to one another and need each other, not just that we believe certain doctrines. Our being united to Christ means that we are united to one another. As the saying goes, “we’re in this thing together.” Paul, in Ephesians 2 gives a beautiful illustration of the unity of believers in the church.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief

cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

(Ephesians 2:19-22)

As the church, the called out people of God, we are not foreigners or strangers. All of us together are fellow citizens of God's kingdom. We are members of the family of God. Together we are growing into a holy temple, the dwelling place of God!

During the 1980's there was a television show called "Cheers." The show centered on the lives of a diverse group of people at a local bar. There was Sam, the bar owner, a former baseball player and a womanizer, Diane, a cocktail waitress with high aspirations, Carla a feisty waitress who had a thing for hockey players, a bartender named "Coach" who was the slow witted funny man, psychiatrist Frasier Crane, Norm, the office worker and Cliff the mailman. The lyrics to the show's theme song were:

Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.

Taking a break from all your worries, sure would help a lot.

Wouldn't you like to get away?

Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name,  
and they're always glad you came.

You wanna be where you can see our troubles are all the same.

You wanna be where everybody knows your name.

You wanna be where people know people are all the same,

You wanna be where everybody knows your name.

The show was immensely popular. It was fun to watch this wacky crew manage or mismanage life together. But ultimately, like the lyrics to the song proclaim, the bar was a place where you had a family, a home and "everybody knew your name, and were always glad you came." The church should be like this. The Bible tells us it was and it still can be today. Let's return to the family

photo of the church in Acts 2 and focus on five activities to which the church was committed.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

(Acts 2:42)

### *Devoted to God's Word*

The first activity to which the church was fully devoted was the "apostle's doctrine." What enabled the church to grow strong in the faith was the teaching of God's Word. Believers become spiritually mature when there is a craving for and a delight in knowing the Scriptures. This is why the apostle Peter wrote,

as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby

(1 Peter 2:2)

And it is not just the pastor's job to study the Scriptures and share them with others. Every believer needs to learn the Bible and share its truth with others. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul encouraged the believers saying,

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another<sup>5</sup> in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

(Colossians 3:16)

Like the first century church, the twenty-first century church can be joyful and strong when the Scriptures permeate our every thought, word and deed. The church's first priority is to make known the Word and will of God. Everything else stems from this foundation.

## *Committed to fellowship*

Secondly, the church must be devoted to “fellowship.” The Greek word translated “fellowship” is *koinonia*, and it means to fully share in common. It is to share in something together fully. It is to be in full partnership. Genuine Christian fellowship is seen in our loving care of and service to other believers. Using the illustration of how our human body works, the apostle Paul encouraged all the believers in Rome to get involved in the work of the church.

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts<sup>6</sup> differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophecy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality<sup>7</sup>; he who leads, with diligence<sup>8</sup>; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

(Romans 12:4-8)

Just as the various parts of our human body have different tasks to perform for the benefit of the whole body, so the church is composed of people with differing gifts and abilities for loving service to the whole church. Each and every believer is unique and indispensable to the health of the church<sup>9</sup>. Fellowship occurs as we each do our part in serving one another. Peter makes this same call for loving service to others in his first letter.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with

the ability God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

(1 Peter 4:10, 11)

Being a believer means more than being committed to Christ, it means being committed to loving service to your brothers and sisters in the Lord. Along with being committed to fellowship, Acts 2:42 told us that the first century church was devoted to the “breaking of bread.” This is closely related to fellowship. In 1 Peter 4:9 the apostle commands us to be “hospitable to one another.” In the breaking of bread believers shared meals together and also partook of the Lord’s Supper. This means that the believer’s hearts and homes were open to all. Sometimes there is nothing more refreshing to our lives than enjoying the company of believers as we socialize around the table. This kind of openness and hospitality where the love of God flows freely is the super-glue that holds the church together.<sup>10</sup>

### *A worshipping community*

The fourth activity in Acts 2:42 were the “prayers.” The Greek word is *proseuchomai* and it means prayer to God having a regard for His power and giving prominence to devotion and worship. We need to pray and worship God individually but it is also a great joy to worship God together as a church. As we sing “hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19)” we are encouraged together as we regard the power and faithfulness of God. Acts 2:47 proclaims that the believers were passionate about “praising God.” When we praise God we magnify His flawless character and awesome attributes. We celebrate who He is and what He can do and this in turn makes us stronger, more confident and faithful believers.

## *Reaching out to the world*

We are also told in Acts 2:47 that “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” This brings us to the fifth activity to which the church is to be devoted, and this is to reach out to other people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. How did the Lord add to the church? He did it by believers telling their friends and neighbors the good news of Jesus Christ. When you are saved you are given both a ministry within the church and a mission to the world. Your ministry<sup>11</sup> is your fellowship and service to other believers, your mission is taking the good news to the world. The Bible boldly proclaims,

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.

(2 Corinthians 5:18)

You and I are ambassadors for Christ! We are representatives of the King of kings and Lord of lords! The Lord Jesus Christ has given us a message of love and reconciliation to proclaim to one and all. Making known God’s plan of salvation and His love for all mankind, is the most noble task in all the world. Sharing your faith with another person is the most loving thing you can do for another. Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ is not just the job of the professional evangelist, it is the privilege of every believer.

Here’s the church, God’s wonderful people, learning His Word, serving in love, worshipping from the heart and making known the good news of salvation in Christ. May all that we do as the church bring glory to God and good to His people.

# CHAPTER 12

## Christ's Return

It is common knowledge that Christopher Columbus sailed to the “new world.” Do you remember this little jingle? “In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” Columbus was a great explorer. But did you know that he also considered himself to be a prophet? He did, and he predicted the end of the world. He wrote a book titled *The Book of Prophecies* in which he predicted that the world would end in the year 1656. In fact, he stated very definitely that “There is no doubt that the world must end in one hundred and fifty years.”<sup>1</sup>

Columbus was wrong of course about when the world would end. But the world as we know it will one day come to a screeching halt. The apostle Peter, whose source of information was much better than Columbus', tells us about the world's end.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

(2 Peter 3:10-12)

Sounds like something out of a science fiction movie where planets and solar systems can be destroyed in a moment! Only this is not science fiction. This is the truth. This is the Word of God.<sup>2</sup>

Few people really believe in the end of the world, and even fewer believe that it can end like Peter described it. But on March 9, 1979, astronomers recorded the most powerful explosion and burst of energy ever recorded. The explosion emitted as much energy as our sun has produced in over three thousand years. The explosion occurred in space some ten thousand years ago, but its effects were still being felt. When the star exploded its outer shell shattered and it was scattered throughout space. The star had been eight-hundred and sixty thousand miles in diameter. After it exploded it collapsed into a dense ball of only five miles in diameter. The astronomers calculated that if our own sun exploded like this, little old earth would have been instantly vaporized. Good old Peter doesn't sound so crazy anymore does he? But what happens after this world, as we know it, is gone? Again, Peter doesn't leave us in the dark.

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

(2 Peter 3:13)

When this old world ends it will be replaced by a new one. And the Greek word translated "new" in verse 13, means not just new in time but new in quality, the way a new Mercedes Benz might replace an old Yugo.

After his sacrifice for our sins, Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and he ascended into heaven. Acts 3:20 tells us that Jesus must remain in heaven "until the times of restoration of all things." In other words Christ is going to return to planet Earth and when he does our world will be changed for the better. Here's the scoop, Christ is coming back and when he does it will be the end of the world as we know it. One out of every thirty verses in

the Bible deals with either the subject of Christ's return or the end times. Of the two-hundred and sixteen chapters in the New Testament there are 300 references to the return of Jesus Christ. And in the Old Testament, Job, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel wrote about what would occur when the Lord Jesus returns. Jesus himself proclaimed his return as well.

Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the Master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

(Matthew 24:42-44)

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

(Matthew 25:31)<sup>3</sup>

Notice that when Jesus Christ spoke of his return in Matthew 25:31 he used words like "when" and "will." There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it. The second coming of Christ is as sure and certain as is the Word of God<sup>4</sup>. This doctrine is a sure foundation for our faith.<sup>5</sup> But what will occur when the Lord Jesus returns? According to the Bible, believers who have died will be raised from the dead and together with those who are alive they will gain immortality and the kingdom of God will be established.

### *Believers gain immortality*

The first thing that will occur is that believers will be granted everlasting life. The apostle Paul wrote about this in 1 Corinthians 15, his most extensive teaching on the subject of Christ's return.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.  
(1 Corinthians 15:20-23)<sup>6</sup>

In his resurrection Christ conquered death and because of this when he returns he will raise to life every believer who has died. And those believers who are alive at the time of his return will instantly be made immortal.

Now this I say brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.<sup>7</sup> Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.<sup>8</sup> For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

(1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

The great truth of the resurrection of Christ and our coming immortality when he returns makes all the trials and sacrifices of this life worth it. In an old television show called "Let's make a Deal" the host would offer a contestant a prize and give it to him, but then he would offer a deal. If the contestant gave back the \$100 bill he could exchange it for another prize, perhaps a toaster or \$1000. If I were to offer you \$100 dollars would you take it? Sure you would. But what if I said to you, "Give me the \$100 dollars back, plus your car and I'll give you \$1,000,000 dollars in a week." Would you agree? Sure you would because it's a great deal! Even if you had to encounter the problems of not having your car for a week, the million dollar prize would more than make up for it. In the same way, the return of Christ and the gift of everlasting life will more than compensate for whatever difficulty we may face in this life. Keep your chin up!

### *The Kingdom of God*

Our world desperately needs good news. From radio, television and newsprint, all we hear about is bad news. There are raging wars, destructive famines, and environmental disasters. Couple that with all the difficulties of life and you can easily see that any good news is more than welcome. The Lord Jesus Christ has brought us tremendous good news, the news of a wonderful future for mankind. The Lord Jesus called this the good news or the gospel of the kingdom of God.<sup>9</sup>

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

(Mark 1:14, 15)<sup>10</sup>

The message that Jesus preached everywhere he went was the good news that a kingdom of justice and peace was coming to

our world. And when it comes, its domain will be over the entire world<sup>11</sup>.

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever."

(Revelation 11:15)

When Christ returns, all of the kingdoms of this world will be under the righteous rule of the Lord. The Old Testament prophet Daniel saw this coming kingdom in a vision and wrote:

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, *One* like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days [God], and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which will not pass away, and His kingdom *the one* which shall not be destroyed.

(Daniel 7:13, 14)

The governments of mankind from the very beginning until today have not been able to solve the world's great problems or bring about peace, prosperity and true justice. But when the Lord Jesus Christ rules in his kingdom the world will finally find peace.

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given:  
And the government will be upon His shoulder.  
And His name shall be called Wonderful,  
Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince  
of Peace.<sup>12</sup>

Many people are familiar with these verses having heard them at Christmas time. But these verses have nothing to do with the Savior's birth, they have everything to do with his return and his kingdom when there shall be world wide peace. The prophet Micah, foreseeing this glorious time, declared,

He shall judge between many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

(Micah 4:3)

What a wonderful day we have to look forward to! In Christ's kingdom there will be no more war; and sickness and disease will be a thing of the past.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer. And the tongue of the dumb sing . . .

(Isaiah 35:5, 6)

All of the miracles that Jesus Christ performed during his earthly ministry in Israel were a foretaste of the coming blessings of the kingdom. And not only will humanity be redeemed and blessed, nature will be too.

For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation

itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

(Romans 8:18-21)

The prophet Isaiah tells us that in the kingdom the desert will blossom like a rose, and that streams will burst forth in the parched places (Isaiah 35:1, 6, 7). Ezekiel tells us there will be an abundance of produce and ruined cities shall be restored.<sup>13</sup> When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, our world will be restored to its most pristine condition since the Garden of Eden!<sup>14</sup>

Sadly, since the fall of the first man, Adam, our world has never seen a time of true peace and prosperity. Our world is filled with war, strife, and suffering. This is because we have rejected God for the most part.<sup>15</sup> But the second Man, the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>16</sup> will restore all that Adam has lost and bring blessings that were never imagined.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ will rule this kingdom for one thousand years.<sup>17</sup> Then according to 1 Corinthians 15:28, the kingdom will be given to God that God may be all in all. Revelation 21 gives us a glimpse of that great day.

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and* be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And he said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

(Revelation 21:1-5)

These words are true and faithful. They are a firm foundation for your faith. How then shall we live in the light of such good news? Peter says that we ought to live our lives in "holy conduct and godliness" (2 Peter 3:11), and that we should be "without spot and blameless" (vs. 14). The apostle Paul says the same thing.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works

(Titus 2:11-14)<sup>18</sup>

Christ's return is our "blessed hope (Titus2:13)." In the light of his return, the light of our lives should shine offering hope to the world (Matthew 5:14-16). There are millions of people who don't know any of this information. They have no firm foundation for their faith. You do. Live and share the good news for the glory of God and the good of His people.

# APPENDIX 1

## John 1:1-3

Many Trinitarians will argue that the first three verses of the gospel of John provide strong proof that Jesus is God. A footnote on John 1:1 in *The MacArthur Study Bible* (New King James Version) states,

Before the universe began, the Second Person of the Trinity always existed . . . Because of John's theme that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity he did not include a genealogy as Matthew and Luke did.<sup>1</sup>

Yet *nowhere* in the gospel of John does he ever state that his theme is to show that Jesus Christ is the *eternal* Son of God. All John says is that his gospel was written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31).” So what does John 1:1-3 say and what does it mean? Here are the verses in question.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

The manner in which these three verses are translated from the Greek lead many Christians to hear in their minds something like this:

In the beginning was the Son of God, and the Son of God was with God, and the Son of God was God. The Son was in the beginning with God.

In fact, here is how *The Good News Bible* translates John 1:1-3.

Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he did not make.

But is this really what the Greek text of John 1:1-3 is telling us? First of all, let's understand what the word "Word" means. "Word" is a translation of the Greek word *logos*, and it means a plan, purpose, saying, expression of thought, a message, or an intention. Here are some examples of how *logos* is used in the New Testament.

Matthew 7:8, "saying"; 8:8, "word"; Mark 1:45, "matter"; Luke 1:4, "things"; 16:2, "account"; Acts 8:21, "matter" or "ministry"; 1 Corinthians 1:18, "preaching"; Colossians 4:6, "speech"

The Greek word *logos* was used to correspond to the Old Testament Hebrew word *davar*. Here are some examples of how *davar* is translated.

I have hoped in Your word [i.e. wisdom, plan, promises].  
(Psalm 119:74)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.  
(vs. 105)

So shall My word be that goes from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

(Isaiah 55:11)

In this last example from Isaiah, we are to understand God's "word" as His plan or purpose. So there is no good reason for the word *logos* to refer to a preexisting Son of God. In fact, nowhere in the entire Bible can you find any Hebrew or Greek word for "word" that implies another preexisting person in the Godhead.

Also in John 1:2, 3 the words "He" and "Him" are impersonal pronouns in the Greek and therefore should be translated as "it" when referring to *logos*. Every English Bible before the King James Version of 1611 translated the pronouns this way. The following is an example.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God: and the word was God. The **same** was in the beginning with God. All things were made by it, and without it nothing was made that was made. <sup>2</sup> [my emphasis]

Now, what does it mean that the "word" was "with God" and the "word was God"? The Greek preposition *pros* translated "with" means to be intimately associated with or together with and yet distinct and separate. My wife can be with me but she is not me. In the same way, God's word was with Him but it was not him personally. In the Old Testament we learn that "wisdom" was also with God.

Then I [wisdom] was beside [with] Him *as a* master craftsman.

(Proverbs 8:30)

No Trinitarian will say that because wisdom was with God that wisdom is now another person within the Godhead. Everyone understands that when we read “I [wisdom] was beside God” what we have is a figure of speech called personification. In the same way in John 1:1, God’s word was with Him but it was not another person. Concerning the meaning of the phrase “the word was God” I can do no better than to quote the comments of scholar William Barclay,

In the AV [King James Version] John 1:1 reads: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ For long the newer translations continued this rendering with the exception of Moffet and Goodspeed, who both render: “the Word was divine.” . . . In a case like this we cannot do other than go to the Greek, which is *theos en ho logos*. *Ho* is the definite article, *the*, and it can be seen that there is a definite article with *logos*, but not with *theos*. When in Greek two nouns are joined by the verb to be and when both have the definite article, then the one is fully identified with the other; but when one of them is without the article, it becomes more an adjective than a noun, and describes rather the class or sphere to which the other belongs.

An illustration from English will make this clear. If I say, ‘*The* preacher is *the* man,’ I use the definite article before both preacher and man, and I thereby identify the preacher with some quite definite individual man whom I have in mind. But if I say, ‘The preacher is man,’ I have omitted the definite article before man, and what I mean is that the preacher must be classified as a man, he is in the sphere of manhood, he is a human being.

John has no definite article before *theos*, God. The *logos* therefore, is not identified as God or with God; the word *theos* has become adjectival and describes the sphere to which the *logos* belongs. We would therefore, have to say that this means that the *logos* belongs to the same sphere as God; without being identified as God. Here the NEB [New English Bible] finds the perfect translation “What God was, the Word was.”

This passage then does not identify the *logos* and God; it does not say that Jesus was God, nor does it call him God . . . <sup>3</sup>

In other words, when we read the phrase “the word was God” the original intent of the Greek text was to convey the idea that the “word” was fully representative of God. The word was and is a revelation of God’s heart and character. If we understand God’s word we know what God is like. The *logos* fully expresses God’s purpose and mind. Therefore you could very accurately paraphrase John 1:1-3 like this,

In the beginning God had a creative and redemptive plan. And this plan or purpose revealed His heart and was fully representative of all that God is. All things were made through this plan and without this divine plan nothing was made.

With all of this in mind John 1:14 reveals a wonderful truth.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The word, the *logos*, God’s plan, His purpose, became flesh and dwelt among us. With the coming into existence of Jesus

Christ at his conception<sup>4</sup> and birth, the full plan and heart of God was expressed as a human being. Jesus Christ was full of divine grace and truth. What became flesh in John 1:14 was not a preexistent or eternally begotten Son of God. What became flesh was God's full plan of salvation revealed in the Man Jesus Christ.

A plan can take "flesh" when it is carried out or acted upon. When an architect's plan actually becomes a building it becomes "flesh." In the same manner God's plan became literal flesh in Jesus Christ who fully revealed His will. Hebrews 1:1 declares,

God, who at various times and in various ways  
spoke in time past to the father's by the prophets,  
has in these last days spoken to us revealing His  
word, [*logos*] by His Son

The Son of God, Jesus Christ is not a preexistent being. He is not the second person in the Godhead. He is simply and uniquely the Son of God who fully reveals God to us.

# APPENDIX 2

## The Mystery

As he ends his letter to the believers in Rome, Paul praises God and makes a statement about “my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the mystery.” Although there are a number of mysteries that are revealed in the New Testament,<sup>1</sup> the mystery that is associated with the preaching of the gospel, concerns the fulfillment of Old Testament promises that Gentiles would one day be blessed and saved along with believing Israelites.<sup>2</sup> The Old Testament however, never revealed that in the new covenant Gentiles who believed would share fully in all that God promised those who believed in Israel. In Ephesians 3, the apostle Paul makes a detailed presentation of this mystery.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery . . .

(Ephesians 3:1-3)

The word “dispensation” in verse 2, is a translation of the Greek word *oikonomia*. Some schools of theology<sup>3</sup> believe that an *oikonomia*, refers to a period of time, an age or epic, and that the New Testament church exists in a period of time that was kept secret from all previous ages (Ephesians 3:5) and thus the church is a separate and distinct body of believers separate from

believers in other times such as the Old Testament. But the word *oikonomia* never refers to a period of time.<sup>4</sup>

In the New Testament *oikonomia*, most often refers to the office of a household administrator or the steward of a plan.<sup>5</sup> Paul uses it to refer to the apostolic office.<sup>6</sup> A second New Testament use is for the divine plan of salvation, its order and administration. But this plan or administration is said to be carried out by God, not any individual or group of men.<sup>7</sup> A third and final New Testament use occurs in 1 Timothy 1:4, where false teachers are said to promote speculation rather than godly instruction.<sup>8</sup>

The apostle Paul was not given special revelation about a secret period of time that segregated the New Testament church from the Old Testament believers. He was given a stewardship of administering, or putting into effect the grace of God that would unite humanity in salvation as revealed in the mystery.

What then is the “mystery”? Traditional dispensationalists teach that the church is a new and separate work of God in a new (once secret) time period, and that the New Testament church is totally unrelated to Old Testament believers or even believers from administrations after this current one. This is not what the Bible states. The New Testament church of the Body of Christ stands in direct continuity with the Old Testament people of God, believing Israelites, as well as with believers in future administrations. This is shown in many New Testament references, where Old Testament prophecy is said to be fulfilled in the church or where Old Testament names for the people of God are used in the New Testament.<sup>9</sup>

The mystery is not the one body of Christ, or a secret period of time, the mystery concerns itself with the *composition* of the one body of Christ, which is the new covenant people of God. The mystery is clearly stated in Ephesians 3.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation [stewardship] of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by

revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already,<sup>10</sup> by which when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: **that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel**, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

(Ephesians 3:1-7) [my emphasis in bold]

The point is that Gentiles who believe in Christ share equally in all that God promised to believing Jews (Old Testament and gospels).<sup>11</sup> The corporate nature of the people of God was not a mystery. What was a mystery was that this body of people would include Gentiles on an equal footing with believing Jews (consequently the many arguments in the book of Acts about the inclusion of Gentiles into the body of believers).<sup>12</sup>

It was not a mystery that Gentiles would be blessed somehow by the Messiah<sup>13</sup>, but it was never understood until it was revealed to Paul<sup>14</sup> and others, that Gentiles would “**be fellow heirs, and of the same body**” with believing Jews. This is the point of Paul’s earlier explanation of the mystery in Ephesians 2.

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, **being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise**, having no hope and being without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off were brought near by the blood of Christ.

(Ephesians 2:11-13)

Once, Gentiles were without Christ, they had no part in the hope of Israel for a Messiah. Once, they were aliens from the commonwealth or citizenship of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. But now, because of the grace of God, the Gentiles who profess belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ have hope in Jesus as the Christ (or Messiah). They are citizens of the commonwealth of Israel (not national or ethnic Israel but the true Israelite, the one who believes—Rom. 3:28, 29; 4:16, 17; 9:6-8), and they are heirs of all the promises made to the fathers, especially Abraham.<sup>15</sup> Believing Gentiles are not alone, without God, in the world, they belong to the one true people of God.<sup>16</sup>

In his letters to two churches, the one at Rome and the one in Galatia, Paul said that his gospel was *no new* revelation. It was promised in advance through the Old Testament prophets (Romans 1:2), and preached to Abraham (Galatians 3:8). Again, the fact that God would bless the Gentiles was not a new revelation. What was startling though was that the wall of separation would be broken down between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14), and that *together* they would make up the one new man, the true circumcision (Philippians 3:3), the true seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:29) and the true Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). According to the analogy in Romans 11, the Gentiles are taken from a wild olive tree and grafted into the olive tree of the people of God (believing Israel).<sup>17</sup> Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ are not made a separate new tree. The olive tree (God's people) is simply newly reconstituted. The *composition* of the tree has changed but there are not two trees or two peoples of God, there is only one.

# ENDNOTES

## *Chapter 1*

- <sup>1</sup> Jamie O’Neil, “No Allusion in the Classroom,” *Newsweek*, 30 September 1985
- <sup>2</sup> Josh Billings, a 19th century humorist.
- <sup>3</sup> Scriptures used throughout are from the *New King James Version* of the Bible unless otherwise noted.
- <sup>4</sup> Hosea 4:1, 2
- <sup>5</sup> The Hebrew word translated “converting” here in Psalm 19:7 is translated as “restores” in Psalm 23:3.
- <sup>6</sup> The Chicago Tribune, January 13, 2004.
- <sup>7</sup> Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

## *Chapter 2*

- <sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 1:20, 21 states, “knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” A text note in *The MacArthur Study Bible* says, “...Scripture is not of human origin. **Prophecy of Scripture** i.e., all of Scripture [all that is foretold and simply spoken forth]. This refers to all of the OT, and then by implication to all the NT...The Greek word for “interpretation” has the idea of a “loosing” [or “origin”], as if to say no Scripture is the result of any human being privately “untying” or “loosing” the truth. Peter’s point is not so much about how to interpret Scripture, but rather how Scripture originated.” (*The MacArthur Study Bible*, NKJV, WORD BIBLES, Nashville, 1997, p. 1954). See also Galatians 1:11, 12.

- <sup>2</sup> www.johnankerberg.org/articles/\_PDFArchives/island/1s3w0400.pdf
- <sup>3</sup> Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That demands A Verdict*, (Thomas Nelson Pub., Nashville, 1999), chapters 3 and 4.
- <sup>4</sup> D. James Kennedy, *Truths That Transform*, (Revell, Grand Rapids, 1996, chapter 18).
- <sup>5</sup> One might fear that the prophecies of Christ's return are untrue since it has been over two thousand years since his departure. But the apostle Peter reminds us that "...with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:8-9).
- <sup>6</sup> George Keith, "How Firm a Foundation"

### *Chapter 3*

- <sup>1</sup> This quotation is from a book titled, *The Creation Hypothesis*, (Intervarsity Press. Pp. 270-293).
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted from "Notes & Quotes" in the *2003/2004 Winter Issue of The Unity of the Spirit Newsletter*. (The Foundation for the Translation of Biblical Studies, P.O. Box 473 Cary, N.C. 27512).
- <sup>3</sup> The Hebrew word for "wait" literally means to twist or to intertwine. Just as single strands of rope braided together become stronger when united so the believer is made stronger as he wrap his faith around the all powerful God.
- <sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word for "hell" is *sheol* and means the grave

### *Chapter 4*

- <sup>1</sup> Rich Mullins, "Awesome God", 1997, BMG Songs, Inc.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.christiananswers.nett>
- <sup>3</sup> Concerning the history of the development of the Trinity the reader is encouraged to consider the following works: Richard Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God*, (Harcourt Inc., Orlando,

- FL, 1999); Donald Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*, (International Scholars Press, San Francisco, 1998), chapter 6; Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, (International Scholars Press, Lanham, New York, Oxford, 1998), chapters 5, 6; Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord*, (Christian Educational Services, Indianapolis, 2000), part 5.
- <sup>4</sup> N. H. Snath, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, (Epworth Press, London, 1955), pp. 187, 188.
- <sup>5</sup> Edward Gibbons, from the preface to *History of Christianity*.
- <sup>6</sup> William Barclay, *Jesus As They Saw Him*, (Erdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 1990), pp. 20, 21.
- <sup>7</sup> Some versions of the Bible (such as the New King James Version) have this translation in a reference or footnote.
- <sup>8</sup> Some pronounce the word *YHWH* as Jehovah and others as Yahweh. The correct pronunciation has been lost over the centuries due to the Jewish custom of never speaking the name of God out loud due to reverence. This author will use “Yahweh” which is the pronunciation used by most biblical scholars.
- <sup>9</sup> R. H. Judd, *One God—God of the Ages*, (The Restitution Herald, Oregon, IL), chapter 2; *The NIV Study Bible*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1985), text note on Genesis 1:1.
- <sup>10</sup> In a recent defense of the Trinity one author has stated that when “one” modifies a collective noun like “bunch” or “herd,” a plurality is implied in *echad*. This argument falls flat however when you understand that the sense of plurality is derived from the collective noun (i.e. herd) and not from the word “one.” *Echad* appears in the Hebrew Scriptures over 600 times and nowhere does it mean a plurality.
- <sup>11</sup> Edmund Fortman, *The Triune God*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. xv, 8, 9.

## Chapter 5

- <sup>1</sup> One of the primary sections of Scripture that is used to support the Trinity is John 1:1. Please see appendix 1, for an explanation

of this verse. The reader is also encouraged to read the following books that have easy to understand explanations of difficult passages: Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, (International Scholars Press, New York, 1998, ISBN# 1-57309-309-2); Bob Carden, *One God The Unfinished Reformation*, (Grace Christian Press, Naperville, IL, 2002, ISBN# 0-9719610-0-x); R.H. Judd, *One God God of the Ages*, (The Restitution Herald, Oregon, IL ); Donald Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*, (International Scholars Press, San Francisco, 1998, ISBN# 1-57309-200-2); Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord*, (Christian Educational Services, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2000, ISBN#0-9628971-4-0).

<sup>2</sup> 1. kurios...properly an adjective, signifying “having power”...It is used of...an owner, as in Luke 19:33...of a master...Matthew 6:24...of an Emperor or King, Acts 25:26...father, Matt. 21:30...husband, 1 Peter 3:6, etc. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1985), p. 379. Obviously when “kurios” is used of Christ the word denotes not only respect but someone who has been invested by God with divine power (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-23).

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 36:26, 27; Joel 2:28, 29

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:11; 10: 46

<sup>5</sup> There is a Hebrew word *adonai* which is used of God. But it is used of God exclusively, never of a man.

<sup>6</sup> Emil Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God, Dogmatics*, (Vol. 1, p. 226)

<sup>7</sup> Karl Barth, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Zondervan, 1976. Vol. 2, p. 84).

<sup>8</sup> *The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1956, Vol. XXVII, p. 294L.

<sup>9</sup> *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, (Micromedia 1967, Vol. X, p. 126).

<sup>10</sup> *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (1967, Vol. XIV, p. 299).

<sup>11</sup> Luke 1:35

## Chapter 6

- <sup>1</sup> *The New Dictionary of Thoughts*, (Standard Book Co. New York, 1955)
- <sup>2</sup> *Columbia World of Quotations*, (Columbia University Press, 1996)
- <sup>3</sup> Genesis 9:6; James 3:9
- <sup>4</sup> *God blessed them...fill...subdue...rule*. Man goes forth under the divine benediction—flourishing, filling the earth with his kind, and exercising dominion over the other earthly creatures (see 26; 2:15; Ps. 8:6-8). Human culture, accordingly, is not anti-God (though fallen man often has turned his efforts into proud rebellion against God). Rather, it is the expression of man's bearing the image of his Creator and sharing, as God's servant, in God's kingly rule. As God's representative in the creaturely realm, he is steward of God's creatures. He is not to exploit, waste or despoil them, but to care for them and use them in the service of God and man. *The New International Study Bible* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1985), note at Genesis 1:28.
- <sup>5</sup> Alva G. Huffer, *Systematic Theology*, (The Restitution Herald, Oregon, IL, 1960), p. 149. "The strongest force working in favor of a general acceptance of the belief in natural immortality has been the dominant influence of Platonism in the early stages of the development of Christian doctrine." *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 1 (Scribner's, New York, 1913), p. 545.
- <sup>6</sup> See the reference to "soul" in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967. Also the *New Bible Dictionary* (Intervarsity Press, Leicester, England, Downers Grove, IL, 2004), states the following in its article *Soul*, "As is clear from Genesis 2:7, the primary meaning is 'possessing life'...the word [soul] is never used for the spirit of the dead." p. 1124
- <sup>7</sup> "the soul...does not stand in dualistic contrast to the body, but signifies man himself." *The Companion Bible*, edited by E.W. Bullinger (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1974), Appendix 13.

- <sup>8</sup> Alva Huffer, *Systematic Theology*, (Atlanta Bible College, Morrow Ga.), chapter 25.
- <sup>9</sup> Deuteronomy 31:16; 1 Kings 2:10; Job 7:21; Psalm 13:3; John 11:11-14; Acts 7:60; 1 Corinthians 15:18, 20.
- <sup>10</sup> “my glory”—this term refers to the whole person, especially in light of the fact that man is made in the image of God.

## Chapter 7

- <sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:16, 17
- <sup>2</sup> Romans 5:12-14
- <sup>3</sup> The Archangel
- <sup>4</sup> This points back to Daniel 11:36-45, which refers to the time of the Anti-Christ during the great tribulation period at the end of the age. See Matthew 24; Revelation 12:12-17; 13:7
- <sup>5</sup> This kingdom will be discussed later in this book when we look at what the Bible says about the future.
- <sup>6</sup> The eternal fate of those who oppose God is death not eternal torment (Psalm 1:6; Psalm 37:9, 10, 20; 73:27; 104:35; Isaiah 41:11, 12; John 3:16; Philippians 3:18, 19; Revelation 20:12-15. See also Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, (Paternoster Press, Carlisle, UK, 1994), ISBN# 0-85364-587-6 and Warren Prestidge, *Life, Death and Destiny* (Resurrection Publishing, PO Box 100-010 North Shore Mail centre, Auckland, New Zealand, 1998), ISBN# 0-473-05308-x.
- <sup>7</sup> When the Lord Jesus Christ returns believers will be judged according to their works, not to determine their salvation but to determine the rewards for their labor. There are five rewards mentioned in the New Testament and they are: *the imperishable crown* (1 Cor. 9:24-27, *the crown of joy* (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19, 20), *the crown of righteousness* (2 Tim. 4:7, 8), *the crown of life* (James 1:12), and *the crown of glory* (1 Pet. 5:1-4). Other pertinent Scriptures on this matter are: 1 Cor. 3:5-15; Rev. 22:12; Matt. 25:14-30.
- <sup>8</sup> The term “Son of Man” is a Messianic term from Daniel 7:13, 14, where it refers to the coming Savior who will receive a

kingdom over all the earth. It is this coming kingdom on the earth that the people who receive everlasting life enjoy it (Daniel 7:27, Luke 12:32, Revelation 5:9, 11). Jesus called himself the Son of Man more than any other title.

- <sup>9</sup> In the Old Testament the word “hell” is generally translated from the Hebrew *sheol*. In the New Testament the word is *hades*. Both words refer to the realm of the grave and **not** an eternal place of torment. The New Testament also uses the word *gehenna* for “hell” in Matthew 10:28. *Gehenna* was the name for the garbage dump on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Its fire was always burning but what was thrown in was destroyed. In the same way destruction is the fate of unbelievers (Malachi 4:1; Luke 17:29, 30; 1 Thessalonians 1:7-9).
- <sup>10</sup> When Jesus speaks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood he is speaking spiritually not literally. Just as eating and drinking are essential to physical life now, so believing in Christ’s sacrificial work on the cross is essential for gaining everlasting life.
- <sup>11</sup> Revelation 20:4-6; 11-14
- <sup>12</sup> The Greek word translated “natural” is *psuchikos* from the root word *psuche* (or *psyche*) meaning soul life or breath life.
- <sup>13</sup> Philippians 3:20, 21; 1 John 3:1-3
- <sup>14</sup> See also 1 Thessalonians 13-18

## Chapter 8

- <sup>1</sup> Romans 6:23
- <sup>2</sup> *The Amplified Bible* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1987)
- <sup>3</sup> See also Galatians 5:19-21.
- <sup>4</sup> Sin is the core of our problem. It is a disposition of selfishness and rebellion. Sins (plural) are the wrong actions that spring from sin.
- <sup>5</sup> These filthy rags are soiled menstrual cloths.
- <sup>6</sup> *The MacArthur Study Bible* (NKJV) states, “Just as the Lord addressed Satan in His words to the serpent (Gen. 3:14, 15), this inspired dirge speaks to the king of Babylon and to the

devil who energized him. See Ezek. 28:12-17 for similar language to the king of Tyre and Satan behind him.” P. 977.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 8:6-8

## *Chapter 9*

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:23; Genesis 2:17

<sup>2</sup> The gospel or good news consists of two parts. Number one is the message of the coming kingdom of God over the whole world (Daniel 7:13, 14, 27; Isaiah 9:6, 7). Jesus began his ministry telling people that this kingdom was at hand or near (Mark 1:14, 15). His preaching and miracles helped to explain the power and beauty of the coming kingdom (Matthew 4:23-25). The second part of the gospel is the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that paid the penalty for our sins so that we could be saved and enter the kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; John 3:16).

<sup>3</sup> 1 Timothy 2:3-5

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:10

<sup>5</sup> Luke 4:40; John 14:8-11; Mark 10:45

<sup>6</sup> The prophecy of the suffering servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53:1-6, indicates that God laid on Christ the iniquity of us all.

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 3:13, 14; Ephesians 5:1, 2; 2 Peter 2:24; Hebrews 9:28

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 2:8, 9; Acts 13:38, 39; Romans 3:19, 20; 4:1-8. Christ's sacrificial death not only covers our sins but it retroactively paid for the sins of the Old Testament believers (Hebrews 9:15).

<sup>9</sup> Romans 3:20-26; 1 Cor. 1:30, 31

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 1:3, 4

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 1; Psalm 37:4

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 4:14-16

<sup>13</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:9

<sup>14</sup> By faith in Christ we are made children of God and heirs of God. Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:5, 6; Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1

- <sup>15</sup> J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English*, (Collier Books, New York, 1972).
- <sup>16</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, (NAVPRESS, Colorado Springs, Co. 1995).
- <sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11
- <sup>18</sup> Romans 12:1, 2; Ephesians 4:17-32. Being sanctified, we are rescued from a fallen world and set apart for God. And as we live differently we sanctify ourselves in a practical manner (1 Thessalonians 4:3).
- <sup>19</sup> Rom. 6:6, 20; Gal. 4:3-5

## *Chapter 10*

- <sup>1</sup> Promises like the one in Ezekiel 36 (and also in Numbers 19:17-19; Psalm 51:9, 10; Isaiah 32:15 and 44:3-5; Jeremiah 2:13; Joel 2:28, 29) show that the terms water and Spirit are linked with the pouring out of the gift of the holy Spirit in the end times. The end times are the days since Christ's ascension up to his return. As a ruler in Israel, Nicodemus should have understood the need for this cleansing and regeneration, hence the Lord's question to Nicodemus, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (John 3:10).
- <sup>2</sup> The word "whom" should be more accurately translated as "which." The gift of the holy Spirit is not a person within the godhead. It is the life, nature and power of God Himself. In the Greek New Testament the word for "Spirit" *pneuma* is neuter in gender and all the articles and pronouns referring to it are also neuter. The Spirit is God's life and power often designated by impersonal symbols like wind (John 3:3; Acts 2:2), fire (Matt. 3:11), and water (John 7:37-39). The holy Spirit is never addressed in prayer nor is it ever mentioned in New Testament greetings (such as Phil. 1:2).
- <sup>3</sup> According to 1 Peter 1:22, 23 this new nature is born of incorruptible seed, which is the word of God. When we are born the first time, we are born of corruptible seed. We have

the life of our father and mother within us, and we will carry some of their characteristics throughout our lives. When we are born again, we are born of incorruptible seed because it is the incorruptible life of our heavenly Father, God.

- <sup>4</sup> The phrase “in Christ” or “in Him” is associated with many of the Christian believer’s blessings. Ephesians 1:3-8 states that we have “every spiritual blessing...in Christ,” that we were chosen “in Him before the foundation of the world” to be “holy and without blame.” We are also “accepted” by the Father “in the Beloved.” And “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Ephesians 3:12 tells us that “in whom [Christ] we have boldness and access [to God] with confidence.” See also Ephesians 2:6, 7, 10; Romans 3:24; 6:11, 23; 8:1, 39; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 1:21; 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:9; Philemon 6; Colossians 2:6-10.

## *Chapter 11*

- <sup>1</sup> This action of holding all things in common and selling of goods to meet the needs of others does not indicate that the Christians lived in a communistic or socialistic community. Rather it indicates that they held their physical belongings lightly and were freely willing if necessary to sell what they did not need to meet the needs of other believers. After Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost many Jewish believers who turned to Christ were from various parts of the world (Acts 2:5-12). Many of them likely remained in Jerusalem for awhile if not permanently to learn more about their new faith. These people would have had great physical needs.
- <sup>2</sup> The phrase “one accord” is translated from the Greek word *homothumadon*. This is a powerful word meaning with one harmonious heart, with one passion. It indicates a deep unity of purpose. Other verses where the word is used are: Acts 1:14; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29; Rom. 15:6.
- <sup>3</sup> *The Holman Bible Dictionary*, (Holman Bible Publishers, April 1991), in its article titled “Church” states the following about

the meaning and background of the Greek word *ekklesia*. “Church is the English translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*. The use of the Greek term prior to the emergence of the Christian church is important as two streams of meaning flow from the history of its usage into the New Testament understanding of church. First, the Greek term which basically means ‘called out’ was commonly used to indicate an *assembly of citizens* of a Greek city and is so used in Acts 19:32, 39. The citizens who were quite conscious of their privileged status over slaves and non citizens, were called to the assembly by a herald and dealt...with matters of common concern. When the early Christians understood themselves as constituting a church, no doubt exists that they perceived themselves called out by God in Jesus Christ for a special purpose and that their status was a privileged one in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:19). Second, the Greek term was used more than one hundred times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in common use in the time of Jesus. The Hebrew term (*qahal*) meant simply ‘assembly’ and could be used in a variety of ways, referring for example to an assembly of prophets (1 Sam. 19:20), soldiers (Num. 22:4), or the people of God (Deut. 9:10). The use of the term in the Old Testament in referring to the people of God is important for understanding the term ‘church’ in the New Testament. The first Christians were Jews who used the Greek translation of the Old Testament. For them to use a self-designation that was common in the Old Testament for the people of God reveals their understanding of the continuity that links the Old and New Testaments. The early Christians, Jew and Gentile, understood themselves as the people of the God who had revealed Himself in the Old Testament (Heb. 1:1, 2), as the true children of Israel (Rom. 2:28, 29 with Abraham as their father (Rom. 4:1-25), and as the people of the New Covenant prophesied in the Old Testament (Heb. 8:1-13). As a consequence of this broad background of meaning in the Greek and Old Testament worlds, the term ‘church’ is used in the New Testament of a local congregation of *called out*

*Christians*, such as the ‘church of God which is at Corinth’ (1 Cor. 1:2), and also of the entire people of God, such as in the affirmation that Christ is ‘the head over all things to the church, which is his body’ (Eph. 1:22-23).”

- 4 For uses of the phrase “called” in a Christian context see: Rom. 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28, 30; 1 Cor. 1:1, 2, 9, 24-26; Eph. 4:1, 4; Col. 3:15; 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:15; 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10; 1 John 3:1.
- 5 How believers are to relate to one another in the church can be seen from a study of the following verses where the phrase “one another” occur: John 13:34, 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10, 16; 15:14, 17; 1 Cor. 12:25; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:2, 25, 32; 5:19, 21; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 18; 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:24, 25; James 4:11; 5:9, 16; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; 4:8-10; 5:5; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5.
- 6 Every believer in the church is given the gift of the holy Spirit which provides a divine ability or abilities for the benefit of the others in the church. The gifts are listed in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:7-14. Along with special divine enablements, every believer is able to manifest the Spirit in the various ways mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:7-11.
- 7 Although some people are gifted in the area of financial giving, all of us are to be gracious givers when it comes to our financial offerings. The church needs money to operate just as all families do. Some pertinent Scriptures on financial giving are: Proverbs 3:9-10; Luke 6:38; Acts 4:32-35; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9; Philippians 4:10-19; 1 Timothy 5:17, 18; 6:17-19
- 8 The leadership positions in the church are listed in Ephesians 4:7-11. Along with this list it is to be noted that each local church was served by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1). Qualifications and guidelines for leadership are in 1 Timothy 3; 4:12-16; 5:17, 18; 2 Tim. 2:1, 2; 1 Peter 5:1-4.
- 9 1 Corinthians 12:12-26
- 10 Hebrews 10:24, 25 encourages us to assemble together as often as possible to stir up one another to good works. It does not matter where the church assembles. What is important is that

the church does come together. The church could meet in a traditional church building or in a home, coffee shop or park. The place does not matter. What matters is that we do the things a church is supposed to do

<sup>11</sup> Ten marks of true ministry:

1. The foundation of ministry is character—mine becoming like Jesus Christ's: 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Col. 2:6; Gal. 2:20; 5:22-24.
2. The function of ministry is to serve the Lord by serving the church: Rom. 12:1-13; Gal. 5:13, 1 Pet. 4:10, 11.
3. The motive for ministry is love: 1 Cor. 13; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-11
4. The value of ministry is in its sacrifice. That which costs me nothing is valueless: Rom. 12:1ff; Eph. 5:1, 2; Phil. 4:16-18; Heb. 13:15, 16.
5. Authority in ministry comes from my submission to the Scriptures: John 17:8, 17; 2 Tim. 3:16-4:2
6. The ultimate goal in ministry is the glory of God: Rom. 15:1-6; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Pet. 4:10, 11
7. The tools of ministry are the Word of God and prayer: Acts 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Col. 1:9, 10
8. The power in ministry is in the gift of the Spirit: Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 2 Tim. 1:6, 7
9. The pattern for ministry is the Lord Jesus Christ: John 13:15; Mark 10:42-45
10. The privilege of ministry is growth: Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 3:7; Eph. 4:15, 16; Col. 1:28, 29

## *Chapter 12*

- <sup>1</sup> *The Book of Prophecies Edited by Christopher Columbus (Reportium Columbianum, Vol. 3)*, Roberto Rosconi, Blair Sullivan, (Univ. of California Press, 1997).
- <sup>2</sup> The promise of a new world is rooted in the Scriptures of the Old Testament: Psalm 102:25; Isaiah 65:17; 66:22.

- <sup>3</sup> The New Testament boldly asserts that the Lord Jesus Christ will return one day. There are several Greek words associated with the Lord's return. A study of these words will add depth to your understanding of this wonderful event. The words are: *parousia*—coming (1 Cor. 15:22, 23; Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; 2:8), *apokalupsis*—revelation (1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7, 13; 4:12, 13), *epiphaneia*—appearing, brightness, manifestation (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:11, 14; Titus 2:11, 12), *heemera*—day (2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Cor. 1:7,8; Phil. 1:6, 10; 1 Thess. 5:2, 4, 6; 2 Thess. 2:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:3, 4, 10). The Lord Jesus Christ's fullest teaching on his return is in Matthew 24.

When the Lord Jesus returns the misery of human history as we have known it will come to an end. Jesus will establish the long awaited kingdom of God on this earth. He will raise the dead and judge the world (John 5:28, 29), and impart to God's children their full salvation (Rom. 8:17, 18; Col. 3:4). After establishing the kingdom Christ will turn the kingdom over to God and be subject to God (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

According to 1 Thess. 4 Christ will descend from the sky, preceded by a trumpet sound, a shout and the voice of an archangel. Believers who have died will be raised and those alive will be changed (1 Cor. 15). The idea that Christ will come for the church in a secret rapture (or gathering), taking believers to heaven before a time of tribulation on the earth, and then return a third time for his official second coming has been widely popularized, but lacks clear Scriptural support. See G. E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids) 1998.

- <sup>4</sup> The nature of Christ's return will be *personal*: Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, *physical*: Revelation 1:7, *visible*: Luke 21:27, *sudden and unexpected (by sinners)*: 2 Peter 3:3-5; Matthew 24:37-44; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-5), *glorious and triumphant*: Matthew 24:30; 25:31; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Colossians 3:4; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 11:15; 17:14; 19:11-16; Psalm 2:6-9; 72:8-11; Daniel 2:44; 7:13; 14, 27

- <sup>5</sup> See also Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 15:20-23; Philippians 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 3:5; Titus 2:13; 2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 9:28; 2 Peter 3:11-14.
- <sup>6</sup> See also 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. *The Geneva Study Bible* (NKJV) has this note at verse 16: “**the dead in Christ will rise first.** For Paul, those ‘in Christ’ constitute a subcategory of those ‘in Adam’ (the whole human race), and comprise all who participate in the salvation of Christ (1 Cor. 15:22, 23), whether they lived before or after Christ. Therefore, the rising of the ‘dead in Christ’ is a resurrection of all the righteous dead, and not merely of New testament believers...the resurrection of the unrighteous is mentioned explicitly by Paul only in Acts 24:15, though he also presupposes it in his warnings...(Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5-16).” See also Rev. 20:11-15.
- <sup>7</sup> The phrase “flesh and blood” refers to living believers and “corruption” to believers who have died.
- <sup>8</sup> Matthew 24:29-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- <sup>9</sup> Although it is most often called the “kingdom of God” at times other terms are used. Mark, Luke and John use the term “kingdom of God.” Matthew uses the term the “kingdom of heaven.” Understanding Jewish sentiments about not uttering the holy name of God, Matthew substituted the term “heaven” for “God.” However, the two terms are synonymous (Matt. 19:23, 24). The apostle Paul calls it “the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:10), and at other times “the kingdom of Christ and God” (Ephesians 5:5). Peter refers to it as the “everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The Bible calls the gospel by other names as well. The Bible speaks of “the gospel of God” and the “gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:1, 16). The term “gospel of God” declares that the good news originated with God and it is the “gospel of Christ” because he has brought it to pass. The apostle Paul at times used the term “my gospel” (Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8)) not because it originated with Paul but because it was the message he received directly from Christ (Gal. 1:11-12). In Rom. 16:25 Paul speaks of “my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the

revelation of the mystery” (see appendix 2 on “The Mystery”). The good news is also called “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). This is because we are called by grace, justified by grace, and saved by grace (Gal. 1:6, 15; Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8). The good news is also called “the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13). Our salvation allows us to enter the kingdom of God. “The gospel of peace” (Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15) is also used to describe the good news. Just as salvation brings us peace with God and a peace in our hearts, the kingdom will one day bring peace to our troubled world. All these different terms describe the same good news. They simply emphasize various aspects of our salvation. Jesus taught the good news of the kingdom (Mark 1:14, 15), and he taught his disciples to do the same (Matt. 10:7). After his resurrection, he continued to teach about the kingdom (Acts 1:3). And the apostles continued making known this glorious good news (Acts 8:12; 28:30, 31).

<sup>10</sup> Christ’s primary message was the good news of the coming kingdom of God to our world. The declaration of this message was the central core of his ministry. In Luke 4: 43 Jesus said that this message was the purpose of his teaching ministry: “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.” Along with the message of the kingdom, Jesus Christ made entrance into the kingdom possible by his sacrifice on the cross for sins: Colossians 1:12-15.

<sup>11</sup> When Jesus Christ returns to grant everlasting life to the people of God, he will rule over a kingdom where the hopes and dreams of mankind will be fully realized. This kingdom will supercede all earthly governments (Rev. 11:15), it will be worldwide in its extent (Ps. 2:7-9; Dan. 7:14), believers will be glorified with Christ (Col. 3:4), Israel will be gathered and blessed (Amos 9:14, 15; Ezek. 11:17-20), there will be peace (Is. 2:4; 9:7; Micah 4:4), there will be no disease (Is. 33:24; 35:5, 6; 65:17-19; Rev. 21:4), and the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord (Is. 11:9; Hab. 2:14).

- <sup>12</sup> Isaiah 9:2-7 and 11:1-9 “describe...the enthronement of the king of salvation and the equipment of the new shoot of David’s line with the gifts of the Spirit of God. At his exaltation to sonship, his father confers upon him names that promise salvation...The king is none other than God’s representative on earth. With his coming, man’s history of woe is at an end; he will bring salvation to the whole world” (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 637). The names, titles “Wonderful” and “Counselor” should be together as “Wonderful Counselor” and point to his wonderful rule as king at which people will marvel. The leading Hebrew Lexicon states that the term “Mighty God” should be translated as “mighty hero” or “divine hero, reflecting the divine majesty (*Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brown, Driver and Briggs, Oxford Univ. Press, p. 42). *The Catholic Study Bible* (p. 888) says that this king is a “warrior and defender of his people, like God Himself.” The title “Everlasting Father” refers to one who is “ever devoted to his people (*The Catholic Study Bible*). Some Greek translations of the Old Testament suggest this title should be understood as “father of the age to come (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 326). And the title “Prince of Peace” indicates that Messiah’s rule will be characterized by true peace and well being (*The New International Version Study Bible*, p. 1030).
- <sup>13</sup> See also Amos 9:13, 14; Ezekiel 34:26, 27
- <sup>14</sup> Even animal life will be transformed (Isaiah 11:6).
- <sup>15</sup> Hosea 4:6; Jeremiah 2:13
- <sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:47
- <sup>17</sup> Revelation 20:5. At the end of this thousand year reign of Christ there will be a rebellion against Christ that will fail, and resurrection of the unjust for judgment (Rev. 20:7-15). After this Christ will give the kingdom to God that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:25-28).
- <sup>18</sup> See also 1 John 3:1-3. Since we shall one day be like our Lord, this should cause us to be more and more like him now.

## Appendix 1

- <sup>1</sup> *The MacArthur Study Bible, New King James Version* (Word, Nashville, 1997), p. 1573.
- <sup>2</sup> *William Tyndale's New Testament*, 1534. Also see Wycliff Version, 1380; Crammer Bible, 1539 and The Geneva Bible, 1557.
- <sup>3</sup> William Barclay, *Jesus As They Saw Him*, (Erdmans, Grand Rapids, 1962), p. 21-22.
- <sup>4</sup> Galatians 4:4 declares, "When the fullness of time had come God sent forth His Son, born of a woman..." The Greek word translated "born" is *ginesthai* (also used in Romans 1:3) which means to come into existence. The fact that the Son of God came into existence from Mary shows that the Son was not already in existence in eternity past. Matthew 1:20 speaks of that "which is conceived" in Mary. The word "conceived" comes from the Greek *gennaō* and means to be begotten, to come into being. And Luke 1:35 tells us that Mary would conceive by the power of the Highest, "therefore [*dio kai*—for this reason]...that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." The Son of God did not preexist his birth but came into being in a moment of time at his birth.

## Appendix 2

- <sup>1</sup> For example Mark 4:11; Romans 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:51; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; Rev. 1:20.
- <sup>2</sup> The first hint of this blessing is given in Genesis 12:1-3.
- <sup>3</sup> Such as Classic or Traditional Dispensational theology.
- <sup>4</sup> *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1985, says on page 174, under the heading "Dispensation," "A "dispensation" is not a period or epoch ( a common, but erroneous, use of the word), but a mode of dealing, an arrangement or administration of affairs."
- <sup>5</sup> *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, E. W. Bullinger, Zondervan Pub., 1978, p.228.

The first use of *oikonomia* in Luke 12:42 refers to a faithful and wise steward (one who manages another's property, finances or affairs).

- <sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:17; Colossians 1:25 and here in Ephesians 3:2
- <sup>7</sup> Ephesians 1:10; 3:9; Colossians 1:25
- <sup>8</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, abridged by Geoffrey Bromiley, Erdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 1985, p.679
- <sup>9</sup> Acts 2:16ff; 3:17ff; Romans 1:1, 2; Romans 11:17-26; 1 Peter 2:9, 10
- <sup>10</sup> Ephesians 2:11-13
- <sup>11</sup> This is made clearer in the NIV "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.(Eph. 3:6)"
- <sup>12</sup> Acts 10; 11; 13:42-49; 15; etc
- <sup>13</sup> Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 11:10
- <sup>14</sup> When was the mystery revealed to Paul? Most likely, Paul received this knowledge on the Damascus road when Christ spoke to him (Acts 26:14-18). Some theologians believe that Paul received the revelation of the mystery after he was put in prison, when the books of Acts came to a close. Paul however, states that he was in prison because he was preaching the mystery (Eph. 6:19-20). When Paul wrote his letters to the Galatians and the Romans the "mystery" was being proclaimed. We can see this when we compare what Paul revealed in Ephesians 3 with what he wrote earlier. Gentiles who believe in Christ are heirs together with Jewish believers (Rom. 8:17, Gal. 3:1-4:7 and Eph. 3:6). They are also members together in one body (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27, Eph. 3:6), and partakers in the promise along with Jewish believers (Gal. 3; Rom. 9-11; Eph. 3:6. Gentile believers have Christ in them "the hope of glory" (Rom. 8:10, gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27).
- <sup>15</sup> Galatians 3:26-29. The "riches of the...mystery...is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27)."

- <sup>16</sup> This theme of Gentiles entering the community of the saints with full privileges can also be found in the book of Acts. See Acts 8 with the inclusion of the half Jew Samaritans; Acts 10 with the inclusion of the Gentile Cornelius; and Peter's speech in Acts 11:15-17
- <sup>17</sup> Rom. 9:4, 5 tell us that to Israel belonged the adoption or sonship, the glory, the covenants, the promises and Christ.