

THE AGELESS CONFLICT



AARON J. CAREY

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INTRODUCTION: GOD'S TRUE PEOPLE OBEY HIS VOICE

Obedience to God is what characterizes God's true people in every age. God's people, those whom He accounts as righteous, are always those that are presently obeying Him and keeping His commandments according to the light which they have available to them. This has been true from the beginning, and will always be so. The full revelation of the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ in the New Covenant never changed this fact the slightest bit. Furthermore, the chief opponents of God's true people have always been people with a disobedient attitude towards God. In many cases these claim to be the people of God, but in fact are not. The true people of God obey and serve Him on His terms. The false people of God often call God's true people heretics (or something similar) for standing on the Word of God and not receiving a counterfeit faith which denies the true God's requirement for man's obedience and/or twists the words of God somehow to change the obedience the true God expects into something else, whatever that might be.

Whether or not we will surrender to the true God and obey His commandments on the terms of His Word without self-imposed conditions is the ageless conflict. Counterfeit Christianity can be recognized by any “Christianity” that one can adopt without settling this conflict on the Lord's side in truth. This is a foundational matter of the Christian faith that needs to be set straight. There is nothing genuinely higher or deeper to the Christian life but that which has at its foundation a right response to this ageless conflict.

This book is about proving that this is the ultimate issue for mankind from the whole Bible, Old and New Testament; and showing how this conflict unfolds in Scripture in the many lessons it has for us. It is good to learn from these so we'll be on the right side of this monumental conflict, as there are only two sides, and all must be on one side or the other. Our eternal salvation depends on our getting on the right side and remaining on it until the end of our lives (Matthew 24:13). We will look closely at Scripture to prove this. It's best to look at what the Word of God says and not at the philosophies of men which complicate Scripture unnecessarily and seek to explain away the plain words of God. If someone critiques this book and says that I reference or quote the Bible too much, I'll take that as a compliment. If there seems to be too much repetition, with the same point emphasized constantly, it's because it is necessary to vindicate the truth of God's Word on this crucial issue from all the lies and confusion that constantly surround and oppose it.

We will look much at lessons from the Old Testament. It's amazing how the Old Testament is about 70% of the Bible, yet often professing Christians treat the Old Testament like it's irrelevant. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus honored and upheld the Old

Testament (Matthew 5:17-18, John 10:35, etc) and the Apostles said that all that which is in the Old Testament is for our example (1 Corinthians 10:1-11, Romans 15:4, etc). The New Testament writers referred to the Old Testament to illustrate and prove their points *constantly*. Many are ashamed to reference it much at all now. This no doubt has to do with all of the various false doctrines that Satan has subtly brought into Christendom which explain away the need for obedience for us in New Testament times. Obviously such doctrine would never be taken seriously were the lessons in the Old Testament not explained away or ignored altogether.

It is no wonder that the issue of obedience to God then is the chief issue that Satan seeks to oppose and brings confusion over. All the negative impressions which professing Christians have over phrases like "obedience to God", "doing right in the eyes of the Lord", "walking acceptably to the Lord", and "being worthy of God's kingdom" verifies that. These are all things that Jesus and the Apostles talked about constantly, as we'll see. (What right do we have to subtract from the Word of God?) The truths given in this book will be verified from the New Testament as the two Testaments complement each other perfectly and are never in opposition to each other. The same God who never contradicts Himself gave both.

Titus 2:11-15 states: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee." (Titus 2:11-15)

No one will deny that true Christianity is characterized by the grace of God. Since that's the case, according to these verses from Titus 2, true Christianity then is characterized by obedience in learning to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar (unique, special) people, zealous of *good works*. And furthermore, gospel ministers should speak, and exhort, rebuke with all authority regarding these truths; and let no man despise them. *This is what the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men teaching!* It's interesting how the truths that we come to when taking God's Word at face value are so different than the doctrines that are so commonly preached and considered "sound doctrine."

Many who've gone to church their whole lives have never truly heard about the grace of God that brings salvation- except maybe negatively! When we let the Bible speak for itself, some things which are commonly called heresy are discovered to actually be sound doctrine; and some things which are commonly called sound doctrine are discovered to really be heresy. Imagine a gospel minister actually teaching his hearers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts that they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world- and actually exhorting them to do so and actually rebuking those who are disobedient. Well, done in line with the rest of Scripture, and an obedient life of his own, he would be a true teacher of the grace of God! But the standard doctrine now is that we can't live that way anyway- and that even if we could it wouldn't have an impact on our salvation. Lies! The true grace of God has been turned into a license for disobedience and immorality. We need to live out and

contend for the true faith where obedience to God's Word is expected, required, and by the promises and the grace of God, regarded as possible. Jesus Christ is Lord as well as Savior, and we have no right to despise Him in His office as Lord/King and to presume He'll still exercise His office of Savior towards us while we rebel against His royal throne. Nor do we have the right to limit His capacity as Savior to only deliverance from the guilt of sin, and not from the power/dominion of sin as well.

There are lies not only regarding our need to be obedient, but also counterfeit versions of obedience to God that can stumble us as well. That is why we need to look at the examples and lessons of true and false obedience in Scripture. For example, we'll see early on that there is Cain, who stopped short of unconditional surrender to God, and yet still tried to offer *something* to the Lord. We'll see from the story of the Golden Calf that we need to be worshipping the right God (don't laugh, this is really an issue -our concept of God must be taken from how He's revealed Himself in the Bible). Then there's the example of King Saul, who did what God asked of him- *with an exception* (which God considered a very big deal). And then of course there are the Pharisees. No, their problem wasn't that they obeyed God's Word as many erroneously think their problem was. They made up a bunch of their own laws which they sought to use as a license to disobey God's Word and/or made their (alleged) obedience to God's commandments an external formality. They ignored the true intentions of God's commandments, which make it necessary that we be obedient in the thoughts and intents of our hearts (John 4:23-24).

This ageless, ultimate conflict starts with God's Word versus Satan's at the very beginning in the Garden of Eden. That is where we'll start too. The rest of the Bible is the extension and unfolding of this conflict, as all of

human history really is also. The chapters in this book are not perfectly chronological, though in general they will flow from the beginning of the Bible towards the end. It seemed good, for example, to put the chapter about serving the right God earlier than it would appear if left in chronological order. The chapter about a right response to sin and failure, detailing the contrast between King Saul and King David, fit in better among the New Testament chapters. The two appendixes at the end deal with issues that didn't exactly fit in the flow of the book yet are issues that are relevant to the book's content and could not be overlooked. One of these looks at the OT story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego because of the lessons it gives for Christians in suffering tribulation.

It should be said too at the beginning that there is really only one type of Christianity. We could think that with all of the different churches and teachings that exist now that there are many varieties which we can choose from, like people choose ice cream flavors. But Christianity is not a Baskin-Robbins ice cream shop! No, I'm not trying to plug a certain church/group. What I am saying is that the Bible is full of objective truth which we must seek and align ourselves with. If a thousand different people are honestly doing that they'll be coming closer together in their understanding of truth and the way they worship God.¹ There is no real Christianity

1 Two other truths stem from this: False unity is when people come together in worship not based on truth (i.e. the attitude of "we have different gods and/or different ways of serving God, but let's just be one since that's not a big deal anyway.") The other truth is that people's dishonesty with Scripture and seeking their own position/comfort/convenience explains much regarding how so many denominations have formed that claim to have the truth. So we see how both unity and disunity can potentially come through man's own betrayal of the true God and acceptance of lies based upon what people

besides the Apostolic Christianity we have before us in the Bible (Ephesians 4:4-6). Imagine people in the same city as the Apostle John or the Apostle Paul in the first-century who called themselves Christians, yet didn't fellowship at the Apostle's church and submit to the Apostle's authority, though they knew what was taught and practiced at the Apostolic fellowship. If that doesn't sound ridiculous, it should (though such people existed in the first-century for sure, but they were rebels against God/Christ). Whenever we choose a church based on what we like rather than because of its faithfulness to the Word of God and openness to be corrected by the Word of God, we have then in that case chosen our own terms of serving God, instead of God's terms of serving Him. And the scary thing is that if you don't love the truth there are plenty of convenient options for church available that will tell you what you want to hear and overlook the truth you don't want to heed, providing a false comfort and security to those who are resisting the truth (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

The true, Apostolic gospel message is that which calls us to obey God and keep His commandments in holiness. There is a bitter conflict that can be traced to the beginning of time which this call fits into. Let's understand it and prepare ourselves accordingly, that we might come out on the right side of it!

The gospel is: **"Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord², which was made of the seed of David**

think is in their best advantage according to their current circumstances.

2 Underlines in Scripture passages in this book are from me, for the sake of extra emphasis related to the point I'm seeking to get across and/or related to the general theme of this book. All of God's Word should be emphasized however, and therefore all Scripture quotations are in bold. The Scriptures in italics are those which introduce and/or summarize the point of

according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name." (Romans 1:3-5)

The Apostle Paul's summary of his ministry:
"That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified³ by the Holy Ghost. I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed" (Romans 15:16-18).

a chapter in considerable detail.

3 (i.e. made holy)



CHAPTER 1: IS MAN A LAW UNTO HIMSELF? GOD'S WORD VERSUS SATAN'S

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2:16-17)

“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” (Genesis 3:4-6)

I once heard a man present the gospel at a street meeting who started his message in a way which I had never heard before. The question which he asked his audience at the beginning could not have been more

appropriate. "Do we have the right to decide right and wrong for ourselves?" Of course the prevailing answer in the audience was "Yes." He then asked them to name some of the worst people ever. Obviously names like Hitler, Stalin, and other mass murderers came up. He then told the audience something like "Okay, if each person has a right to decide right and wrong for himself, then nobody can say that any of those people (the mass murderers) were wrong." The audience didn't know how to respond to that!

The preacher's question gets to the heart of this ageless conflict and the true gospel message. The conflict began in the Garden of Eden when God gave Adam and Eve a simple command- a command with the greatest of implications. Would they give glory to God and honor His supreme authority as the Creator and Ruler of the Universe? Would they receive what God had said and lean on that in spite of the temptation to get (what seemed to be) the benefits of taking the forbidden fruit? Or would they listen to the tempter's suggestion *who (basically) told them that they could be their own gods and know good and evil without having to listen to the Lord telling them how to live and what to do?* Would they believe God's Word which said that transgressing Him would in fact bring a deadly consequence that they could not see the possibility of, judging by their natural senses? Was what God had freely given them enough? Or did they need what He forbade them from having? We know that they made the wrong choice when it came to these questions. Hence the fall. The consequences being the connection to God in the human spirit broken (spiritual death), (eventual) physical death, mourning, sorrow, and pain introduced into a world thrown into chaos as its perfect Creator and Designer was disobeyed. A world with its original perfect order and harmony broken by the rebellion of the creatures made in God's image.

SIN'S TRUE FACE

We see in the awful consequences of the fall the true face of sin. It would be impossible for the consequences to have been anything other than these awful things. The God of the Bible is the essence of love, goodness, righteousness, etc. Sin is worse than just hurting other people (though all transgression of God's commandments does hurt someone, somehow). It is rebellion against the highest authority and the highest good, the One whose commands are for the best for all when obeyed. There is something evil about disobedience to God that words cannot express. There is something about it that inherently brings chaos and shame into the world. Disobedience to God is unspeakably evil because of the justice and excellence of His commandments, which stem from His perfectly Just and Excellent character, which is dishonored when He is disobeyed.

The God of the Bible is not a malicious dictator who gives commands to satisfy His own ego. God is jealous for His name because He would be corrupt to not be! He must punish rebellion against Himself with the severest punishment or He would be a criminal who was complicit with evil otherwise. His will (expressed by what He commands) is given in perfect wisdom and knowledge; *to obey God's Word is to do what's best for all of creation and to disobey Him is (essentially) to proclaim one's own self to be god, to follow Satan, to trouble the Universe.* It is just eternal truth that not even God Himself can change (just as the Bible says that it is impossible for God to lie) that all things should revolve around Him. When a created being who owes his existence to the God who created all things seeks to put him/herself in God's place, they are following a vain lie and calling others to that lie. This is why it is vain to worship a person or any other

created being or object; and why it is simply logical and right to worship God.

Disobedience to God does indeed hurt people as well. If man had never transgressed against God there would be no sorrow, death, pain, mourning, etc. Consider a world where no one lies, steals, has relations outside of God's boundary of marriage⁴, no one is greedy nor envious of another, all authority (government, parents, etc) is just and honest, where there was no rebellion against authority, no murder or malicious hatred, where all were sober and considerate of others' considerations, etc, etc. That would be a good world! And why is the world not that way? Because the great majority of mankind is suppressing God's truth and dishonoring His commandments! Otherwise this world would be the world described above. Though not all are equally malicious, all who walk careless of God's commandments and thereby decide right and wrong for themselves, are part of the core/root problem that corrupts and defiles the world.

God does indeed want us to discern between good and evil. He wants us to do so by seeking Him with an honest, surrendered heart to learn of Him what is good and evil in His eyes (Hebrews 5:14). Doing so is true humility, as the one who does this is essentially saying the opposite of transgressors who do what is right in their own eyes and essentially proclaim themselves to be gods—such a person is saying that God knows better than they do and that it's better to learn right and wrong from Him than to decide it for him/herself. That is only the truth! **“The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own**

4 How much heartache, pain, and trouble can be traced to the disobedience to God's commandments in this area alone?

soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor is humility.” (Proverbs 15:31-33)

The thing is that sin *often seems like* it would be good for us, even though it is not. This is seen with Eve as she was tempted by the serpent. The fruit of the tree looked pleasant, looked like it would taste good, seemed like it would give her wisdom which she thought she needed. So she took the bait. The Bible doesn't deny that sin can be pleasurable *temporarily* (Hebrews 11:25). We all have legitimate God-given needs and desires that we want fulfilled. The Bible testifies of God's wrath being against those who seek fulfillment of those needs and desires by means which He has forbidden, those who put their own needs and wants before honoring God and keeping His commandments. Such suppress the truth about God that they know inherently in order to somehow, in some way, gratify self instead of obey God and wait on Him in faith to provide fulfillment by means that are lawful in His eyes.

The inevitable reaction of man to his own rebellion against the true God is to somehow alter their concept of “God” in a way that is suitable to how they have chosen to live. **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,**

And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.” (Romans 1:18-23) This is why the concept many have of God is a god that lets them decide right and wrong for themselves; or to the same effect, a “God” who doesn't mind if they break His laws for their own gain or pleasure *now and then*. The “god” behind this mentality is Satan. The idea that we can be autonomous and do what's right in our eyes *is Satanic*. Satan didn't want God to reign over him, Satan wanted (and still wants) man to follow him in his rebellion against God's reign. Satan wants to make the world devoid of all true worship of God, and even of the very remnants of His laws and institutions. *The common idea that it is okay to do whatever you want, as long as you don't tell anyone else what is right and wrong for them, is pure Satanism; as well as the idea that we should be guided/ruled by the desires of our hearts and the seeking of our own happiness.*⁵ The commonly known quote by Satanist author Aleister Crowley “*Do as thou wilt*” as he summarized Satanism, bears witness to this fact. Satanists understand that subjection to the God of the Bible and doing one's own will are by nature opposed to each other. Of course Satanists typically allege that the God of the Bible is the “bad god” whose laws (allegedly) shackle and enslave mankind, and that Satan (allegedly) is “the true God” who wants to set men free from the restraints the “bad god' has imposed upon them.

We should know better though. It is people doing their own will instead of being subject to God's law that corrupts the world. Imagine if Hitler and Stalin had been wholly subject to God and honored His law. They would not have murdered anyone then, no matter how strong the temptation. When anyone truly wrongs another, at the

5 Which we will see more and more as we go on inevitably comes into conflict with the commandments of God.

core of it they are casting aside the law of the true God to do their own will. I'll trust somebody who denies their own will and keeps God's commandments over one who does what is right in their own eyes any day!

Many will say that to compare the average person to Hitler and Stalin is ridiculous. It is true that many people haven't had a role in a physical murder, while Hitler and Stalin ordered the killing of millions. Yet consider this: Hitler and Stalin, in their casting aside God's law to pursue their own lusts, came to believe that their murdering millions was the right thing to do! Anyone familiar with these men knows that they did not really consider themselves evil. Their own lust for power (or lust for something) deceived them. *They really thought they had good reasons to do what they did.* They could justify themselves and persuade people that they were right, and even make people who opposed them seem like evildoers themselves. We know that Hitler succeeded in doing this in German society to a great measure, as he couldn't have done what he did without the support and/or compliance of others, who put self-seeking ahead of God's commandment (i.e. did their own will) and thus cooperated with murderers. **"They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them."** (Proverbs 28:4)

*All who disobey God somehow rationalize their own sin through the bias of what they see as being in their advantage. Hitler and Stalin were careless regarding obedience to God's commandments; and they thus became what they at one time would have shuttered to become. Though not all sinners become Hitlers and Stalins, *the sin of all who reject God's authority and disobey His voice is of the same core nature as their sins.**

All who reject God's authority also do become

enslaved to sin and somehow do become what they wouldn't have chosen to be at a previous time; a time when sin's effects on them hadn't progressed as far and its deceitfulness had a lesser impact on their judgment. **"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (fit). And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge (i.e. not retaining Him in their full knowledge-not being subject to all His commandments), God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding (foolish/senseless), covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable (impossible to appease), unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."** (Romans 1:24-32)

THE AGELESS CONFLICT IS THE SUPREME ISSUE OF THE UNIVERSE

The cases of Hitler and Stalin also prove that there is a higher law than that which society deems acceptable.

If that were not the case, we could indeed never say that Nazi Germany and Communist Russia were wrong! For in both those societies mass murder of certain groups of people was indeed normal and considered acceptable. It has been rightfully said that man is foolish to think that he can turn from God and not serve Satan. The disobedient attitude towards God's Word/Law is the ultimate crime deserving of the most severe punishment. **"The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.*" (Psalm 14:1)** This verse literally means the fool has said in his heart "*no God*" (instead of "*yes God*"). You don't have to be an atheist or a professing Satanist to do this; you just have to ignore a commandment of God to go your own way like Adam and Eve did. The testimony of God's Word is that those who do so are corrupt, abominable, and incapable of doing good.⁶

Subjection to the true God on His terms is the supreme issue of the Universe. Whether we are so or not is the difference between heaven and hell; as those in heaven do God's will (Matthew 6:10), while those who go to hell do so for doing their own, and thus following Satan. There is no true biblical salvation that doesn't settle this issue in favor of genuine subjection to God's Word. It is a universal principle that nobody receives eternal life from God who doesn't take self off the throne of their life to yield control to the One who has the full, non-transferable right to it.

"So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." (Genesis 3:24)

6 Not those who repent of going their own way also, as some erroneously teach.

“And when he (Jesus) had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:34-36)



CHAPTER 2: SERVING GOD ON THE RIGHT TERMS: CAIN VERSUS ABEL

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth (angry), and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of

thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."
(Genesis 4:1-10)

It's one thing to say that you love, obey, and serve God; but it's another thing to actually do so on His terms. If not on God's terms, then it's rebellion against Him all the same. *There is such a thing as an appearance of reverence for God and an appearance of an obedient life that, when examined in comparison with what His Word requires, isn't those things at all.* We have a striking contrast between the heart of an obedient worshipper versus that of a rebellious, counterfeit worshipper in the account of Abel and Cain. We need to examine our own hearts with the lessons in this story and with all the lessons in the Word of God so that we are not self-deceived that we are genuine worshippers, if in fact we aren't. The warning God's Word gives about the peril of the last days is regarding a form (appearance) of godliness (Christianity) that seems right, but in reality doesn't emphasize the need and/or give the power to overcome a disobedient, sinful life.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent (without self-control), fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

It is this counterfeit Christianity that the way of Cain aligns with perfectly. The way of Abel falls in line with the genuine and isn't compatible with the way of Cain. The genuine Christianity is that which leads all those with it to **"live godly in Christ Jesus"** (see (2 Timothy 3:12). These **"shall suffer persecution."** (2

Timothy 3:12) Their persecutors may at times be those who are irreligious altogether; but the chief offenders are the Cains. Those whose lives have a false appearance of godliness, which are exposed and discerned for what they are by the Abels.

TWO OFFERINGS/TWO WORSHIPS CONTRASTED

What distinguished Cain from Abel? They both brought offerings to the Lord. **“And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wrath, and his countenance fell.”** (Genesis 4:4b-5) Many who teach on this passage focus on only one point and miss other extremely important ones. They'll point that Abel brought an offering that involved blood and Cain didn't. Obviously the blood sacrifices that God instituted in the OT are pictures of Christ's sacrifice, His pouring out His soul unto God to redeem sinners, and it is true that it is the law and wisdom of God that **“without shedding of blood there is no remission.”** (Hebrews 9:22b) I believe there is merit to the point that Abel was right to bring a blood sacrifice and Cain was wrong not to. Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain was a farmer. Perhaps Cain disobeyed an instruction to trade with Abel so that he'd have a sheep to offer as a blood sacrifice too.

There are big issues though here that go beyond just *what* was offered, but regard *the quality of the offering and the quality of the life one making the offering*. Notice how Abel's offering was described: **“And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering.”** (Genesis 4:4) Abel offered to God the best of what he had and God received both him *and* the offering which he made. On the other hand we don't see the same description of Cain's offering when we read carefully.

“And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.” (Genesis 4:3) Cain did not give of the first (the best) of the fruit (food) of the ground. Notice then that God rejected not only Cain's offering, but Cain himself. **“But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.” (Genesis 4:5a)**

It is certain that there was something about that which God required regarding an offering's quality that Abel was willing to suffer loss for himself in order to give; but Cain on the other hand was not. Abel yielded his claim to the best of what he had to the Lord in faith that God had a right to it and would honor Abel in return. Cain on the other hand was stubborn and unbelieving. *Abel served God on God's terms; Cain tried to serve God on Cain's terms.* And when the Lord rejected Cain's offering to Him, Cain couldn't take it. **“But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.” (Genesis 4:5-7)**

There was something sinful about Cain's attitude towards the Lord and what He asked of him. God told him that he had to rule over this. When God told Cain that he would be accepted if he did well, it's clear that Abel, in being accepted, did indeed do well and did indeed rule over sin. As much as “Cainish” ministers deny the possibility of us doing well and overcoming sin in submission to God, there are multiple scriptures that clearly say otherwise. The passage which we looked at in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 shows that the peril of the last days is false Christianity which doesn't insist that we overcome sin, and often denies that we even can. But Jesus' final

message to Christian churches in the Book of Revelation called all to overcome as a condition of salvation (see Revelation chapters 2-3). So that there is no mistake about that truth, we are told at the very end of the Bible.

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:7-8)

“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” (Revelation 22:14-15)

Abel was a man who believed God was worthy of the best he had and of all that He should require him. Cain on the other hand (in his pride) put a limit on how far he would go to honor the Lord. He did offer *something*, but he would only offer *so much*. Abel recognized God's right to all he had, but when Cain was pushed to a certain point he couldn't take it- and showed his lawless nature in full force!

“And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew (*killed*) him.” (Genesis 4:8)

It was the heart of unconditional obedience that made Abel's works righteous and acceptable to God. It was the conditions which Cain put on how he would serve the Lord which made him wicked and unacceptable to

God. Since he wouldn't let go of his conditions nor admit that he had been in the wrong, he eventually killed Abel, whose testimony and counsel were a rebuke to his wicked attitude; the very reason that the Jewish leaders had Christ crucified, whom Cain and Abel are a striking foreshadow of. These truths are supported by the New Testament's commentary on them.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report... By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh... But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is⁷, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Hebrews 11:1-2, 4, 6)

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.” (1 John 3:10-13)

LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR CAN'T BE SEPARATED FROM UNCONDITIONAL OBEDIENCE TO GOD

Though many now would call Abel the “unloving, intolerant one who imposed his standards on his poor

7 Believing that He is God implies recognizing His Supreme authority; and therefore His right to whatever obedience that He commands.

brother and drove him over the edge”, the Bible says that Abel was the righteous one whose works were righteous; and that Cain was the unloving, wicked one whose works were evil. True love for God is obedient to His commandments. It regards God's commandments in everything and doesn't rationalize away obedience to Him. Biblical love for God is that which willingly chooses to obey Him, persuaded that He is faithful to those who commit their way unto Him (see Psalm 37:1-11). The following New Testament passages show the inseparable connection between love for God and unconditional obedience to Him (which we will see eventually is inseparable from true faith as well).

**“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (money and material possessions).”
(Matthew 6:24)**

“And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning (the teaching of Christ), ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine (teaching) of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.” (2 John 6-9)

In spite of the counterfeit Christianity that offers salvation in Christ without calling men and women to forsake the throne of their lives and to depart from all iniquity (2 Timothy 2:19) that they might keep Christ's words, the Apostolic gospel indeed calls us to this.

Christ's words, when preached straightforward without a pathetic excuse of how "they don't really apply to us" cut at the pride of our hearts and strike a blow to the things people glory over in this world. They call us to walk in God's ways without compromise in the midst of a world that is at enmity with God's truth and which doesn't receive kindly those "Abels" who are a bitter reminder to it of the truth which it has suppressed. A world where genuinely receiving Christ's teaching without picking and choosing what we can stand and what we can't (like "Cains" do) puts our financial security/wealth, social status, acceptance by family and friends, and even our reputation as "kind, nice people" on the line.⁸

Jesus did not make it easy to be saved and spoke of the unconditional surrender that is necessary to be His follower (which as we'll see better throughout this book, "follower" equals "true believer"). Such is necessary to receive all His words as our true Master and to be on the right side of this ageless conflict.

"And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate⁹ not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not

8 Remember that Jesus talked about the blessedness of His disciples being persecuted for righteousness' sake and being insulted and falsely accused for His name's sake- implying that such would happen- Matthew 5:10-12.

9 Obviously Jesus meant "hate" here in comparison to one's loyalty to Him. There can't be any thing or person, even things that are legitimate in and of themselves, which we esteem more than obeying God. Any such thing or person is an idol that we must repent of serving.

down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:25-33)

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh (body), and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-17)

THE HEART OF CAIN

Some other things to note about those who are like Cain are: Cains considered themselves entitled to live their own life. They like religious duties which they can do which don't seriously threaten their own convenience and way of life. They say (at heart) "That's over for now. I can go back to my own life."

Cains use things like church attendance, Bible study, and prayer as ends rather than means. They reason that if they do one or more of these things that God doesn't ask anymore of them. They reason "Why can't I do (insert sinful deed which God forbids)?" or "Why do I have to (insert righteous act that God requires)? I already went to church/prayed/read the Bible, etc." They reason that if they do x amount "for God" or give so much "for

God" that they are then entitled to areas of their life "for themselves" which God doesn't have a right to touch. The idea that God "only asks one hour per week" of us for church is something we hear growing up, but it's a deadly lie! Cains say at heart (they'd probably never say it out loud) "God, I gave you an offering. Now get off my back! I'll make another offering again someday."

Cains often reason that if they do their duty on Sunday that they have a right to hang out with the devil's crowd on Friday night and Saturday. The idea that they can't have *any* pleasure in sin and that they'd need to break off *all* relationships that involve sinning or condoning sin (which is sin too- Romans 1:32, Proverbs 28:4), is troublesome and offensive to them.

Cains make noble sounding promises to God which, when examined, *imply that they are in control of their own life and that by keeping their promise they'll be doing God a favor.* They ask God to bless them with health and wealth, and vow to give so much to what they consider a good cause. The implication of such vows is that "I get to keep the rest." The fact that God has a right to all their time and money offends them. God has a right to all we have- our inner being and its affections, our lips and what they speak, our bodies and what they are used for, etc. It is evil to even imply that we have the right to somehow bargain/negotiate His right away.

We must be willing to obey God's commandments all the way, no matter the inconvenience to our life and/or hindrance to own goals and plans that should be risked for doing so. Cains though, like the Rich Young Ruler,¹⁰ refuse to part with that which idolatrously rivals Christ's reign in their heart. They put limits on how far they will

10 See Luke 18:18-30

go in order to love their neighbor as themselves, unlike the Good Samaritan who went to the greatest length within his power that he might do so in accordance with the need of the stranger he encountered.¹¹ **“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27)** True obedience to God seeks from the heart to aid those in real affliction, whether in the soul or body *and* keeps itself unspotted from the world. The neglect of either of these makes one's religion impure and defiled before God.

THE HEART OF ABEL

The time when those making promises to God are not Cains is when the promise is not limited by self-imposed conditions. There must be the heart that yields control of one's life to the Lord with the willingness to do whatever His Word says. Some may not use those words exactly, but that has to genuinely be the intention of one's heart. Such an intention, followed through on, is the characteristic of Abel. Cains will stop short of this surrender in their hearts, no matter how noble and/or right their words sound.

The spirit of Abel, as a result of genuinely surrendering to the Lord and intending to do whatever His Word says, therefore seeks God with resolution, perseverance, and honesty to better find out how God wills to be obeyed and served. Abels thus open their eyes and ears to God's Word and follow through by responding to what they find in obedient action. They seek to serve God based on His commandments and instructions, not their own guesses as to what they think He should find acceptable. Jesus' words to Mary and Martha in Luke's

11 See Luke 10:25-37

gospel make the spirit of Abel a pre-requisite to have **“that one thing (that) is needful.”**

“Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42) Those who truly hear Christ's word *and* receive it in faith will do what they have heard, without withholding any obedience that the Word calls for. That is the obedience that comes from faith which characterizes the heart and life of Abel. Such obedience will be examined on more and more as this ageless conflict unfolds for us in Scripture so that we can get a clearer understanding on it.

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.” (Jesus in Luke 6:46-49)

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness

the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:21-27)



CHAPTER 3: WORSHIPPING THE RIGHT GOD: MOSES VERSUS THE IDOLATERS

“And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” (Exodus 20:1-6)

There is only one true God. When the Lord commanded **“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”** He was forbidding man to worship any so-called god besides the true God who created all things, and who revealed Himself to Israel. Man's rebellion against God involves his esteem of exalting created things and the gratification of his own senses above his Maker and His

laws. We saw in chapter one how the inevitable reaction of man to his own rebellion against God is to somehow alter his concept of "God" in a way that is suitable to how he has chosen to live, to *what he wants* "God" to be, a "God" he's comfortable with, a "God" that suits him. Some people and cultures choose, like the Israelites in the wilderness did, to "represent" their god(s) by statues and images; others simply misrepresent Him by a concept in their mind, as is more common today. Regardless of how such a misrepresentation is expressed, it is idolatry all the same.

This idolatry can even be in those who say that they believe in the God of the Bible. How? *Simply by overlooking/ignoring passages in the Bible that bother you and/or not honestly dealing with the plain truth in certain passages that makes you uncomfortable; and solely focusing on passages and select phrases, which when taken alone and/or not considered carefully, don't really bother you.* The unclean lives of multitudes of professing Christians marred with immorality, careless ease, and fleshly indulgence testify that idolatry has touched Christendom in nations that on the surface appear to have a large "Christian" population. How do I know? *If such wasn't the case, there would be an intense sobriety and godly fear throughout churches and professing Christians would be living like God/Christ commanded them to!* It's obvious to any honest person though that such is the exception rather than the rule, at least in North America. But when such a thing is brought up among professing Christians, then the excuses start coming! And the excuses professing Christians make for their unholy lives all are rooted in a concept of "God" that does not line up with how He has revealed Himself regarding His character and His expectations of man in Scripture.

LESSONS FROM ISRAEL'S GOLDEN CALF

We see many lessons and warnings about idolatry in the account of the Israelites and Moses' brother Aaron making the Golden Calf, while Moses was communing with the Lord on Mount Sinai.

“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot (know) not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the Lord. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the Lord

his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people. And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it...And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made." (Exodus 32:1-20, 35)

I don't believe that the Israelites believed that the calf they made was actually God Himself. They considered the calf as a representation, an aid to worship, to remember God with- like all idolaters who make graven images to represent God, consider their images to be.

Idolaters generally don't call their idols "idols" just like most sinners give a more generous label to their sins than the Word of God gives. This is probably true of idolatry more than most other sins, as it is especially cherished of mankind. The Israelites made the Golden Calf out of impatience- they didn't want to have to wait for Moses to come down from the mountain to lead them and instruct them. They wanted to get things moving; they didn't want to have to wait. Waiting is uncomfortable. Essentially they wanted to live and move on their own terms in disregard of the true God, while convincing themselves that they weren't really disregarding Him. The calf was their self-deceived method of being led by their own evil hearts and yet claiming that "God" was with them and leading them. They simply substituted a "God" they were comfortable with in place of the jealous, awesome God who gave them the Ten Commandments and promised vengeance on those who broke them.

How could they do this after seeing the true God's power in delivering them from Egypt so recently? And even more recently seeing His consuming fire on Mount Sinai and hearing Him give the Ten Commandments with His own voice, even forbidding the very thing they were now doing?¹² It is hard to believe! But even a few weeks¹³ of agonizing waiting can make people desperate. And when we're desperate, *unless we're extremely careful and honest*, we'll start to believe and act upon what our hearts desperately want, despite all the evidence we've been given to the contrary. We know from the New Testament commentary by the disciple Stephen that the people

12 See Exodus chapters 19-20

13 Which by reading Exodus closely it's likely that's the general time frame they had been waiting for Moses for. Even a few days in an uncertain looking, uncomfortable situation, can lead to such desperation.

wanted to go back to (what they foolishly imagined in their desperation was) a more comfortable, stable life in Egypt.¹⁴

This is indeed what happened. The Israelites wanted God to be a certain way and wanted to regard Him as being with them unconditionally, just like people today and throughout history have. Therefore they misrepresented Him horribly so they could feel okay about taking the course they had set their own hearts on, feel okay about allowing themselves to be at carnal ease and allowing themselves to satisfy their carnal passions. Oh, they still called the idol “the Lord” and offered sacrifices like the true God had required as our passage shows. However, the difference between the true God and the character of their “God” of convenience afterwards showed itself, when **“the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.”** Bible commentators are agreed that this wasn't innocent play referred to, but a euphemism¹⁵ for sexual immorality. Idolatry and immorality are closely connected. Receiving the fear of the true God will cause one to flee from immorality; and even to flee from the temptation of it, when at all possible.¹⁶ It is no wonder that Moses, a man who revered the true God's honor, couldn't stand to see His worship corrupted and His Holy character badly misrepresented.

We don't have the right to make God according to

14 See Acts 7:39-41- we also see directly from the account of the Israelites in the wilderness by Numbers 14:3-4 that the rebellious Israelites were indeed conspiring to return to Egypt (as hard as it is to comprehend why- sin can take away the ability to think logically).

15 A modest way of expressing an immodest truth.

16 As we see with Joseph in Genesis 39:7-10 and the many warnings throughout the Bible, such as 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, Ephesians 5:5-7, Hebrews 13:4, etc.

our own understanding. And yet that's the common "politically correct" assumption, not only in secular society, but even in many churches! We also don't have the right to mix the worship of the true God revealed in Scripture with the ways those that serve other gods worship their gods. Hear how God warned Israel later, shortly before they would actually enter into the Promise Land of Canaan, which had been polluted by the Canaanite idolaters.

"When the Lord thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God: for every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." (Deuteronomy 12:29-32)

In the New Testament we are told along the same lines. **"What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" (1 Corinthians 10:19-22)**

THE TRUE JESUS

The true God has revealed Himself to us perfectly in His Son Jesus Christ. **“No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:18)** Man-made versions of “Jesus” (which the versions of “Jesus” that you see in the media qualify as), could easily be no different than the Golden Calf. Though they might be portrayed as speaking some of the same words that He spoke and doing some of the things recorded of Him in the New Testament, they cannot possibly represent Him rightly. **“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)** No artist or actor can ever re-create that glory- not even close! We need to come to the Bible and let the Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible and whose power Jesus lived by, teach us who Jesus is- as we need the Holy Spirit to teach us all of Scripture.

See how those who actually did see and hear Jesus reacted to His preaching. **“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” (Matthew 7:28-29)** I question whether anyone ever gets that impression from man-made versions of Jesus. And that makes sense, because Satan doesn't care that much if we know that Jesus did miracles and was kind to children *provided* that we are left in the dark about His royal authority. His role as Lord/King of mankind is the ultimate issue of the Universe. That point has been made and will continue to be because it is what the Bible emphasizes constantly. The true gospel is the **“gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:15, Acts 28:31, etc)** and though Jesus died to atone for and forgive our sins, that will save no one who doesn't genuinely submit to God's authority through Him as King.

And that is no easy thing, because His words (royal decrees) are contrary to our natural wants, and being in His kingdom means having a value system contrary to the world's that often requires shunning the very things humans glory in and esteem. We will deal with that truth a lot more as we go on. For now, we will just say that art and media representations of Jesus can be idols that could very well affect those who heed/regard them to not fear God, just as the Israelites turned from His fear when they adopted a more tolerable version of "God" to them. We are warned about false "Jesus"es multiple times in the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians: **"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him."** (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)

Jesus Himself warned: **"Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets¹⁷, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."**(Matthew 24:23-27)

17 This obviously refers to false servants of Christ too- but since these misrepresent the true Jesus, the warning about them is still appropriate here.

A false Jesus doesn't have to be an artistic representation or a person claiming to be Jesus,¹⁸ it could be any concept of Him that is contrary to how He is revealed and what He has spoken in the Bible. A common misrepresentation of "Jesus" is one that only has nice, positive things to say who doesn't expose and rebuke sin. As simply reading the gospels demonstrates, and as we'll see more as we go on, that is not the true Jesus! False representations of Jesus are idols just like the Golden Calf.

No one fully comprehends the heights and depths of God's vast nature- but we can know what we need to know about who He is and what He requires of us by how He has revealed Himself in His Word. The point is that we must seek that revelation and thereby have our understanding of God molded. We don't have the right to think of "God" *as we would have Him to be*. It is wrong to fashion our concept of Him according to our own corrupt understanding which inevitably degrades the glory of the true God. It is wrong to harbor concepts of Him not based on His revelation of Himself in His Word. We have to make a choice to be honest about everything God has said about Himself in the Bible and not alter that to suit ourselves, no matter how uncomfortable doing so makes us. We have to make a choice not to entertain in our minds a chosen concept of "God" that is pleasant and/or suitable to the desires of our own hearts. **"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered."** (Proverbs 28:26)

18 Though it is those things too. There's also a sense in which a false Christian is a false Christ, because of their misrepresentation of Christ's name. This is especially true of a preacher that is such, and even more so if it is a false Christian preacher showing great signs and wonders, like Jesus warned about specifically in Matthew 24:23-27.

Any concept(s) one has of God that prevents them/turns them from being under the true Jesus' righteous authority and reign is an idolatrous substitute for the true God that robs of eternal life; we are thus warned to keep ourselves from idols. **“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”** (1 John 5:20-21)

MOSES' INTERCESSION

We see also in Exodus 32:9-14 how Moses interceded for the people when God threatened to destroy them. The Lord spared (most of) them therefore for the time being. It is a picture of Christ's intercession for those who rejected Him and crucified Him. Nevertheless, most of the Israelites in the wilderness yet remained disobedient to the Lord and never entered into the Promise Land, as we learn from the book of Numbers. Only the younger generation who were children at the time of this incident entered, along with a few others who were consistently obedient to God's voice. Christ died for sinners and on the cross made intercession for them. This was not for an unconditional forgiveness (that would be criminal and blasphemous!), but a plea that they might have more time to yet repent and obey the true God (i.e. get on the right side of the ageless conflict). The patience of God is limited though, and wrath is stored up for those who remain unrepentant (Romans 2:4-5). We must therefore really fear the true God and His judgment. That is what we'll look at more in the next chapter.



CHAPTER 4: SHOULD WE REALLY FEAR GOD? NOAH VERSUS THE REST OF THE WORLD

The aspect of God's character which people are most likely to idolatrously cast off and/or twist is the fear of God. Over and over in the Bible the fear of God is commended and commanded of us. And yet, there are few churches, even among those that profess to be Bible-believing, where the fear of God is preached and not watered-down. And even where the concept is given lip-service, many times it is actually a fear of man that is being communicated in reality. The fear of God can be wrongly used by manipulative leaders to make insecure people afraid to question them or to expose wrong-doing at the church by making people believe that God will be angry with them if they merely ask for simple, honest accountability from the leaders. That is truly a counterfeit fear of God that is really a fear of man. That is not what we're talking about here. We are talking about the genuine fear of God that, when given heed to, will make a person honest and pure even when no person is watching them, and which will even cleanse the very thoughts and

intentions of the heart (2 Corinthians 7:1).

When the Bible talks about the fear of God it means “the fear of God” (yes, really). A word that is often used in the New Testament to refer to the fear of God, is in the original Greek the word *phobeo* (think of the word “phobia”)- an intense dread of displeasing and offending God. Without this fear at the foundation of one's life it is impossible to shun sin's temptations and to live worthy of God's kingdom.¹⁹ We are told directly **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)** It's plain then that to receive the true knowledge of God (the Holy One) necessarily means receiving the fear of Him. Jesus Himself *commanded us* **“And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.” (Luke 12:4-5)** The Greek word for fear here is indeed “*phobeo*.”

Yes, Jesus spoke of the need to fear God in relation to God's power to cast our entire beings into hell. Often when preachers make an attempt to explain the fear of God *they explain it away* by saying something like “fear really means reverence or respect.” But from the words of Jesus Himself it means more than that. In one New Testament passage reverence/respect and godly fear are even distinguished from the other. **“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:28-29)**

¹⁹ And we do need to live worthy of God's kingdom to enter His kingdom; a truth we will deal with more throughout this book, and will focus on in chapter 12.

LESSONS FROM NOAH AND THE FLOOD

Any who doubt whether God should really be feared only need to look at the drastic, dreadful things He did in Scripture to make an example of those who turned from Him and did wickedly. There are many, many such examples of God doing so towards individuals, families, cities, and nations. There are also the terrors of the end-time and of the Day of Judgment that we are warned about in the Book of Revelation. There has even been a time already when the Lord killed every single person on earth except eight people. If your God hasn't, your god is not the God of the Bible.

We have the story of Noah and the flood in Genesis chapters 6-8. We see there the earth corrupt and full of violence (Genesis 6:11). We see God's grief at what His originally good creation had become. We see how God spared righteous Noah and his household as the only household where the pure worship of God had not been dishonored and defiled. Noah prepared an ark at God's direction and God sent him and his household into it- and then destroyed everyone else. That is good to remember if we should think that we can indulge in a little sin and not take keeping God's commandments so seriously.

No doubt Noah warned others of the coming judgment. In 2 Peter 2:5 we are told that he was “**a preacher of righteousness**”; the rest of mankind in that very verse is called “**the world of the ungodly.**” They didn't consider themselves ungodly, except maybe as a joke. They likely told Noah not to take life so seriously. Maybe they even told Him “Don't be so uptight. God is love,” as an excuse to ease their guilty consciences and continue in their careless lives. They likely mocked and said things like “If God destroys me, he'll have to destroy

virtually everyone else too." Tragically ironic. It must have been a horrible scene.

The Bible notes the time during the flood when the mountains were covered (Genesis 7:20). People likely assumed that if somehow Noah was right and there was a flood, they'd just go live up in the mountains. But they underestimated the Lord's power. They had never seen it unleashed so until it was too late for them. The Bible says that the unrepentant treasure up wrath for themselves on judgment day (Romans 2:5). Nobody is getting away with anything. When God's wrath fully comes, it is then too late to repent and get right with Him. We have warnings, examples, instruction, and promises that the people in Noah's time never had. If they were expected to fear God (as they justly were expected to, or else God wouldn't have punished them) and turn from their careless, evil ways; how much more are we?

What distinguished Noah from the rest of the world was that He feared God; whereas they didn't. We have reason to say that he feared God even before the Lord told him of the flood; and Noah then continued to fear God and believed that God would bring the flood as He said He would. He therefore built the ark at God's instruction while the rest of the world ignored the warning of the coming judgment, and therefore missed the salvation that was provided for those who would receive the fear of the Lord. We see by the New Testament commentary in the Book of Hebrews that the world was condemned for not fearing God like Noah. True faith believes God's warnings as well as His promises. His genuine salvation can never really be laid hold of when His warnings are disregarded.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen... By faith Noah, being

warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." (Hebrews 11:1, 7)

Jesus compared His second coming and our need to be prepared for it with the flood in Noah's time and the days leading up to it. He noted the carelessness of the people in being consumed with the pleasures of life as an example and warning to us. In their excessive care about temporary things, they neglected to turn to the Lord with their whole hearts in order to be ready for the judgment like Noah was.

"But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day

when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 24:37-51)

BIBLICAL TRUTHS ABOUT THE FEAR OF GOD

- Those who do evil in God's sight provoke Him to anger and hot displeasure (Deuteronomy 9:18-20). Anyone who says that truth is only for rebellious Israel and not for us should remember that we are told in the New Testament that all God's dealings with Israel are examples to us in New Testament times, as all examples from the Old Testament are written for our admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11).
- God has a controversy with those who don't walk in His ways (Hosea 4:1, Micah 6:2).
- God condemned Sodom and Gomorra with an overthrow, making them an example for those that after should live ungodly (2 Peter 2:6).
- God is angry with the wicked every day who work iniquity; He has prepared His judgment for them if they turn not (Psalm 7:11-14).
- God will punish workers of iniquity come judgment day (Isaiah 26:21, Luke 13:27, 2 Peter 2:9, etc).
- He calls Himself “**a great God, a mighty, and a terrible**” (see Deuteronomy 10:17).
- God's anger/wrath are as great as He is (Psalm 90:11).
- He casts people away for not hearkening to Him (Hosea 9:17).
- Jesus said that it's better to lose an eye, hand, or foot that causes us to sin rather than to be cast into the fire that shall never be quenched

(see Mark 9:43-48- obviously implying that if we continue to sin we'll go into the fire that shall never be quenched. Though cutting off a body part won't deal with the root of sin in the heart, the point is obviously that we must be extreme in forsaking sin at the heart so that we stop committing it- see Matthew 23:25-26).

- In Malachi 1:6 God equates honoring Him with fearing Him
- In Malachi 1:6 He rebukes Israel's priests for not fearing Him.
- In Jeremiah 2:19 He tells the people of Judah that it is an evil thing and bitter that they've forsaken the Lord and that His fear is not in them (thus connecting not fearing God with forsaking Him).
- In Revelation 15:4 glorified saints marvel that anyone would not fear the Lord.
- In having the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence and a place of refuge (Proverbs 14:26); in the true fear of the Lord is life, satisfaction, and protection (Proverbs 19:23).
- The passages where we're told "fear not" in the Bible aren't saying we shouldn't fear God; they are saying that we should fear nothing else if we indeed do fear God (Isaiah 8:12-13, Luke 12:4-9).
- Those who believe that God is out to get them and believe He will just randomly punish them don't have the true fear of God. That is an unreasonable fear which is a deception and a distraction from the reasonable fear we should have of God- which must be rooted in His treating everyone appropriately based on our response to the light of His truth, believing that His character is perfectly just and that He'd never do anything

but that which is right, as His character in Scripture bears witness to (Genesis 18:25).

- The true fear of God is not only a fear of punishment. According to James 2:19 even the devils fear that. However in their pride they don't think the punishment for disobedience to Him reasonable nor will they turn from their disobedient rebellion to obey God. The true fear of the Lord does both (Psalm 19:9, Ecclesiastes 12:13, Proverbs 3:7, Proverbs 8:13, Proverbs 16:6, etc).
- Finding mercy of God is conditioned on keeping His covenant- which always involves fearing Him and keeping His commandments (Psalm 103:11, 17-18).
- There is no contradiction between our need to love God and our need to fear God. At least once God commands both *in the very same Bible verse*. **“And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).**

The true fear of God is rooted in His coming judgment of the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30-31). The Lord is full of justice and has neither partiality (favoritism) nor random malice towards anybody. God will give every single person exactly what they deserve in response to His truth (Job 37:23-24, Jeremiah 17:10, Romans 2:6, 11, Colossians 3:23-25, etc). Therefore if we turn to Christ with our whole hearts, depart from iniquity and do what's right in His eyes He will have mercy on us and save us through Christ's death

for our sins and His resurrection. If we persist to walk in our own way and take no heed to walk in His commandments He will condemn us. As was said in chapter 1, God would be complicit with evil and therefore a criminal against His own righteous government if He didn't punish those who are disobedient to Him.

THE LORD'S DESCRIPTION OF HIS OWN CHARACTER

We have in the Book of Exodus God describing His own character to Moses. We see there His goodness and His severity put side by side, just as we are warned in the New Testament to **"Behold the goodness and severity of God."** (Romans 11:22a)

"And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him (Moses) there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.²⁰ And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped." (Exodus 34:5-8)

We see in the Book of Jonah how God warned the Ninevites of coming judgment (Jonah 3:4) and how He delighted to have mercy on them when they believed Him,

²⁰ God made it clear in Ezekiel chapter 18 that everyone is responsible for their own sin and that no one is punished for another's sin. This verse is referring to people who turn from God often being enslaved by the sins of previous generations in their families- which those who turn to Him instead will be delivered from.

repented and turned from their evil way (Jonah 3:4-10). In God's dealings with the Ninevites, the prophet Jonah, and the men whom Jonah was in the ship with before he was thrown overboard, we see in these God constantly dealing with people and influencing them to make the right choice to obey and serve Him- *yet He never made that choice for anyone*. He respects us enough to let us go our own way and have the bitter consequences thereof if we neglect the opportunity He gives us to side with the truth.

God therefore takes no pleasure in condemning anyone and sending them to hell. Groups like the notorious Westboro Church terribly misrepresent God in their rejoicing of calamity upon people. Their spirit is completely wrong. **"For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."** (Ezekiel 18:32) We only need to see Jesus weeping over Jerusalem when it was rejecting Him to see God's own intense grief when people reject Him and bring His judgment upon themselves (see Matthew 23:37-39 with Luke 19:41-44).

We are told in the Bible that it's His will that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4-6, Acts 26:29). However it's not His will to save anyone who won't repent and obey the truth (Matthew 12:41-42, Luke 13:1-9, Romans 2:4-16, etc). *Therefore it's His will that all choose to repent and serve Him on the terms He has revealed Himself in Scripture through Jesus Christ- and it's His delight when someone does*. Christ endured untold labor and agony to redeem us and win us to God. One need look no further than Christ's life, and what He suffered on the cross, to see God's kind heart towards mankind. Therefore we have the multiple calls to repent and turn to the true God by believing on His Son Jesus Christ the Lord. This is a choice of the will which God will not force us to make. This is the ageless conflict

calling us to take sides, with no decisive choice for the right side equalling a choice to be on the wrong side. Truly making the right choice here cannot be separated from receiving the genuine fear of the Lord; the call of the gospel of Christ can never be separated from the call to genuinely fear the true God.

“Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Joshua 24:14-15a)

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” (Acts 2:38-40)

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” (Revelation 14:6-7)



CHAPTER 5: WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE?: THE INHABITANTS OF SODOM VERSUS ALL COMMON SENSE AND DECENCY

“And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door.” (Genesis 19:9)

The words above were spoken to the famous biblical patriarch Abraham's nephew Lot by the inhabitants of Sodom. Lot had taken in two guests, who were actually angels in the form of men. The perverted men of Sodom wanted to violate these two men who had lodged in Lot's house for the night. The words above were spoken to Lot by the men of Sodom after Lot had reproved them for their wickedness and in his terrified state had foolishly offered the Sodomites his daughters instead. They essentially told him *“Stand back and stop judging us.”* That sounds familiar. That is the cry of the homosexual community today. Beyond that, it is the cry of a world

that wants to abandon all common sense and decency in order to cast aside all reproof and reminders of its rebellion against God and His laws.

It's impossible to prove anything to those who purposely close their eyes and shut their ears. That's one reason why it's not wise to reason a lot with someone after it's obvious that they are unreasonable. Here is the truth though about "the judging issue" so those who will listen aren't deceived by the twisted reason over this topic that is becoming more and more prevalent.

THE NEED TO MAKE RIGHT JUDGMENTS

EVERYONE does make judgments about right and wrong. Nobody who is honest can say otherwise. Just agreeing or disagreeing with the statement "EVERYONE does make judgments about right and wrong" *requires a judgment*. It is a statement that is logically unreasonable to disagree with. One's own disagreement with it proves its validity. To be consistent a person who preaches "judge not" could never come to a definite conclusion about this statement or any statement. Those who applaud non-judgmental people should applaud drunks- *for they are the least judgmental people*- as well as some of the most dangerous! Society (rightfully) considers drunk driving a criminal act, which is so, to a large extent, because of a drunk's inability to make right judgments. The obvious conclusion that we learn from drunks *is that those who don't make the right judgments inevitably make the wrong ones*. Only those in a vegetable state or those who have an extremely low IQ are exceptions. But we live in a world where it's getting harder to even say that $1+1=2$.

The fact is that we all have moral standards that we expect others to follow. The thing is that people

generally excuse their own sins while condemning similar things in others. What we expect of others we should insist on in ourselves! This is what Jesus warned about in His (commonly misused) words in Matthew chapter 7: **“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”** (Matthew 7:1-5- the same truth is expressed in Romans 2:1-5).

Jesus wasn't saying don't judge at all. The clear lesson is that we shouldn't be harder on others than we are on ourselves. In the Sermon on the Mount where those words are spoken, Jesus gave moral truth derived from the law of God with authority, words which our very salvation is dependent on whether we obey and do or not (Matthew 7:21-29).

It's no wonder that Jesus, in preaching the righteous requirements of God's law, would give a warning therein against the human tendency to use truth to criticize others, while not judging and dealing with one's own sins first. Nevertheless, He spoke of how those who remove the beam (log) from their own eye, will see clearly enough to remove the speck from their brother's. But now a person who confronts another about their sin is called a hypocrite whether they've removed the beam from their own eye or not. Ironically, people who are quick to call others who reprove them hypocrites, are influenced by the very attitude that Jesus warned against here- being quick to notice another's sin (the reprover's alleged sin), while refusing to examine one's own self

thoroughly and honestly. We *should want* others to warn us if we are living in sin (and thus bringing the wrath of God upon ourselves).²¹ And if we really aren't, somebody falsely believing we are sinning shouldn't bother us that much (because in that case we'd be living to please God, and therefore regarding the opinions of all people about us as insignificant anyways- John 5:44, Romans 2:29, Galatians 1:10, etc). And if someone tells us we are sinning and need to repent, it just might be that they really care about us, even if they are erring in their judgment. Therefore those who are really defensive about being told they're sinning and/or are quick to accuse others of "judging" (in a blameworthy sense), have no good reason to be.

Later in Matthew chapter 7 Jesus would warn about false prophets and show how we should recognize them (Matthew 7:13-20). Of course this requires judgment. Jesus would even rebuke the multitudes for not judging rightly on another occasion. **"Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" (Luke 12:56-57)** It's interesting that the ones Jesus called hypocrites here are the ones who were not judging what is right. Our society sometimes paints those as the good guys!

Tragically, multitudes in churches, contrary to Jesus' words, are afraid to call one a false prophet whose life and/or message is contrary to the Word of God. Pathetic church-goers sit and tolerate wickedness and blatant error in their fellowships saying "*Oh, this doesn't seem right, but I don't want to judge.*" Their silence and lack of action towards wickedness and deception equals their consent to it, even if they wish things were different.

21 See Leviticus 19:17

Sadly many Christian homes are destroyed as parents sit in churches week after week where the Bible is watered-down, explained away, where God's standards aren't held up, and where sin is tolerated and not reproved. Rather than confronting the leaders and insisting on things changing or them leaving, they come back again and again, while any holy walk with the Lord they may have had before declines, and their children grow up ignorant of God's ways and influenced by the church's ungodly youth.

It's not hard to see that the "judge not" mentality is an attack on true Christianity and an assault on common sense and decency in society. It paves the way for every type of vice and error to infiltrate any place where it is accepted. When the Bible is taken without compromise it is filled with things that many will label as judgmental-doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness describe the content of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16). When God's Word is genuinely preached in a church meeting *people will feel judged* (1 Corinthians 14:23-25)- judged *properly* by the Word of God searching and discerning the heart (Hebrews 4:12); not *improperly* by the unmerciful expressions of others (more on this shortly). Sadly though, the latter is probably a lot more common than the former.

HYPOCRISY'S NOT LIMITED TO THE CHURCH

The hypocrisy of the rest of the world in this area is easy to see by how people find fault (granted, often legitimately) with professing Christian preachers. Not hypocrisy for judging when something is really wrong, but hypocrisy in not judging and condemning the same wrongdoing in themselves. When a televangelist gets caught in a scandal the world yells "hypocrite, hypocrite." If the person's guilty as charged then they're a hypocrite

indeed. Consider though: How do people even define scandal? When television preacher Jimmy Swaggart was caught cheating on his wife with a prostitute, how could he even be a hypocrite unless the ones yelling "hypocrite" consent that adultery is absolutely wrong? The fact that one *knows that* proves that they *really* know adultery is wrong. So if you know that an adulterous preacher is evil, what does that make you if there is adultery in your life? If you know a preacher who tells a lie, even just to save himself a few bucks is absolutely wrong (as he is), what does that make you if you lie to help yourself in even a little matter?

We naturally know/generally have an idea of how a Christian *ought to be* (for true Christianity aligns with the law of God naturally written on the hearts of all people). *And the fact that we know that condemns the one who would call a preacher a hypocrite if he/she has sin in their life which they would call a preacher a hypocrite for having in their life.* It is true that God dealt more severely with hypocritical leaders of Israel in the Bible, whom are about the equivalent to a hypocritical preacher today. But why does He deal with such more severely? *Because they are supposed to be mature examples in walking the way in which everyone is supposed to walk.* A true man of God could be no more in terms of his character. God's laws are the same for everyone. Though not all have the maturity, opportunity, and/or ability to express God's truth publicly as a preacher- all are expected to follow a preacher's righteous conduct, if he is genuine himself. And if he's not, by recognizing that, it is proof that we know better too.²²

22 Hypocritical preachers always do have supporters who won't acknowledge that they are evil. These supporters are closing their eyes and ears to suppress truth that they don't want to deal with- just like many people who see the foolishness of the preacher's supporters do in other ways regarding other truth

THE EVIL WAY OF THE WORLD

It may be good to go back and read chapter 1 again at this point, as there it is shown that man is not a law unto himself, but is accountable to God to walk in His laws- and that it could not be any other way. The idea that we'd have a right to go our own way is Satanism. The common idea that "nothing is wrong besides telling another that they're wrong" is Satanism, as the essence of Satanism is "*Do as thou wilt.*" The common expressions of "Have your own way", "If it feels good, do it", "Find your own path", "Do what you want", etc are all just different ways of saying "Do as thou wilt." This describes the way of this world, *as it is through the "Do as thou wilt" mentality that mankind follows Satan*, whom Jesus calls the "**prince of this world.**" (John 14:31)²³ It's in this sense that the Bible says "**Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.**" (James 4:4) The way of the world is to put fulfilling the desires of the body and the mind ahead of fulfilling the law of God (Ephesians 2:2-3). It is that way of life that we need Christ to save us from (Matthew 1:21).

which is disturbing to them, which they likewise don't want to deal with.

23 Not that Satan is ultimately in control of this world, but in the sense that God permits him to reign as much as mankind will allow him to reign over them. Satan can't do anything except through those who are rebelling against God. The day Satan 's power to influence is taken away will be the day when nobody has a chance anymore to turn to the Lord in repentance and find mercy of Him anymore.

GOD'S LAW IS THE PERFECT JUDGMENT OF RIGHT AND WRONG

I know some will say here something like “I only mean that we should be able to do whatever we want as long as it doesn't hurt others.” What does it mean to “hurt” others though? If you cast aside God's law, it could mean whatever you want/don't want it to mean. Don't we often believe that others have wronged us- who won't admit that they've wronged us themselves? It's undeniable that Hitler and Stalin thought that they were helping mankind as a whole by their heinous deeds. Satanists²⁴ can't unconditionally condemn anything, no matter how vile or wicked it is. They hate the thought of anything being absolutely wrong (it would be an acknowledgment of the law of God having validity- and God's law is an extension of God Himself, as it reflects His holy and righteous character). The truth is though that those who justify doing anything that God has forbidden, neglect any good God has commanded be done, or just simply take a “whatever, who cares” attitude towards God's commandments in their judgments *are partaking of the same evil way*²⁵ as those who are openly Satanists. God is the only one who is qualified to tell us what is good and bad, what really hurts and really helps others²⁶. We must know good and evil through Him (Hebrews 5:14), which means aligning our way with His commandments and judgments (as He will never contradict those). We actually must love righteousness and hate iniquity in this manner in order to align ourselves with Christ and to

24 Those who have directly sworn allegiance to him really understand this conflict for what it is.

25 I.e.- Choosing to live by their own authority/choosing to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil

26 The most evil and sadistic criminals will criticize people for “judging them” and will say how they are being “hurt” when their horrendous crimes are labeled for what they really are.

follow Him (Hebrews 1:8-9, Amos 3:3, Amos 5:14-15, etc).

In which of these cases is the bigger discrepancy in wisdom: The Creator of the Universes' compared to an adult human's; or an adult human's compared to a child human's? It's obviously the first one. Yet we know that adults (sane, responsible ones) know better than children what is good for them. If a child had its way it would eat candy all day and give candy to other children if it could. It doesn't see the problem, though it would be harmed and be harming others. But we'd even say a child is stubborn and rebellious who didn't listen to his parents and only eat candy when they gave permission. At the same time, a child could need surgery and go into it crying and saying it was being harmed. Yet there are times when a painful surgery is what is really needed to save a life. But a child who had a high opinion of its own judgment and a low opinion of their parents' would fight the surgery they needed to save their life. God Himself has testified of what is good and evil in His Word. **“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 for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.”** (Psalm 19:7-11) Therefore it is our own pride if we think that we know better than God does what is really good and evil.²⁷

27 And people don't even agree among themselves about what is good and evil- there are nudists who want the right to go out in public naked. They say “I have a right to my body and I'm not hurting anyone so who are you to tell me I can't walk around naked?” Obviously many disagree with them, with good reason.

God's law is love (Deuteronomy 33:2-3). Those who truly walk in His law truly do what is best for others (Romans 13:8-14, 2 John 6) while those who don't inevitably hurt others.²⁸ No doubt there are few people, maybe nobody, whose life doesn't coincide to some extent with God's definition of loving others. We do have an idea of what that means because of how we expect others should treat us (Matthew 7:12), and probably no one does the exact opposite of that all of the time. Yet if we are not submitted to God and are pursuing our own lusts, our own bias will blind us as to what is really good, and will keep us from consistently walking in love and doing what's best for others.

THE UNRIGHTEOUS BIAS OF SINNERS ILLUSTRATED

Rebellious mankind, set on pursuing their own lusts, is like a crowd at a sporting event that is rabidly supporting the home team. They will agree with the controversial calls that are in their team's favor (i.e. compatible with one's own self-chosen morality), and some will happen to be right to them (as their self-chosen morality dictates, which will align with God's law *to some extent*). And they will also boo the calls that go against their team (i.e. against their self-chosen morality), though some of these will in truth be the right calls²⁹. *The fan's sense of justice is strong- as long their own will isn't rebuked by justice. Their own sense of right and wrong can be correct-*

This is actually a major issue right now in San Francisco (I don't believe that's a coincidence!), though it gets little attention in the national media.

28 It's not right therefore to sin with anyone, even if they are consenting to it- they are still being hurt, even if they don't know or care that they are.

29 If you've ever been to any serious sporting event you know this is true of many fans at them.

unless the right call goes contrary to their own lusts. This is why those who are pursuing their lusts won't seek God for the right calls (until they repent of pursuing their own lusts, that is). Their own lack of neutrality and unwillingness to align with the truth when it is revealed to be contrary to their own self-chosen way keep them from honestly seeking the judgments of the perfectly righteous Judge. Until we repent of going our own way and truly acknowledge in humility God's right to tell us how to live, there *will* be calls against us- or else we'd have no problem seeking (the true)³⁰ God for the right calls and submitting to them at all! To truly repent and be saved we must lay down the attitude that says that we have the right to live on our own terms, and thus submit our lives wholly to the Lord's judgments.

This is why criminals in prison can look down on other criminals who have been found guilty of a crime that has received a similar severe sentence to their own- while still feeling really good about themselves. This is why two sinners who are both rebelling against God can tell that the other is wrong and be repulsed by the other's sins- while not being ashamed at all of their own. It also shows how two people committing similar sins (i.e. see the same bad call as being to their mutual advantage) can justify and applaud each other over that which God condemns. Though not everyone commits the same sins, those who are willfully committing *any sin* are breaking the entire law of God *by their disregard of the Lawgiver*. We can thereby understand the following passage. **“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not**

30 Of course it's possible to do like we saw the Israelites did, and just fashion a god in your own mind whose judgments just happen to be whatever you would like them to be and to ignore all the passages in the Bible that say otherwise. But that is both dishonesty and idolatry, which we must repent of also.

commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” (James 2:10-11)

Jesus said that the great commandment is to love God with all your soul, strength, and mind; and the second that is like unto that is to love one's neighbor as one's self (see Matthew 22:37-40). Those who say they are doing the first must do the second in line with God's commandments if they indeed are; while those who refuse the first (which means laying down our own agenda to receive the right calls in everything) can't do the second (to really do so means *to do so consistently*), as you cannot consistently do what's best for others while disregarding God, nor love God while disregarding His commandment (2 Samuel 12:9-10).

Usually then the people who stand for and quote God's commandments are the ones who are called “judgmental.” Yet it is really those who protest/disobey any of God's commandments, thinking that they know better, who are among those who really are “judgmental” in a blameworthy sense. **“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isaiah 5:20-21)**

A CAUTION

We also need to distinguish between God's judgments about right and wrong, and how He has testified that those who transgress against His commandments won't enter His kingdom versus man's assumptions about others. It's not wrong to say that another is wrong by facts that are certain, but it IS wrong to assume things are true that you don't know are true for sure. Our judgments need to be based on the Word of

God and that which we know for certain. *We can't be looking for wrong in people and seeking to rebuke people. That is wrong*, and it is possible to dishonor God's name and offend people unnecessarily by being like that- as well as to be wicked ourselves thereby. **"The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favor in his eyes."** (Proverbs 21:10) We have to make sure we really are standing for God and His Word and not out to satisfy our own egos- or we could really end up being judgmental in a bad way (remember that if someone reproves you, the same goes for making assumptions about the one reproving you- we need to take all reproof in the fear of God and judge its validity based on His Word).

SODOM'S MANIFOLD SINS

It wasn't Lot then who was wrong in reproving the men of Sodom; it was the men of Sodom who were wrong to cast aside God's commandments through their own biased judgment. The Lord would bare witness of this later in Genesis 19 to make them a terrifying example to those who would cast His laws aside.³¹ We know by Ezekiel chapter 16 that Sodom had cast aside God's ways long before it was destroyed, before what is known as "the sin of Sodom" was ever even prevalent in Sodom. God thus testified many years after Sodom was destroyed **"Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good."** (Ezekiel 16:49-50)

31 See Jude vs. 7- Those who know the story know that later in Genesis 19 Lot himself cast aside right judgment too regarding his sobriety. He was then scandalized by his daughters in a shameful act. Though they had fled Sodom, the way of Sodom was not out of them.

Before their immorality was even prevalent, the Sodomites became proud, gluttonous, and lazy. They didn't use their abundance and extra time to care for the poor and needy (as those walking in God's ways would).³² They became self-exalted and self-satisfied. Sound familiar? These are the conditions that easily lead to a society filled with sexual immorality and a multitude of other sinful indulgences.

This helps explain why the United States and the western world have become the "anything goes" societies they've become. The Bible is clear that evil societies exalt and protect the proud who work wickedness and tempt God (Malachi 3:15). **"Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." (Romans 1:32)** Those who were alive in the western world at the end of WWII, and are still alive today, can testify how they have seen modern Sodoms take their course. It's worth wondering when God will take drastic vengeance. **"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14:34).** Remember that Sodom was prosperous and affluent until the very day it was destroyed!

The prevalence of homosexuality is really a symptom of the excessive pride that is decaying America and the whole world. This goes beyond just the homosexuality issue. It's possible to have the right view on that, and yet still not be settled regarding the ultimate issue of who the ultimate authority is in your life on the right side of this ageless conflict. Are we sided *completely*

32 Sodom was in an area rich in natural resources, as the Bible and modern archaeology testify. It's no surprise that people there could become rich while doing very little.

with the Lord and His judgments? Are we seeking Him and what His Word says *consistently* in ours?

**“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”
(Philippians 1:9-11)**

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” (Psalm 1)



CHAPTER 6: WHAT CHARACTERIZED ABRAHAM'S FAITH: LIVING FAITH VERSUS DEAD FAITH

Some may discount all that's been said up until now because they believe that saving faith in Jesus Christ can be separated from obedience to God. However, it cannot be. Abraham is the man in the Bible who is given to us as a model of real (living) faith in both the Old and the New Testaments. In Jesus Christ there is a better covenant with better promises (Hebrews 8:6), a perfect revelation of God's mind and character (John 1:14-18), a perfect example of true righteousness, etc. However the obedient heart which was required for people in Old Testament times who were to truly believe on the God of Israel, is required all the same in New Testament times of those who would truly believe on Jesus Christ *the Lord*. Abraham and the Old Testament saints are given as models/examples of faith for those of us in New Testament times, as passages like Hebrews chapter 11, James chapter 2, and Romans chapter 4 show. It is pathetic that faith in Jesus Christ is frequently preached

about without the examples of men of faith in the Old Testament, and the lessons we can learn from what is written about them, factored into the message, contrary to the Apostolic example of preaching on faith. No doubt this is a key reason for the unholy, disobedient living that prevails among professing Christians.

We saw in the introduction how the gospel is **“concerning Jesus Christ our Lord... for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name's sake”** (see **Romans 1:3-5**) and that the stated goal of the Apostle Paul's ministry (i.e. Apostolic ministry/true Christianity) is **“that the offering up of the gentiles³³ might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost... to make the gentiles obedient by word and deed.”** (see Romans 15:16-18) If that's not our gospel, we have been deceived by a false gospel, as the Apostle Paul warned about (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

The phrase *“justified by faith alone”* is a protestant/evangelical sacred cow. Whenever anyone talks about forsaking sin, obeying God, being holy/worthy, etc as having to do with our salvation, someone will often say “Hey, salvation is by justification by faith alone. You're making Christianity about works. You're speaking heresy.” But we can boldly say that justification by faith *alone* is not only never mentioned positively in the Bible, *it is even spoken of negatively and directly rebuked*. There is a universe of difference between *justification by faith versus justification by faith alone*. The Bible teaches justification by faith, not justification by faith alone. A true, living faith is never alone. It is always obedient. It is dead faith that doesn't produce obedience

33 Remember that Paul was sent among the gentiles. The gospel is the same for both Jews and gentiles- Romans 1:16-17, Ephesians 4:4-6, etc.

to God; and is therefore esteemed by God as being alone. We will see this as we go on.

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

By what Scripture says about Abraham's faith, we can say that: *The faith of Abraham is abandoning oneself to God's authority in order to walk in His ways without self-imposed conditions, believing (i.e. persuaded) that He will be faithful to those who do so.* This is the same as saying that the faith of Abraham is a right response to the ageless conflict.

Consider the following scriptures about Abraham and his faith together:

“Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

“After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed

be. And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:1-6)

"And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." (Genesis 18:17-19)

"And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt³⁴ Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of... And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me... And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:1-2, 10-12, 15-18)

34 Test/try as an opportunity to do good- God *never* tempts (influences/entices) anyone to do evil- James 1:13

Abraham is proof that truly believing God (having saving faith) means keeping the way of the Lord/fearing God/obeying God's voice, etc as these passages show. Obedience to God is what characterized Abraham's faith. **"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Hebrews 11:8-10)**

Now some will point out here the times in the Bible where Abraham didn't obey God. There were several times like that in his life for sure. However, *in his disobedience he was unbelieving*- when he went out of the land God sent him to and went to Egypt (Genesis 13), when he tried to "help God out" to receive his promised heir by marrying Hagar his Egyptian maid and having a child with her (Genesis 16), when he lied and said his wife was his sister among strangers on two occasions out of fear for his own safety (Genesis 13 and 20). They happened, and God doesn't hide them from us. It is clear however that Abraham repented and got back on the right track after he sinned. Nor did he sin presuming that God would have mercy on him and bring him back automatically, as some do. He did wrong in difficult moments and afterwards he humbled himself, didn't make any excuses for himself, and returned to walking in obedience to God. How can we know that?

We can know that Abraham truly humbled himself and repented when he went astray by the fact that in Genesis 22 the Lord told Abraham that he had proven his fear of God and his obedience by his willingness to offer up his son Isaac. This was after all the times

recorded in Scripture where Abraham had gone astray. Unless God lied, Abraham always turned back to keeping the Lord's way and didn't harbor/hold onto any disobedience. In addition, to confirm this, we have God's own clear testimony about Abraham, given to his son Isaac, regarding Abraham's obedient way, that God saw fit to give as a summary of his life. **“Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”** (Genesis 26:3-5).

LIVING FAITH IN CHRIST IS OBEDIENT TO HIM

So we can say for certain that, *the faith of Abraham is abandoning oneself to God's authority in order to walk in His ways without self-imposed conditions, believing that He will be faithful to those who do so.* When Abraham departed from that he was walking in unbelief and not faith; the fact that he returned to that after he went astray and endured in that until the end of his life is *the very reason why* he is called a man of true faith and why he is the biblical example of faith for us.

This explains why when the Bible speaks of faith that justifies, it is speaking of an obedient heart in the present-tense that necessarily leads to an obedient walk with the Lord (i.e. living by faith). Obviously this faith could not possibly be alone, but is necessarily accompanied by works of obedience to God's voice/commandments.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ:

for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17) The just SHALL live by faith- what could be plainer?

This is why the Apostles preached baptism in preaching the gospel of Christ. Neither the act of baptism nor the waters of baptism save. But if our heart is obedient to God/Christ we will obey Christ's command to be baptized because we are under Christ's authority in truth. We cannot just receive Jesus as our Savior and despise His kingly authority. He is a Royal King, not an enabler of the disobedient to God to continue in their disobedience and get away with it (Romans 6:1-2a).

"Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." (John 18:37)

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." (Acts 5:30-32)

"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." (1 Peter 3:21-22)

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:37-38)

THE DESCRIPTION OF ABRAHAM’S FAITH IN ROMANS 4 EXAMINED

The New Covenant rite of baptism serves a similar function as circumcision did in Abraham's time. When that was commanded him of God, he speedily obeyed God (see Genesis 17:10-11, 23). We are told then in the New Covenant that it wasn't the circumcision that made Abraham righteous, but that the righteousness of his faith was proven by his obedience to God's command for him to be circumcised. **“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision³⁵ to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he**

35 Paul thus described the true circumcision, which the outward circumcision in the Old Testament was a picture of: **“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” (Philippians 3:3)**

had being yet uncircumcised.” (Romans 4:8-12)

But let's look at the verses preceding these, as doing so can help clear up a lot of confusion about this topic. **“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” (Romans 4:1-5)**

We have to consider what kind of works the Bible is talking about when it condemns justification by works. We will shortly see that in a sense we must indeed be justified by works, in the sense of the obedience to God that must characterize those who walk in the steps of Abraham's faith. We should actually go back a little further to the closing verses of Romans chapter 3 (remember that the letters in the Bible were written as continuous letters, without chapter breaks). **“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” (Romans 3:28-31)**

So there we have it. In the strongest language of **“God forbid”** we have destroyed the (common) concept that faith makes God's law void. Real, living faith rather establishes God's law. *Abraham didn't do anything apart from God to earn His favor.* He didn't seek justification by doing things independently to appease God, to pay Him

off, to bribe Him, to make God his debtor who owed him salvation, etc. It is that mentality which is the basis for many false religions, and the general approach that many take towards getting right with God that is completely wrong. Many Jews at that time sought justification from a strict adherence to the ceremonial law of Moses. Some try to get right God on self-imposed terms, like "If I do X and Y God will surely be pleased with me." *Mentalities and approaches like this are what the Bible condemns when it condemns justification by works.* But what do all these things overlook? *The true faith of Abraham that abandons self to God in obedience and trusts in His promises therein.* The point in Romans chapters 3-4 is that we must seek the Lord in that way and that we can't get around that. Those who try to do so stumble at Christ's righteous authority (see Romans 9:31-33 with Romans 10:3-4). By faith the moral law of God is established, the fundamental requirement of man that we turn from living by what is right in our own eyes to be subject to God and do what is right in His eyes. The very moment one so turns *to the Lord* in faith, through the atonement for sins that Christ has accomplished on the cross, they are justified. Working to earn one's own justification contradicts how the Lord must be sought. A heart³⁶ that is turned to the Lord in faith though is willing and ready to obey Him. The works based mentality of those who seek to earn their salvation opposes this living, obedient faith.

The ageless conflict has never ceased. Through Christ's atonement we can yet repent and get on the right side of this conflict. There is an opportunity to take the right side yet! We don't have to be condemned and go to

36 There is a labor of the heart that is necessary to turn to Jesus Christ. Jesus thus said "**Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.**" (John 6:27)

hell because we have turned from God in the past and went the way of the world. While we have life we can repent, turn at heart to be subject to Him through Christ, and therein be assured of pardon when we seek it through the blood of Christ's atonement on the cross. Yet we don't have a license to continue going our own way in rebellion and still be saved anyway. God forbid! Sadly though few preachers make that clear to their hearers and multitudes think they are saved because they have "accepted Jesus" when they still live by their own authority and are careless to keep God's commandments. A man who cheats on his wife and is given a free offer of forgiveness by her, must yet break off the adulterous affair to come back to his wife in truth. Otherwise he mocks her mercy and grace. God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7-8). We can't have salvation in Christ while holding onto³⁷ the adultery of walking after the spirit of the world that is lawless towards God (James 4:4, Ephesians 2:2-3). The Apostle Peter thus wrote to Christians **"Who his own self (Christ) bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."** (1 Peter 2:24-25)

Continuing with Romans 4 (we'll repeat a little to get the context of verses 6-8 better): **"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not**

37 Or returning to it after we've left it (2 Peter 2:19-22)-we'll deal more with this eventually.

impute sin.” (Romans 4:4-8)

The “**Even as**” here is crucial in understanding how God imputes righteousness to a man without works. Paul would go on to quote from Psalm 32 to show how David describes the blessedness of the man unto whom the Lord imputes righteousness without works. Let's see that description in its original context to prove that to have righteousness imputed to us without works we must turn to be obedient to God's voice.

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah³⁸. I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.” (Psalm 32:1-7)

David made it clear that it was when he confessed his transgressions to the Lord that he was forgiven. *He obviously meant thereby that he forsook them, as that is implied in the biblical understanding of confession of sin.* **“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” (Proverbs 28:13)**

38 A Hebrew word that has no direct translation to English- considered by many to be a call to reflect or pause on what's just been said.

David didn't work to atone for his own sin and/or to score "brownie points" with God. He dealt with his sin head on, with "no guile." (Psalm 32:2) He settled his controversies with God. We thus have the following exhortation, regarding what was previously said in this Psalm, which God gave by His Spirit through David as the Psalm closes.

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." (Psalm 32:8-11)

To be righteous and to trust in the Lord we must submit to His instruction and teaching. The wicked refuse to do so, like the horse and mule, which when not driven/restrained by force are (generally, commonly) rebellious towards their masters, and follow their own hearts instead. This willful submission to God is necessary for the Lord to impute righteousness unto us. Otherwise God would be corrupt in pardoning the unrepentant who are yet rebels to His righteous government. The description of Abraham's faith in Romans 4, considered with the other scriptures that are cross-referenced there, bears witness to this truth.

WORKS OF OBEDIENT FAITH

Those who say salvation is a transaction where one basically prays and exchanges their own record for Jesus' perfect record have to ignore tons of Scripture, wrench a few verses terribly out of their context, and separate the meaning of key words in Scripture from how

they should be defined/understood when considered with other places in Scripture. One man challenged a preacher of this counterfeit righteousness described in the first sentence of this paragraph in a discussion forum. He thus asked him "What place do these verses have in your gospel message?" He then gave the following verses (of course his question was ignored).

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:1-11)

And that brings us to where true faith naturally produces works of obedience, and therefore why the doctrine of "*justification by faith alone*" is a devilish doctrine that is a slap in the face to God's Word. The Bible is clear that genuine faith that submits to God and obeys His Word. An adulterous woman doesn't earn her husband's favor; but if she is genuine in returning to him, upon his free offer of pardon, she will prove it by turning to be faithful and obedient to him. *In that sense we must be justified by works; otherwise we mock God if we claim faith in Jesus Christ.* In that sense those who are disobedient to God and don't keep His Word prove themselves unbelievers without a faith any better than the devils have.

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." (James 2:19-24)

"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing," (Ephesians 5:23-24- it's clear then that to be among Christ's people we must be subject to Him in all things.)

"They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate³⁹" (Titus 1:16)

39 i.e. Unacceptable to God

So much confusion on this topic comes because people don't see (and maybe don't want to see) "**how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only**" like we see from the example of Abraham that James gives above. Abraham heard God's Word and acted on it. He truly believed God. *He didn't set boundaries on his life regarding how far he would go to obey God.* Since he honored God's authority and believed He would be faithful to him, he therefore did what God commanded him without rationalizing what God had commanded away (as people normally do). He was ruled by the Word of God and not by his own plans and his own desires. His attitude was basically, "Whatever God commands, He has a right to, and if I do what He says it will ultimately be well with me—otherwise it won't be" (see Isaiah 66:2 with Hebrews 11:1). This is the obedient attitude that we must have towards God's Word that is revealed in its completeness to us in His Son Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4). Those who take on this attitude follow in the steps of Abraham's faith and prove it by their obedient works. Those who are disobedient to the will of God revealed in Scripture, along with those who neglect to know it altogether, can justly be reproved for their unbelief.

"They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." (John 8:39)

"And he (Jesus) answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it." (Luke 8:21)

"Though he (Jesus) were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:8-9)



CHAPTER 7: HEEDING THE RIGHT MESSENGER: TRUE PROPHETS VERSUS FALSE PROPHETS

We're going to look here at what characterizes a messenger who speaks Gods Word faithfully versus one who doesn't. The word "prophet" here is simply a reference to a messenger who is supposed to be speaking God's Word. A false prophet is one who is supposed to be speaking the truth of God, but isn't. That's what is meant here when a false prophet is referred to, and nothing more. A true prophet is one who really is sent of God to speak for Him and really does speak God's truth without misleading people. We have to remember that error and deception could never work if there wasn't truth mixed in. False prophets themselves are deceived. They can be nice people. *However if they're not speaking the whole counsel of God's Word they are misleading people all the same.* When we talk here about "speaking truth" we mean, as the classic courtroom oath goes, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." That is what characterizes a true messenger of the Lord. For a leader/preacher to depart from that puts them at risk of being a false prophet.

This is important, because a lot of people think that a messenger is good simply because he speaks "some truth." "Oh, I like him, he says a lot of good things." But if he doesn't speak the whole counsel of God he's potentially deceiving people and there may very well be blood on his hands. The Apostle Paul would tell those who had sat under his preaching ministry. **"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."** (Acts 20:26-27) He didn't shun to declare the whole counsel of God, meaning that it's possible to fail to do so simply out of carelessness. *It's easy to mislead people just by not being diligent and extremely careful about one's message aligning with God's Word.* That is why the Bible warns spiritual leaders to be extremely careful and sober about walking in the truth themselves, as well as extremely careful over what they are teaching. Thus Paul told Timothy **"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."** (1 Timothy 4:13-16) Anyone who can ignore these words and think that this isn't a sober, serious matter doesn't really care about what God's Word says. *It is impossible to take it too seriously!*

FALSE PROPHETS DECEIVE REGARDING JESUS' LORDSHIP

As was said then, deception never happens without a lot of truth being mixed in. There can be deception to a message even if there is nothing expressly wrong about it, when there is not a clear call to obey/act

on the truth that has been given. **“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (1 Corinthians 14:8)** If “Cain” can hear the same preacher over and over and not be given a clear call to repent and take on the spirit of “Abel”, and to bring forth fruit in keeping with that, the preacher is misleading him. “Cain”'s and false prophets are drawn to each other, as both are to the religious system, which we will look at in detail later.

That Jesus is Lord and MUST BE obeyed as Lord is what false prophets will either deny outrightly, be silent about, or twist to mean something different than what the Bible means. They'll say a lot of random things that are true, but they will not identify the ageless conflict and call people to the right side of it in the Lord Jesus Christ in truth. The deception can be subtle. Hear the Apostle Peter's warning about false prophets.

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily (in a subtle manner) shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.” (2 Peter 2:1-3)

We see here that this denial of Jesus as Lord causes the way of truth to be evil spoken of. The name of Christ is blasphemed (Romans 2:24) in the world through the ungodly lives of professing Christians who live in sin and misrepresent Christ- *all because they don't really honor and follow Him as Lord.* And it is often through covetousness that false prophets don't preach the whole counsel of God which calls for us to turn from a self-ruled

life to glorify Christ as Lord in truth. The mere threat of the loss of a large percentage of preacher's church/audience if they were to preach to whole counsel of God makes doing so a financially risky endeavor. Though Peter may have had in mind preachers looking to get very rich by their preaching, it applies all the same to those who won't risk offending people by proclaiming the whole truth in order to preserve their position, salary, and/or reputation at all. Remember that deception comes not only by expressly speaking lies that people want to hear, but also by simply not speaking the whole counsel of God that all need to hear. To be a true prophet the consideration of one's position, salary, reputation, etc must all be put on the line in order to speak the truth without compromise. These words of Jesus apply to preachers just as much as they do to everyone else. **"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."** (Matthew 6:31-33)

Peter then in the following verses of 2 Peter chapter 2 gives admonitions based on his warnings about false prophets, so there is no mistake that ungodly living (which the false prophets won't rebuke) is what he is ultimately warning against.

"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should

live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government.⁴⁰ (2 Peter 2:4-10a)

Consider the following lists of sins/types of sinners given in the Word of God, and God's express condemnation of those who do the things mentioned in these passages/those who are described in these passages.

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators (those who have sex outside of marriage and/or use pornography), nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest (obvious), which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness (consenting to unclean thoughts and/or using indecent/obscene language), lasciviousness (indulging in lust and/or provoking it in others through immodesty or other ways), Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions (rebellion against authority), heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings (partaking in wild parties- in which sin inevitably abounds), and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time

40 Despise Christ's Lordship especially, as well as other God-ordained authority- see also Romans 13:1-7

past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21)

"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,⁴¹ God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding (foolish/senseless), covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable (impossible to appease), unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." (Romans 1:28-32)

False prophets will not (at least without partiality) confront these sins in their audience/congregation and insist that people forsake them in repentance in order to have a true walk with the Lord. There is a vast difference between discouraging a sin versus speaking the truth directly and outrightly that it's forbidden and will lead to your damnation if you don't cast it from you in repentance. False prophets will either not even bring up verses like these *or* they'll explain away them with a clever explanation that dances around their plain meaning, which the people will usually be very willing to accept without a serious question. At the very least false prophets won't make the people think that these verses actually apply to anyone listening to them, except maybe unpopular people that most are against anyway. Sadly,

41 Not retaining God in one's knowledge here refers to not retaining Him in one's "full knowledge" - a reference to the refusal to receive the revelation of who God is, what He requires, and to walk wholly in the light of that revelation.

many people will just be relieved to be “let off the hook” and will continue on the broad way to hell.

TRUE PROPHETS CONTRASTED WITH THE FALSE

False prophets may preach against the (alleged) sins of their detractors and those they know most everyone is against. True prophets aren't partial and will confront the sins of their closest friends and supporters if they are living in willful sin, thereby risking the loss of their friendship and support, since they care more for their eternal good than for the earthly benefits of these relationships.

True prophets are often seen as “the Pharisees” (which we will deal with more later), “self-righteous hypocrites”,⁴² “the enemies of the people” and many other such things. False prophets are palatable to man- who wants to believe that the status quo is well, that all is fine, and he can keep living the way he's currently living. True prophets despise compromising in order to be palatable to man, seek to please God alone, and are interested in preparing people that they might be acceptable to God (Romans 15:16-19). So it's no wonder if rebellious people who felt secure in their life of careless disobedience before they came along would call them unjust names and hate them! However, true prophets don't provoke people unnecessarily and they're willing to change if they discover they have erred from God's Word at all. They honor all men (1 Peter 2:17) and therefore strive not to

42 Because they tell people they must obey God- and disobedient, obstinate people in their self-deceived bias often want to believe that they MUST be evil themselves (as if somehow that would excuse their own disobedience if it were true).

provoke anyone unnecessarily because of wrong attitudes in themselves. They speak the truth in love without a personal agenda, and would stop speaking if they saw that their words didn't have the potential to profit their hearers. Their manners aren't at all like those of the people in the Westboro Baptist Church, even though their enemies may accuse them of that. They are not out to "get anyone"; they are simply concerned about God's Word being glorified (2 Thessalonians 3:1). If someone feels that a true prophet is out to get to them, it is because they have issues with the God whose word he is speaking.

The mark of true prophets always is that they call people to forsake their sins to keep God's commandments and to walk with Him in truth. The mark of false prophets is that they don't.

Jesus said **"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."** (Matthew 5:17) So everything that is in the prophets' writings applies to us in the New Covenant.⁴³ Hear the call of God's prophets then from the Bible.

"Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets." (2 Kings 17:13)

"Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have

43 Otherwise the prophets' writings would in effect be destroyed- which Jesus said to **"think not"** that He came to do.

transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.” (Ezekiel 18:30-32)

“But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.” (Jeremiah 23:22)

“Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” (Psalm 34:11-16)

It's interesting that the previous passage from Psalm 34 is quoted in 1 Peter 3:10-12 for us in the New Covenant! The basic conditions for being a righteous person have never changed. We also see how John the Baptist, Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and the other Apostles preached the same basic prophetic message to us in the New Testament, showing how the ageless conflict and the conditions to be on the right side of it have never ceased.

John the Baptist: “Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees:

every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." (Luke 3:7-9)

Jesus: "But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Matthew 13:23) "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." (Matthew 13:40-43) "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." (John 3:17-20)

Peter: "Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." (Acts 3:26)

Paul: "And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from

darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." (Acts 26:15-20)

John: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:7-8)

FALSE PROPHETS ARE USUALLY CASUAL AND LIGHT

We see then that there is a seriousness, a weightiness, about true prophets and their message. False prophets though usually have a lightness to them. The few who don't have it don't call people to obedience to God's Word, but to loyalty to their own agenda. However, most false prophets have a casualness and a lightness to them, which is misleading in and of itself, even if their words should (somehow) all be right. **"Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord."** (Jeremiah 23:32)

Amazingly, the whole direction of the church growth/seeker-sensitive/emergent church movements, that have spread everywhere like wild-fire, actually encourages lightness and seeks to make church a light environment! Churches are encouraged to be like cafes or

lounges where people relax and have a good time. There is nothing wrong with having coffee at a church meeting, but it's the light spirit to it all that is the opposite of the intense, weighty, sober spirit of a true messenger of God (derived from the Spirit of the Word of God) that is misleading. Lightness is a lie.

“Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favor.” (Proverbs 14:9) The spirit (not necessarily the words, but maybe) of false prophets and those that follow them towards sin is typically, “There are more important things to worry about.” They may focus on sins of society, while downplaying those of individuals, willfully ignorant that life is about our response to God primarily, and that any willful sin is a wrong response to God- and therefore directly related to the most important matter there is! They also don't consider how it is the sins of individuals that corrupt and degenerate society as a whole. It's also blasphemous to imply that sins against God are *only* a big deal if society is greatly affected- as if God is less important!

If one loves Jesus they will receive all of His words (John 12:44-50). They won't pick and choose what they like and what they don't. They won't dishonestly explain away things that bother them. The same is true of preachers regarding the message they preach. Heeding true prophets and ceasing to heed false ones is essential in ending up on the right side of the ageless conflict.



CHAPTER 8: SAVING KING VERSUS WEALTHY ENABLER OF REBELLIOUS SINNERS: THE REAL JESUS VERSUS COMMON COUNTERFEITS OF HIM

We looked in the third chapter regarding worshipping the right God and about the possibility of worshipping a false Jesus that is really no different from the Golden Calf whom the Israelites worshipped. We saw how the versions of Jesus that the media gives us cannot be the real Jesus and how we need to beware that we don't worship a false Jesus that is made by human understanding. There are false versions of Jesus in hundreds of different cult groups where "Jesus" is basically equated to the authority of the group's leaders whose commandments are *not derived from, and in line with, the Word of God.*

There is never a substitute for seeking the Word of God diligent in honesty like the Bereans in the Book of Acts tested the message that came to them through the Apostle Paul. Not even Paul, being a man whom God worked miracles through, and who had genuine Apostolic

character, was sufficient for the Bereans to just believe Paul's message was of God without comparing it to the scriptures that were available to them.⁴⁴ And God commends them for that! **“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.”** (Acts 17:10-12)

If a messenger is of God and he is preaching the real Jesus, his message will be confirmed by the Scriptures to those who receive his word with all readiness of mind, and search the Scriptures daily (continually, diligently), whether the things he's saying are so. It is in that readiness of mind and diligence with the Scriptures that we can be preserved from error and know the real Jesus from false versions of Jesus- as one can know real money from the multitudes of possible counterfeit versions that could be made by becoming thoroughly acquainted with the real. We just have to remember that if we're not humble and open to truth without self-imposed conditions God will let us remain in the dark regarding the truth, no matter how much we study His Word. As long as one has a disobedient attitude and is choosing the terms of how they will serve God (like Cain), they can learn and accumulate knowledge, but it won't really profit them and help them recognize that which they really need to see. **“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** (2 Timothy 3:7) That is why Israel's leaders

44 What we now call the Old Testament was available to them, which testified of the Messiah whom Paul came to them preaching- Romans 16:25-27. We'll look at examples of this as the chapter continues.

in Christ's time could quote the Bible well and yet miss its author and great subject (Jesus Christ) who was standing right in front of them! They didn't obey the revelation they had, so they were justly blinded to the ultimate revelation of God!

Jesus thus told the Jewish leaders **“Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?”** (John 5:45-47)

“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent,⁴⁵ and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.” (Matthew 11:25-26)

THE MOST COMMON FALSE JESUS

There is one particular false version of jesus that prevails in America, and the character of this false jesus really is a characteristic of most false jesuses- the thing that most have in common in some way.⁴⁶ That false jesus is the wealthy enabler jesus who died for our sins so we don't have to worry about sinning! Whom we can just

45 Referring to those who are wise and prudent in their own eyes- Isaiah 5:21. The opposite of being so is the childlike willingness to be taught and directed without self-imposed conditions, which Jesus said that we must be converted to. **“Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.”** (Luke 18:17)

46 This goes perfectly with what we saw in the fear of God chapter- the true fear of God is the aspect of the true God that is most often taken away/twisted when people commit idolatry and fashion a “god” that is suitable to them.

pray a prayer to and “receive” as our savior and then never have to worry about God being angry with us no matter how we live afterwards! His is the antinomian (lawless) gospel that says regarding the ageless conflict, “You know, 'God' eliminated that when 'Jesus' died on the cross. The only choice you need to make is to accept everything 'Jesus' did for you as your own, and 'God' will never look upon your sin ever again.”

This will anger some people, but be certain that God would never violate the eternal principles of His authority and (essentially) give man a license to live however He chooses without punishment. We will show by the Scriptures that the “Jesus” described in the previous paragraph is a false Jesus which is a satanic invention meant to turn “Christianity” into pure Satanism (“Do as thou wilt- thou shalt not surely die” - Satan). A “Jesus” who is a savior only- or (ridiculously) a king whose royal office and authority are made void by his office as savior, as if he can be received as one's savior while being scorned as a king. That is how many regard Jesus, but only a false Jesus can actually be regarded that way and give the hope that those who so regard him will actually be saved. The real Jesus calls such a hope a false hope, and will destroy those who don't receive His righteous reign, as we will see here.

THE REAL JESUS REVEALED FROM OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

Some may not be deceived by that false Jesus specifically, yet still need to come to the true Jesus on His terms. Those who have so come to Him need to not turn away from Him. The truths in this chapter therefore are important to all, as they not only expose the false Jesus, but shed light on who the real Jesus is. We will see in the coming chapters how the salvation offered in the real Jesus

keeps the battle lines of the ageless conflict right in place- there is no rivalry between His office as a King and as a Savior! Our response to the real Jesus is really our response to the ageless conflict. In the New Testament Christ is **“the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.” (Hebrews 8:6)** The need to take the right side in the ageless conflict, on the same terms as have been from the beginning, is still required to be a partaker of Christ and this better covenant.

Those who were right with God and serving Him on His terms under the Old Covenant were instantly ready to receive their Messiah when He came; and those who weren't were not.⁴⁷ It is thus that we can understand these words of Jesus to Nicodemus in John chapter 3. **“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” (John 3:20-21)**⁴⁸ In the rest of this chapter we are going to look at some Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament that will reveal how a Jew in Christ's time who believed and understood the Scriptures would have understood the Messiah to be, and understood how we are obligated to respond to Him. It is notable that these Scriptures show too that both Jews and gentiles are offered the same salvation in the Messiah as His gospel is sent forth into all the earth on the same conditions, in case anyone should say that these Scriptures don't apply to certain people

47 In that truth is the significance of God sending John the Baptist to Israel to prepare their hearts for Christ- all must be believe on Christ through a right response to John the Baptist's message- which is a call to repentance, a call to take the right side in the ageless conflict- Luke 3:3-18, John 1:6-8

48 See also the account of Simeon and Anna in Luke 2:25-38

now.

Psalm 2: In the second Psalm we get a clear understanding of who the Messiah is and why the world rejects Him. He is a King whose reign the rulers of this world, and those who love the lusts of the world, seek to cast off- but cannot do so, except to their own eventual destruction. The Apostles and early church would quote this Psalm as directly applying to those who oppose Christ and His gospel (see Acts 4:23-27).

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” (Psalm 2)

The clear message is that Christ's resurrection is proof that He is the Lord, God's chosen King, and that all who do not bow to Him in humble obedience will be dashed in pieces when He comes back to rule the world with a rod of iron. Though in a way this is directed to people in power in this world who would oppose Christ

by their earthly authority, like Herod and Pilate, it applies just as much to all of us. We are all called to abandon the throne of our lives (living our own self-chosen way by our own authority) that the Lord's Christ might reign over us, that His judgments might prevail in us.

Isaiah 42:1-4: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." (Isaiah 42:1-4-referenced in Matthew 12:18-21)

A lot of people preach that to "trust in Christ" means to just trust His death to take away your sins so God doesn't see your sins anymore. But that preaching is insufficient- it doesn't bring those who heed it to glorify Jesus as Lord and settle the ageless conflict on the right side! From the previous passages we looked at it is clear that to trust in Him means to welcome His reign and to submit to His righteous decrees that they might be sent forth to victory in our lives.

"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust." (Romans 15:9-12)

Christ's ministry was **“for the truth of God.”** It is virtually the same thing as what was said of Jesus by the angel before He was born. **“And she (Mary) shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)** Nobody can come to Jesus for salvation who is not seeking to be saved *from their sins*. Those who won't confess and forsake them can't ever have mercy (see Proverbs 28:13). We must submit to the truth of God to have an interest in Jesus Christ. But sadly, misleading versions of the gospel are often preached that give people the idea that they can be saved *in their sins* by just trusting Jesus as their personal savior. That is not biblical.

We also learn clearly from the above passages that Christ came to reign over the gentiles, not just the Jews. The Apostles preached Jesus Christ as Lord⁴⁹ to everyone, whether Jew or gentile. Consider again the expressly stated purpose of the gospel that the Apostle Paul gives at the beginning of Romans. **“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name” (Romans 1:1-5)** And therefore, we are told that Christ's enemies who will be destroyed at His second coming are those who don't obey Him. **“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who**

49

See Acts 11:20 and 2 Corinthians 4:5 for example

shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

Many will say that Christ's finished work on the cross is diminished when obedience to Him (and thus to God's commandments) has a part in one's salvation.⁵⁰ But we can't explain away the plain truth of God's Word that shows the need to be subject to Christ in order to be saved. The Bible sees no opposition between Christ's office as a Savior and His office as a King. So we should take God's Word that there isn't, and throw away doctrines/theologies which say or imply that such opposition exists. We must be under the Lord's reign, and we cannot work our way there. An atonement must be made for sin, a ransom given to redeem our souls back to God. Christ accomplished that when He died on the cross (1 Timothy 2:5-6, Revelation 5:9). We can therefore fall under Him and find mercy, provided we are truly humble and have turned from rebellion to God's authority (which authority is committed to Christ- John 5:22-29). Don't rebels against any government have to lay down their arms and submit to the laws of that government in order to actually be reconciled therewith? Christ died to reconcile man to God- not God to man. There is a universe of difference there. A free offer of pardon doesn't mean an unconditional one- if the rebels humble themselves and obey they are not working to get the government's favor or earning in it anyway. It is blasphemous to assert that God's authority can be trampled on because Christ died for sinners! The Apostle would thus write **“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.” (Romans 6:1-2a)** So we can safely say that God forbids us

50 See chapter 6 on the faith of Abraham that clarifies the matter of justification by faith versus justification by faith alone.

from continuing in sin and that His grace therefore won't abound towards those who continue living by their own authority and refusing the reign of His Holy and Just King (Acts 3:14).

Psalm 22: We see in this next Messianic Psalm how Christ's offices as Savior and King complement each other; and therefore cannot be rightfully separated. In Psalm 22 we see the agony of Christ on the cross (verses 1-21) - and then we have His resurrection and His kingdom preached to the world (verses 22-31) - a kingdom that people *may enter into because of His death on the cross*. We'll quote only the latter verses of Christ's experience on the cross for the sake of space. I encourage everyone to read the whole Psalm in their Bible.

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall

eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this." (Psalm 22:14-31)

To truly preach Jesus Christ there must be the preaching that He is Lord, must be obeyed as Lord, and how He must be obeyed as Lord. **"But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." (Acts 8:12)** Philip wasn't preaching two different gospels- because preaching the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ are inseparable. Look at these verses from later in Acts chapter 8 carefully as Philip preaches Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. **"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:35-37)** In preaching Jesus the Son of God it's clear he spoke of the need to submit to Him and obey Him in baptism *upon the eunuch's hearing the gospel for the very first time.* **"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things**

whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:18-20) Submitting to Christ to be His disciple set on learning to “**observe all things whatsoever**” He has commanded is a requirement to be a true Christian- it's not an optional “extra” for those who “want more to their Christianity.” To believe on Christ the Son of God necessarily means receiving His authority as the Son of God with all of our hearts.

Psalm 18: This agrees with the words in another Psalm, which have a clear Messianic application, as the Father raises Christ from the dead after His death on the cross and calls all to bow to Him as the gospel message goes forth into the world. **“Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; and thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me.”** (Psalm 18:43-44)

The Old Testament (biblical) understanding of the Messiah that the Jews (rightly) had in their time was that the Messiah would be a King who would reign on the throne of David. Though many Jews missed recognizing Christ, their concept of the Messiah was correct in that He would be a king. Many wanted an earthly king who would deliver them from the Romans (which Jesus refused to be- John 6:15) instead of from their sins (because they sought the things of the world instead of the things that matter to God), but their understanding of the Messiah as a king was at least correct.⁵¹ This is how the

51 See also Acts 17:7 where we can see the Apostles preaching Jesus as a King- whose message about the nature of His kingdom was also misunderstood by gentile rulers (they considered Jesus' kingdom a rival to Caesar's, though it isn't- John 18:36-37). Nevertheless this, along with many other

Apostles preached on the day of Pentecost. The realization of many in the audience that they had crucified their king who had been approved of God by miracles done among them, and who was raised from the dead (demonstrated to them by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, and which could not be refuted, given the fact that the tomb He was laid in was empty), was what caused many to agonize and to see their earnest need to align themselves with the Lord's Christ, who had been raised to sit on the throne of David. When they asked the Apostles what they must do, Peter told them to repent of their opposition to the King whom they crucified and to be baptized in His name for the remission of sins, that they too might receive the Holy Spirit. Those who did so steadfastly continued in the Apostle's teaching and fellowship (i.e. subjection to Christ's word- Acts 2:42). They weren't told "Oh wonderful- you're saved now no matter what." They continued in obedience to Christ- they had the Apostolic understanding of salvation, which is equated to being in subjection to the kingdom of God- not the shallow counterfeit salvation that has become the norm in our day. The church of Christ and their lives of power brought fear on every soul (Acts 2:43). The testimony of Christ in them was powerful and convincing, though many opposed it all the more, as the persecution they would shortly face shows (see Acts 8:1). All of this can be read about and proven from Acts 2:14-47, which is extremely important that all study carefully to understand the real Jesus and the Apostolic (true) gospel message.

Deuteronomy 18: In Acts 3 as the Apostles received another opportunity to preach Christ to a large crowd, Peter would reference Deuteronomy 18,

Scriptures, shows that the true gospel message to all, both Jew and gentile, preaches Jesus as King (which is the same as preaching that He is Lord).

confirming the kingdom message and calling them to repent that they might heed Christ the Great Prophet promised through Moses, whom all have an obligation to hear/obey in whatsoever He says (see Acts 3:19-26). **“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God⁵², neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”** (Deuteronomy 18:15-19)

Psalm 110: Another key Messianic passage is Psalm 110. There we see Christ's office as Lord/King along with His office of High Priest (in which He applies the true salvation that He offers as a Savior). Here we see how Christ is the ultimate of the two anointed ones in the Old Testament, Israel's King and High priest, united in one person (the ultimate fulfillment of both those Old Testament offices which were both a type/shadow of Him). It's clear that we cannot just take Jesus as one and

52 Christ is indeed the Lord God, as multiples scriptures prove (i.e. 1 John 5:20, Acts 20:28, etc). The clear meaning given the context of the passage is that when Christ came, He didn't come and speak in the intimidating manner that God spoke to the Israelites in Mount Horeb (i.e. Mount Sinai). He had all the characteristics of a regular man like Moses (see Hebrews 2:16-18), but nevertheless spoke with great authority as a man, like Moses also did- only in His case with even more authority (Matthew 7:28-29, John 7:44-46, Hebrews 3:1-6, etc).

neglect Him as the other. Those who do not willingly serve Him in holiness are His enemies that oppose Him, who will one day be crushed under His feet. Jesus Himself would describe His enemies whom He will destroy as those who will not that He should reign over them (Luke 19:14, 27)

“The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.” (Psalm 110)

Psalm 40: Rather than letting people off the hook as a wealthy enabler by His office as Savior, the real Jesus calls people to settle the ageless conflict and submit to His reign which upholds the eternal, moral law of God. We see also from the Old Testament insights into Christ's ministry, that He would preach and uphold that eternal, moral law. And as we go on to His actual ministry we will see that only those who would submit to that law could receive Him in truth; while those who wouldn't rejected Him.

“Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid

thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation." (Psalm 40:7-10)

Isaiah 42:6-8, 21-25: We see then from Isaiah 42 how as the gospel of Christ goes forth in the world that the law of God is magnified and made honorable, as Christ did that very thing in His ministry. We cannot be delivered and restored from our sins (i.e. redeemed) until we are willing to walk in God's ways and are obedient to His law. Our disobedience to it is why we were taken captive and spoiled by the devil; and brought under God's judgment altogether to begin with. Those who refuse to be obedient and align themselves with His law-honoring King are like rebellious Israel who was delivered unto judgment by the Lord, and yet didn't get the message that they had to return to walk in His ways and be obedient to His law in order to be redeemed from the judgment upon them (see also Isaiah 48:17-22 and Isaiah 55:6-7).

"I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images... The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable. But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore. Who among you will give ear to this? who will hearken and hear for the time to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his

ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart.” (Isaiah 42:6-8, 21-25)



CHAPTER 9: CHRIST'S REIGN VERSUS THE LAWLESS SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

The reason that the world is at enmity with God is that it exalts the lusts of men ahead of the commandments of God. Christ came upholding the law of God and preaching its righteous requirements- therefore He and the world are at odds. It doesn't want Christ's ways, nor does He want the world's. They are at enmity with each other. Jesus thus said to some who did not believe in Him **"The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." (John 7:7)** Yet those who side with Christ as His true disciples will also be hated by the world, as their lives (if they truly believe on Christ) will also be a testimony that the world's works are evil. **"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:18-19)** Now of course many are friends of the world and don't see any contradiction between serving its lusts and believing in Jesus Christ,

because the “jesus” they believe in isn't the real Jesus of the Bible. We should want to see the true Jesus of the Bible and know the truth about the characteristics of His reign.

No doubt that these words from the Apostle John were inspired by the truths he heard Jesus preach. **“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”** (1 John 2:15-17)

It was by following these lusts of the world that Eve transgressed God's Word and took of the forbidden tree. **“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”** (Genesis 3:6) Of course God had given other trees to Adam and Eve that were good for food, created other things that were pleasant to the eyes which He hadn't forbid them, and they could have been wise through fellowship with God and the means they could use within that fellowship. But they were enticed by the tree which God had forbidden, and gave in and ate of it... and thus became God's enemies.

And that is “*the world*” in the sense that the Bible uses it to describe the prevalent enmity towards God among people in this world... unrestrained by the commandment and ways of God. Lawless. Living in sin. All different ways of saying the same thing.

It is this lawless spirit/attitude that Jesus Christ reproved through His preaching ministry, wherein He

also showed us how to walk in obedience to God by the path that He went. What we have in the Gospels and in the rest of the New Testament is Christ's confirmation of the law of God given through Moses and the Old Testament prophets, as His life is the ultimate example of how to walk in truth and overcome the way of the world. We have a witness of truth in Jesus Christ that far exceeds the quality of any witness to God's truth in Old Testament times- a perfect flesh and blood declaration of God's character and will (John 1:18). Christ's preaching ministry is His instruction for us in applying to our lives the true righteousness that is in the law of God. We could say, His instruction in how to come out on the right side of the ageless conflict. He concluded His ministry by dying for us so that we have an opportunity to repent and get on the right side of the conflict. He rose again to confirm the truth of His identity and of His words; and to be the one mediator between God and men who enables/empowers those who come to Him on His terms to walk with God in the path that He walked, and thus overcome this sinful, corrupt world (Hebrews 5:7-9, Hebrews 7:25, 1 John 5:1-5).

And therefore we see that those who received Him were those who submitted to the law of God and those who rejected Him are those who wouldn't. And that is still the case now. It's no wonder that Jesus said that it will be the workers of iniquity (lawlessness) who will be cast away from Him on the Day of Judgment. **"But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."** (Luke 13:27- see also Matthew 13:40-43)

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Consider the Sermon on the Mount, the foundation of Jesus' teachings (the first and longest of His recorded messages in the gospels). In it He said **"Think**

not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

(Matthew 5:17-18) The law of God is Christ's own law, as He is God come in the flesh. There were many ceremonies and rituals in the law of Moses which He has now fulfilled, or fulfills in those who believe on Him now- or at least will fulfill at His second coming. He is the substance of the shadows that were in the ceremonial law. We don't have to sacrifice animals anymore, because He is the atonement for sin that the animals pictured. He doesn't require physical circumcision for us, because He gives the true circumcision (gives His Spirit to those who believe on Him, to deliver them from walking after the flesh and following the lusts of the world- Galatians 5:16-18, Galatians 1:4, Galatians 6:14), etc. He Himself kept those ceremonial/ritual aspects of the law when He was on earth, because He had not yet instituted the New Covenant, which covenant is in His shed blood (Matthew 26:28). For those still under the Old Covenant performing the ceremonial law was a matter of obedience to God. So though Christ released us from the obligations of the ceremonial law in the New Covenant, He did not release us from the eternal, moral law of God. That would be blasphemous, criminal, and satanic! Jesus would then go on to give commandments regarding the moral law in the Sermon on the Mount and the rest of His teachings, and would conclude the Sermon on the Mount by saying that only those who do them would be saved (Matthew 7:21-27). It is the moral law of God which is not made void, but is established by faith in Christ (Romans 3:31), as we saw in chapter 6 and will see more as we go on.

Consider the passage in 1 John 2:15-17, about the lusts of the world that are contrary to the love of the Father, with the passage from John 7:7, where Jesus said

that the world hates Him because He testifies that the works therefore are evil. Jesus' preaching is indeed about love- love as God defines it. *That* love requires denying self the pleasures of sin and the pursuit of the lusts of the world in order to walk in. **“If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (1 John 2:15b-16)** And it is serving these lusts that Jesus would go on to reprove in the Sermon on the Mount, and those lusts which must be denied in order to truly keep His words (i.e. be a true disciple of His).

Jesus would go on in Matthew chapters 5-7 to reprove ways in which people commonly break God's law in order to pursue the world's lusts:⁵³ anger (the root of murder), lust with the eyes after any that are not one's own spouse (the root of the physical act of adultery) and casualness towards one's marriage covenant (which can lead to adultery in God's eyes and many other sins), making casual oaths (dishonesty/carelessness about one's own word), taking/desiring personal vengeance on one's enemies, turning away those in need, selectiveness in whom you love/do good to, performing spiritual disciplines (praying, giving, fasting) to be seen of other people, refusal to forgive those who've wronged you/bitterness/holding grudges, serving money and earthly things ahead of the Lord's interests, anxiously seeking security and/or happiness in the pursuit and/or hoarding of them instead of in God's faithful provision to those who seek first His kingdom,⁵⁴ being harder on others

53 And thus love the world by following the lust of the gratification of one's own body and/or mind, the lust of the eye, and/or the pride of life ahead of God's will expressed through the commandments of His moral law.

54 I.e. Those who make obeying Him in the present their supreme priority- see Matthew 6:33-34.

than on yourself through focusing on other's sins while neglecting/excusing your own, etc.

The evil attitudes and mindsets that lead to these things are a contrast to the right attitudes (which are commonly called the beatitudes) that Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount with (see Matthew 5:3-12). It is one thing to talk about the positives (love, mercy, faithfulness, self-control, honesty, patience, generosity, trust in God, good-will, etc). These are all things that Christ exemplified and taught. Yet it is another thing to also identify and rebuke the negatives that corrupt the positives.⁵⁵ *The words of Christ rebuke the negative, because they cannot exist with the positive (at least without corrupting it so that it causes one to be unacceptable to God). Mankind wants to believe the negative is not that big of a deal, and that you can have some sin in your life and yet love God too. Christ and His royal authority rebuke and put down this mindset.*

These are the same truths that the Apostle Paul would emphasize in the Book of Galatians, no doubt because he was a disciple of Christ who understood His words. Paul had wrote that the law of God is established by true faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:31). He knew that those who transgress God's law (in the present tense) have no hope of inheriting His kingdom while they continue to; and he knew that one having the righteous attributes of God's Spirit is mutually exclusive with living after the flesh in transgression of God's law (see Galatians 5:16-23). He spoke there of deeds that hinder those who are

55 I.e. For example, how lusting after women is adultery/covetousness; and how nobody can serve God and mammon- and therefore we must choose one, and thus will hate the other by default. Jesus said these things in Matthew 5:27-28 and Matthew 6:24 respectively.

committing any of them from entering God's kingdom. Since the law of God, the eternal voice of God, is upheld by faith in Christ, *those breaking God's moral law therefore need to repent and bow to Christ's righteous authority in order to side with Him and truly believe on Him.*

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest (obvious), which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness (consenting to unclean thoughts and/or using indecent/obscene language), lasciviousness (indulging in lust and/or provoking it in others through immodesty or other ways), Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions (rebellion against authority), heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings (partaking in wild parties- in which sin inevitably abounds), and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19-21)

And this is the same truth we see in Jesus' words in John chapter 3, which like the previous passage in Galatians, is worth looking at again here. **“For God so loved the world,⁵⁶ that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the**

56 Jesus clearly meant the people of the world in this passage, and not this world's system which calls people to pursue their own lusts instead of submitting to the commandments of God unconditionally. The world system is by its very nature at enmity with God, and could never be otherwise (James 4:4, Ephesians 2:2-3, etc).

condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. (John 3:16-20) *Refusing to forsake evil deeds to pursue one's own pleasure/interest in this world, rather than siding with Christ in submission to God, is the way of the world; and persistence in this way prevents one from coming to the light in Christ and escaping condemnation.*

Note the simple, yet clear contrast between the true gospel and counterfeit gospels which we can discern by the first chapter of Galatians. **“Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”** (Galatians 1:3-8) Remember with this how the grace of God that brings salvation is described in Titus 2:11-12- it teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, that we should live soberly, righteous, and godly, in this present world. Any supposed gospel that teaches a “grace” which denies or minimizes the true teaching of the grace of God and the power of Christ to deliver from sin thereby, is a counterfeit gospel.

God's love in sending Christ to seek and to save the lost won't avail those who won't yield control of their lives to Christ the Lord and give up the disobedient attitude and evil deeds that caused them to be lost to begin with. We have to be agreed with Christ (Amos 3:3) in

order to be joined to Him by faith, and to thus be on His side. Many offer easier ways to be saved, but they are counterfeits of the genuine salvation that Christ calls us to. The real Jesus is the Captain of the Lord's host, not a humanistic sissy whose compassion towards people overrides His honor for the truth of God and zeal that it be honored and obeyed by people. He therefore has the severest punishment in store for those who won't turn and obey the truth.

Christ's lack of partiality and His unwavering terms of holiness are no doubt lessons we see from the Book of Joshua as the pre-incarnate Christ appears to Israel's leader Joshua, who was reminded of the Higher Leader whose side he needed to be absolutely certain he was on. **“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.”** (Joshua 5:13-15)



CHAPTER 10: CHRIST'S MINISTRY: THOSE WHO RECEIVED CHRIST VERSUS THOSE WHO REJECTED HIM

Here is an important consideration to illustrate the truth of what is being said. Consider why specific people in the gospels and in the rest of the New Testament received or rejected Jesus Christ.

Judas: Why did Judas reject Christ? He valued money more than he valued Christ. Christ and money will come into conflict. There will be opportunities to profit by betraying Him/denying Him and/or losses in finances that need to be made, or at least risked, in order to confess Him. Jesus made it clear that mammon (money/material possessions) is the chief rival master to God (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). You can't heed Jesus' words and not have your outlook/attitude towards mammon altered- unless you ignore many things that Jesus said and make a false Jesus that suits you.

The Rich Young Ruler: The same can be said of

the Rich Young Ruler. He wanted eternal life badly and he went to the right source (Jesus). However, Jesus knew his heart, and knew that for the Rich Young Ruler to be subject to God's commandments and follow Him in truth, he would need to sell his possessions and give to the poor. Mammon was an idol to him- an idol that he refused to part with;⁵⁷ and therefore he was very sorrowful. However Jesus didn't make things easier for him to get eternal life (see Luke 18:18-30).

Some people wrongly use the Rich Young Ruler account to make it seem like being a Christian is all about caring for the poor. But we can't just take a few random verses and make those everything. Many people that emphasize heavily caring for the poor disregard Jesus' words on most other things- especially the things He spoke about sin⁵⁸ and our need to be saved from our sins,

57 At least from what we know by the gospel accounts- maybe he did later on.

58 No doubt being unmerciful towards those in need and being possessive of mammon and being materialistic are sins that we need to repent of and be saved from, as the accounts of the Rich Young Ruler and Zaccheus illustrate. Yet Jesus' words deal with many other sins also. And it should also be noted that just because someone helps the poor doesn't *necessarily* mean they that they love the poor or that they don't love money. To follow Christ we have to deny even the "good feeling" from helping people and not let seeking that good feeling and/or seeking the praises of people influence what we do. This includes not seeking the praises and the appreciation of the poor as well. We also have to be willing to proclaim the hard things that Jesus spoke to everyone, including the poor, who can be just as arrogant and just as resistant to God's truth as everyone else. So take away the selfish reasons to help others materially and add in the uncomfortableness, danger, and hatred of men that are risked by truly confessing Christ before people, including the poor, and maybe a lot of those who are so zealous to care for the poor aren't servants of the real Jesus after all. It's also a lot easier to give

the things He spoke about hell, as well as His command to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15) and to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). Though standing for Him and obeying Him does mean being willing to sacrifice for the poor, it goes so much deeper and beyond that! To make it primarily about meeting the material needs of the poor is to create a false Jesus with humanistic, shallow compassion; and stops short of obedience to the real Jesus. In Matthew 26:6-13 we learn that serving Jesus and caring for the poor are not necessarily the same. To overemphasize a good thing to the exclusion of the other things Jesus said is just as bad as the idolatry of the Rich Young Ruler. Both of these mindsets are disobedience and rebellion to Christ's kingdom, though they appear so different.

Zaccheus: Consider Zaccheus on the positive side regarding Matthew 6:24. In Luke 19:1-10 we read how he decided that he would repent of his financial dishonesty, pay back those whom he defrauded 4x, and give half his goods to the poor. He tore his heart from the love of money, his dearest sin, and its unrighteous benefits that he might receive Jesus as Lord in truth. No doubt his heart was obedient to Jesus' kingdom, or else Jesus wouldn't have called him a son of Abraham (Luke 19:9- as we saw that the chief characteristic of Abraham's faith is unconditional obedience to God).

The woman caught in adultery: Jesus didn't just forgive her unconditionally, as many believe. She was required by Him to forsake her immorality and its pleasure, and any other sins she may have been committing. **“When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where**

away things that were donated by other people and weren't ever rightfully yours anyways.

are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” (John 8:10-11)

She had her judgment delayed- but if she would not repent she would still be condemned in the end (see Romans 2:4-5). Like with us, Christ's grace gave her an opportunity to repent and avoid condemnation- but not an opportunity/license to continue in sin that grace may abound (Romans 6:1-2a). Jesus preached only in Israel, a culture that at the time understood what God's law said about such immorality. By affirming the law of God as He did (Matthew 5:17), Jesus was confirming everything the Old Testament taught about sin- thus confirming its condemnation of adultery, sex outside of marriage, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, etc. When Jesus spoke about “**fornications**” (see Mark 7:21-23) as being evil, He was therefore including all of these things. He also spoke of God's intent that marriage be between one man and one woman (Matthew 19:4-5) and said that lusting after others is proof of an adulterous heart (thus condemning pornography and the spirit that prevails on many college campuses, beaches, the advertising industry, and a lot of other places). We have to align ourselves with His words on this or we deny Him (Mark 8:38).

Even though Jesus didn't say a ton about fornication within a culture that didn't require Him to, His Apostles, who were sent to gentile cities where this sin was everywhere did indeed say a lot about it. Some rebellious people accuse God of being obsessed with sex- *but it is people who are obsessed - to the point where many would even do the unthinkable and transgress God's boundaries to gratify their immoral desires!* God just tells us the truth that we need to know. After all, the world lies to us constantly- so God setting the matter straight over and over for us is a great mercy in a world where we are lied to over and over, not least of all on this topic.

One need only read the New Testament epistles to see that they contain multiple rebukes of sexual sin and instruction on fleeing from it and overcoming it. **“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification (holiness), that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification (holiness) and honor; Not in the lust of concupiscence (forbidden desire), even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.”** (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8) Apostles of Christ are simply messengers of Christ- their word confirmed His (Hebrews 2:3). Those who ignore the truths in the epistles and don't obey them reject Christ- for the epistles are His Word also. Nearly everything that you find in the epistles can be found as having its origin in the words of Jesus in the gospels.

The Scribes and Pharisees: What about the Scribes and Pharisees who were always contending with Jesus? Wasn't their problem that they sought to obey God's commandments? No! That is what you would think by how some speak of the Scribes and Pharisees; but it's not true at all. *Jesus was the one who obeyed God's commandments and taught others to do so. The problem with the Scribes and Pharisees was that they were lawless at heart, but sought to look righteous externally. They weren't obedient to God and were motivated by self-seeking in even their apparent “holiness.” They took a selective approach to God's commandments and used an external adherence to them, along with a strict adherence to human traditions that were convenient for people whose hearts were far from God to give people the misleading*

impression that they were holy. They thereby got the respect of a lot of people, whose praise they sought more than God's.

Jesus thus told the Pharisees **“Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.”** (Mark 7:6-9) **“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”** (Matthew 23:25-28)

Satan has deceived many to believe that keeping God's commandments and telling others to do so is legalism; and that anyone who seeks to do so is a Pharisee and a legalist. *But a true legalist is one who goes through some religious motions externally, but remains lawless at heart.* Jesus made it clear that we should cleanse the inside that the outside may be clean also, as we just saw from Matthew chapter 23. The true Pharisee is the one who goes to church and can appear to love God, but who also indulges in sin in subtle and private ways, thinking he/she is entitled to do so because of all the other “stuff” they do “for God” (this is none other than the spirit of

Cain). Jesus on the other hand said that we should do the commandments that are from God's Word, even if it should be a hypocrite who is quoting the Bible to us. We should just not do after the hypocrite's own example. **"Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not."** (Matthew 23:1-3)

People often associate pride with keeping God's commandments- but that association is a lie too. The Bible actually equates pride with transgressing God's commandments; and associates humility with keeping them (see Psalm 119:21 and Malachi 4:1 compared with Proverbs 22:4 and Psalm 103:17-18- which prove this absolutely). Jesus actually said that *faith is a weighty matter of the law* (along with judgment and mercy -Matthew 23:23).

As we saw in the chapter about Abraham's faith, one who abandons him/herself to God unconditionally obeys God's commandments. Yet to go through the external motions of the law without faith as a foundation of the law is to abuse the law and vainly expect to gain something by it that it cannot offer, as it condemns the one who seeks justification from it as a transgressor, an enemy of God's authority (which authority must be submitted to by the true foundation of obedience to God, which is the faith exemplified in Abraham- Romans 4:13-15). This was the grave error of the Scribes and Pharisees. Nevertheless true faith establishes the law of God (Romans 3:31) and persistence in transgression keeps a person from true faith (John 3:18-20). The law therefore condemns those also who seek justification by faith in Christ, yet continue in sin- as the law's real purpose is to bring us to forsake our

sins⁵⁹ and die to ourselves in repentance that we might be joined *to the Lord* in an obedient faith that submits to His authority, and thus genuinely obeys His commandments (see John 17:3 and Amos 3:3). Therefore to continue in sin and refuse to take up the cross to follow Christ in unconditional obedience still leaves a person without the faith of Abraham- and thus without justification. **“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”** (1 John 2:3-4)

The Jewish Leaders: Consider the Jewish leaders. They saw Christ as a threat to their place in life. They reasoned that if He should continue unhindered that they would lose their position, their social status, their power, etc (see John 11:47-48). Why? They were ruling by means that were not based on the truth. They had the right views on a lot of things. Yet they were more interested in what they could get out of God's external worship than they were actually interested in worshipping God Himself! Otherwise they would have let Jesus, the ultimate Truth, to have His way to do whatever He wanted in Israel, and whatever He wanted with them. But they were idolaters who worshipped the god of self-interest before the true God. Those who resist Christ's words to hold onto things of this world follow them. Even if these say they worship “Jesus”, it is a false Jesus who is not the true Jesus of the gospels. We will see more in the chapter on the religious system the subtle evils and enmity with Christ that can be in established, and even unestablished, religion.

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea: Consider on the other hand prominent men in the Jewish community like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea.

59 i.e. Which are transgressions of the law- 1 John 3:4.

Though they were very influential men, the highest authorities in their nation were against Christ and those who identified with Him. When they identified publicly with Jesus (John 19:38-39) they were putting their own position and reputation in society, as well as their financial security, on the line. Consider also the blind man that Jesus healed in John chapter 9. He was honest about Jesus and wouldn't say what the leaders of his synagogue wanted him to say about Him- and therefore he got put out of the synagogue for doing so (see John 9:24-34). In many churches, whether you are a leader or a member, you've just got to take His words seriously and *really* confess Him as Lord- and you just might get put out too (and there is a place for leaving churches too that refuse the light of God's Word- 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). With some it's not the issue of obedience to Jesus as Lord in their private lives that is their greatest obstacle to being a subject of His kingdom; but rather it's the putting of their reputation on the line before others whose friendship/support they won't risk losing and/or whose displeasure they won't risk stirring up. But a big aspect of truly worshipping God and genuinely obeying His commandments is standing for His truth despite the potential consequences of standing for that truth before people. To esteem those potential consequences more is to commit idolatry. **"For do I now persuade (seek approval from) men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."** (Galatians 1:10)

Pontius Pilate: Consider then Pontius Pilate. He is a clear proof that the demands of the world and siding with Christ inevitably come into conflict. Pilate *could* tell that Jesus was a righteous man who was falsely accused out of envy from the Jewish leaders. His wife had told him to have nothing to do with that just man (clearly meaning that she told him to have nothing to do with His

death) because of how she had suffered greatly in a dream because of Him. He *did* want to let Jesus go. But there was a problem. The stand he had begun to take was creating a tumult (Matthew 27:24) among Christ's enemies; therefore Pilate proclaimed his own innocence and delivered Jesus to be crucified (see these things in detail in Matthew 27:11-26). *But Pilate was not innocent, despite his declaration of his own innocence.* The Bible implicates him as a partaker in Christ's murder (Acts 4:27). If the tumult continued that would mean his own safety would be on the line, as well as his job, and therefore his dreams of advancement in the Roman Empire's hierarchy. Pilate is clear proof that we either must side with Christ as Lord or inevitably side against Him. There is a popular song whose chorus goes "*Jesus is just alright with me.*" *But just alright is not going to do, not with the real Jesus anyways.* That is impossible. We must confess Him to the risk of our own interests/well-being in this world or deny Him to our own damnation in the next. We can't be neutral- to not go all the way with Him is to be against Him. We just have to take all of His words seriously, begin to stand for them, and the conflict will become evident soon enough. We need to keep standing for Him when it does. However we just need to refuse His words by not letting them mold our beliefs and our lives- and then we'll save ourselves the trouble that confessing Him as Lord brings. On the other hand though...

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (Matthew 16:24-27)

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matthew 10:32-39)

“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” (Matthew 24:9-13)

Christ was ultimately crucified because a lawless world couldn't stand the law of God honoring/law of God upholding Son of God who was a rebuke to its lawless ways. The Apostle Peter would thus rebuke the crowd in Jerusalem, telling them **“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not**

possible that he should be holden of it.” (Acts 2:22-24)

The word “**wicked**” here in Greek is “*anomos*” - which literally means “without law” or “lawless.” It was by transgressing God's law that we went astray from Him and delivered Him to be crucified on the cross. It was our lawlessness that made it necessary that Christ die for us, if we were to have ever a chance to be saved. In Christ the moral law of God is upheld, and to turn to Him we must submit to it (Romans 3:31). Those who continue in their sins crucify Christ afresh and cannot turn to Him in truth in their rebellion; while those who would truly forsake them and go the Lord's way must indeed turn to Him, who is “**the Holy One and the Just**” (Acts 3:14), the righteous King whose life and words correspond with the genuine righteousness that is in the law of God. To be on the right side of the ageless conflict we must receive Christ's reign as our Lord/King, and therefore truly be obedient to His voice.

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.” (Jesus in Luke 6:46-49)



CHAPTER 11: CAN MAN OBEY GOD? APOSTOLIC VERSUS Gnostic INFLUENCE

Does God actually expect man to obey Him? The Scriptures teach that this is so repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments. However, there have always been challenges to this plain biblical truth. Some people want to justify indulgence in the pleasure of sin, and want to believe that it is impossible that they should do anything but sin all the time. There was such a justification that was popular in the time of the early church called Gnosticism. Most today are still influenced by the Gnostic justification of sin, though few actually trace this influence to its origins in Gnosticism.

We have to find the source of the doctrines that we believe or we'll certainly be deceived. There are a multitude of popular concepts and cliches that are common in Evangelical Christianity today that are completely foreign to God's Word. And one such example that is commonly labeled "sound doctrine" is the idea that we must sin all the time. This idea can be traced back to

Gnosticism; whereas the Apostolic, biblical doctrine that we are able to, and expected to obey God, is frequently termed as heresy.⁶⁰ But error doesn't become truth, nor does truth become error, because of popular opinion.

WHAT WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GNOSTICISM

What we should know about Gnosticism is that it alleges that man's body is irreparably corrupt- and that man's spirit (inner being) is inherently good and united to God. Gnosticism⁶¹ is like New Age teaching in that it emphasizes man coming to a knowledge of the "God" inside of him. Though it's true that very few professing Christians accept this New Age idea about man's inherent divinity, *many however are influenced by Gnosticism's concept of the irreparable corruption of the human body. Sadly, the concept of an "invisible salvation" that many professing Christians have amounts to something very similar to Gnosticism, with the practical effects being virtually the same.* Professing Christians believe that their (professed) faith in Christ unites them to God and saves their spirit- while yet leaving their bodies necessarily in a corrupt condition, bound to continue sinning until the day that they die. Therefore, many professing Christians don't really believe that it is possible in this life to overcome sin and live a righteous life that is truly acceptable to God. To preach the possibility of such in the majority of churches would lead to the charge of heresy! But what does the Bible teach?

The logical outcome of Gnosticism is that those

60 At least when there's preaching that actually applies this truth to the hearers and actually calls people to be obedient to (i.e. act upon) God's Word. When that happens, Gnostic defences of sin are very likely to be employed.

61 Gnosticism comes from "gnosis"- the Greek word for knowledge.

influenced by it will have one of the following reactions.

- 1) They'll treat their body badly somehow on purpose. They may eat only a minimal amount of (probably not very good) food, maybe deliberately wear shabby clothing, they may abstain even from legitimate relations with their own spouse,⁶² and maybe will abstain from physical exercise beyond the daily demands of life. This is a false holiness which God never commanded which interferes with having the genuine holiness in Christ (see Colossians 2:8-12, 20-23). Unless somehow doing these things is necessary to love our neighbor as ourselves in extreme circumstances (i.e. in a famine/food shortage, no private room available, etc) they are unprofitable and vain, as treating the body badly doesn't deal with the real issue of sin; yet it deceives those who do so to think they are made holy thereby, when they are really not.

- 2) The much more common reaction of those influenced by Gnostic thinking is sensual indulgence, as if what you do in your body is irrelevant because your spirit is (allegedly) saved, and you (allegedly) can't control the desires of your body anyway- so why not just indulge them? This is why sins of passion and/or sensuality like anger/rage, envy, strife, hatred, neglect of good through laziness, drunkenness, gluttony, and sexually related sin (which was especially prevalent among Gnostics), are common

62 Or maybe shun getting married altogether because of the belief that doing so will make them unholy. A reason that the Word of God never gives to do so, and which the Word of God even contradicts when it says it that marriage is honorable in all. **"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers (fornicators) and adulterers God will judge."** (Hebrews 13:4)

among professing Christians deceived by Gnostic influence today.

GNOSTIC INFLUENCE REBUKED BY APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE

It was Gnostic influence creeping into early Christian churches that was a threat to deceiving the Christians into believing that it was okay that they indulge in their immorality; as well as a key reason why there were Gnostic sects that broke off from the Apostolic churches. The Apostolic churches refused to tolerate the license for sin that was/is the logical outcome of Gnostic influence. We can tell in the Apostle Paul's warning to the Christians in Corinth about fornication, that he made sure to counter Gnostic ideology in his instruction, knowing the arguments the Gnostics used to justify it. He would make it clear to them that we must glorify God in our body *as well as* in our spirit- which clearly means that to do both are possible and expected of us. **“Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”** (1 Corinthians 6:15-20)

The idea that we can be good at heart, yet be committing sin at the same time, is a common belief that is compatible with Gnosticism. Yet the Bible teaches that the true grace of God delivers those under it from sins of the

spirit *and* of the body (see again Matthew 23:25-26 here). We looked in the introduction at the true grace of God's teaching that the Apostle Paul spoke of in his letter to Titus, which is worth looking at again, as it refutes the Gnostic concept that we can't overcome sin in this life. **“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”** (Titus 2:11-15)

Most professing Christians consider the grace of God as an excuse (i.e. license) for disobedience. Often when someone talks about obedience (like we are here) someone will say something like “Hey, you're forgetting about grace.” No, as we see from Titus chapter 2, the grace of God that brings salvation teaches us to obey God (deny ungodliness and worldly lusts that we should live soberly, righteous, and godly in this present world), it redeems those under it from all iniquity (through Christ's giving Himself for us), that they might be a peculiar (unique) people, zealous of good works. Since Christianity IS about grace, Christianity therefore is about obeying God, overcoming sin, and living acceptably to God! That truth could not be any clearer.

Therefore we've been lied to about grace! We've been told that we cannot deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; we've been told that we cannot live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. We've been given the false impression that grace eliminates the need to obey God and follow Christ as our Lord anyways!

Notice here the context of the call to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints from the Book of Jude. **“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness,⁶³ and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Jude verses 3-4)**

Two men were talking about their conversions to Christ and the impact it had on their lives. One told the other how he had been looking at pornography prior to his conversion, but how afterwards he had never went back to it once. The other said *“Now that is true grace!”* He was right! The true grace of God brings forth good fruit immediately when one receives it in truth. The Apostle Paul thus described the effects of the gospel message when it was received by the Colossians. **“Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth” (Colossians 1:6).** Could it be that those who have always been bound by sin have never obeyed the true gospel message and thus received the grace of God in truth? Grace is in Jesus Christ (John 1:17), the King/Lord. It is channeled through the Holy Spirit, as we'll look more at shortly, who is given to those that obey Christ. **“Him (Christ) hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” (Acts 5:31-32)**

63 A license to pursue lust and/or to provoke others to it.

FAILING OF THE GRACE OF GOD

There is also the truth that we must yield to Christ continually. One can bow their heart to Him and be delivered from their besetting sin- and then return to it (or even get new besetting sins) when they turn from Him at heart to go their own way again. This can be particularly ugly when someone remains religious, yet is turned from Christ and trying to be holy on their own. *But the enemies of true grace accuse everyone who seeks holiness through Christ of trying to be holy on their own too, willfully ignorant that the existence of counterfeit holiness doesn't at all negate the true that we must have.*

The Apostolic instruction on grace is that we must yield to the Lord continually to not block the flow of the His grace in our lives. When the channel of grace has free course in us WE WILL overcome sin by the grace of God. *With grace's instruction to obey, comes its enabling as we obey.* **“Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?”** (Romans 6:13-16)

It is with that understanding that we can see how it is possible to fail of the grace of God, as the New Testament also teaches. If we yield ourselves to sin (i.e. neglect following peace with all men and holiness) we are refusing the grace of God- *and thus no longer under grace.* **“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any**

man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.”
(Hebrews 12:14-16)

To get a better picture of this, here are some other scriptures which also show from various angles that *with grace's instruction to obey, comes its enabling as we obey* (implying too that we can be obedient to God, and that we are therefore expected to be).

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” (John 8:31-36)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” (John 15:1-6)

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and

superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:21-27)

A KEY DISTINCTION EXAMINED

The question that almost always comes up when this topic comes up is *"How about you, don't YOU sin?"* Often the one who asks it wants to justify their own sin, as if there is really is no difference between someone who justifies and holds on to sin versus someone who forsakes it out of obedience to God (as His Word commands us to) and overcomes serving sin by the grace of God in Christ.

I remember seeing a talk show which a professing Christian woman was on. She was defending her immoral life. They brought in a pastor also to confront her (who wasn't very well prepared). He rightly said that the Bible teaches that she was living in sin. The woman was irritated and basically asked him "How is me doing what I'm doing any different from you being a liar?" The pastor didn't have an answer. I don't know if the pastor was really a liar or if he was just in over his head on television, but the following is the type of answer that she needed to hear from someone who could testify such in truth.

“There is no dishonesty in my life now. I'm not a liar currently. I've turned from lying and have made right my past lies as much as I was able to. You on the other hand are justifying your sin and holding onto it. I'm seeking justification by faith in Christ and not a perfect record before God. But the Bible is clear that Christ only justifies those who forsake the disobedient attitude towards God and the sins which put Him on the cross. To turn to Christ and believe on Him in truth we must reckon ourselves dead to sin with Him, that we might also live to God with Him. God has testified in His Word **'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid...For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord....Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?'** (Romans 6:1-2a, 10-11, 16) I hope you will come to your senses and obey the truth, ma'am.”

The Bible actually teaches that there is a key distinction *between unconscious sin and willful sin*. We need the blood of Christ to blot out all of our sins, including unconscious ones. *But we cannot be justified with willful sin in our lives*. Repeatedly in the Old Testament did God tell the disobedient that their blood sacrifices (pictures of Christ's sacrifice on the cross) profited them nothing. Why? They could only profit those whose heart had yielded to Him in obedience, who were no longer justifying/harboring their sin (see Isaiah 1:10-20 for such an example).

We see in Psalm 19:12-13 the clear distinction between secret faults (i.e. unconscious sin) and presumptuous sins/the great transgression (i.e. willful sin/rebellion against God). **“Who can understand his**

errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.” (Psalm 19:12-13)

There is such thing as faults in one's character, which even though their heart is fully obedient, they just honestly can't see yet. If such a person keeps walking in all the light they have, their spiritual senses will increase as they know God more, and they will become aware of faults in their character which they were not aware of before. And if they continue walking obediently in all the light they have, they'll not close their eyes as they become aware of those faults and/or justify them. They'll seek the Lord for victory and ask the Lord to forgive them for what they become aware of- they'll thus grow in the Lord.

On the other hand, if there is evil we persist in and/or good that we neglect to do (James 4:17), *that is willful/presumptuous sin* (which includes just closing our eyes with a “who cares?” or “whatever” approach to life in relation to God's commandments). *In that sense we must not have sin in our lives.* We absolutely cannot have that disobedient attitude towards God (the great transgression) that is manifested by presumptuous/willful sins. *There is a clear distinction then between those who are willful sinners/continuing in sin and those that aren't.*

Think about it: Without receiving this understanding, when a Christian is asked “*Do you sin?*” by an opposer, he/she is put in a terrible bind. I've seen it both ways, as you may have too. **Scenario 1:** “*Do you sin?*” “No.” “Well you're a self-righteous liar then!” **Scenario 2:** “*Do you sin?*” “Well, yes.” ‘You're a hypocrite whose just like the rest of us. You're actually worse, because you claim to be a Christian. Christians are

supposed to be a light to the world who are different from the crowd. But you just admitted that you're no different. Start to live like a Christian and then maybe we'll listen to your message."

Without that distinction between unconscious and willful sin (which we all know at heart does exist, though some won't admit it) there would be no acceptable answer to that question. However we CAN be obedient to God and therefore be different from the crowd- whether the openly godless secular crowd, the Gnostic-influenced "we have no choice but to sin crowd", as well as the crowd of those whose outward profession of a holy Christianity doesn't match their private lives.

There are numerous scriptures which absolutely CANNOT be understood without understanding the distinction between unconscious sin and willful sin. Yet in understanding that distinction they make complete sense.

"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (2 Timothy 2:19)

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:12-15)

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it

knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." (1 John 3:1-10)

GNOSTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF SCRIPTURE CONFRONTED

Many wrongly use scriptures that apply to the wicked who are not reconciled with the Lord and apply them to even the (supposedly) righteous. Of course the natural outcome of such an error is to assume that it's possible to continue in willful sin and nevertheless be righteous. Those who wrongly use the scriptures we're about to look at assume the Gnostic doctrine that overcoming sin is impossible in this life is true. Confronting the ways in which Scripture is commonly twisted to support Gnostic error could be a book in itself. For now though we'll demonstrate the errant, Gnostic-influenced abuses of two of the most commonly abused passages from Romans 3 and Romans 7.

ROMANS 3

Let's look then at Romans 3:9-20: **"What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used 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 have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."** (Romans 3:9-20)

This passage proves that those who are turned from God can't be righteous/do good in their rebellious state (see Titus 1:15-16); and it shows that they are in that state willfully (i.e. not because they can't help it, as some teach- otherwise they wouldn't be guilty before God). This passage is also given to illustrate and prove the truth of Isaiah 53:6 **"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him (Christ) the iniquity of us all."** (Isaiah 53:6) This does not change the truth that we must turn from going our own way- and if we do obey and turn, these verses no longer apply to us! We can then live for righteousness- that is what the gospel is meant to bring us to! That's why Peter told Christians **"Who (Christ) his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that**

we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. **For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.**" (1 Peter 2:24-25) "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." (1 John 3:10) "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10- consider that those which are persecuted for righteousness' sake who aren't really living righteously would be pretenders/hypocrites- not blessed!)

To further contrast those who are of God against those who are described in this passage who are not of God, here is more evidence straightforward from the scriptures. The reader can compare these descriptions of the righteous to the wicked who are described in Romans 3:9-20, given previously, and the point that Romans 3:9-20 only applies to those who are turned away from God in rebellion should be evident. This is just a sample of the numerous passages that could be given to prove this point.

"But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness."(Romans 6:17-20) "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." (Romans 15:14) "I beseech thee

for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me" (Philemon 10-11) "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6- those who don't honor God's authority and seek Him diligently are the wicked without faith- not the righteous, as they do honor God's authority and seek Him diligently, as we've seen). "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." (3 John 11) "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." (Matthew 12:35) "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:79- this is descriptive of the call to repentance through John the Baptist that we must heed to turn to Jesus Christ in truth). "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men." (Romans 14:17-18) "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Ephesians 5:8-11) "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him." (Proverbs 14:2) "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." (Acts 9:31) "Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." (Romans 3:30-31)

ROMANS 7

Many support their Gnostic-influenced belief that we can't overcome sin in our mortal bodies by the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 7. They say that the following words of Paul describe what his present experience was as a Christian at the time when he wrote them. That is a rather ridiculous claim though given the context of the Book of Romans, as we will see.

“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:14-24)

The Apostle had spoken in Romans chapter 5 of the truth that those who've been reconciled to God through Christ are partakers of a salvation through Christ's life that is an actual remedy for all the damage caused by sin's reign in them when they were enemies of God. **“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so**

might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 5:20-21) He would go in chapter 6 to warn that we cannot continue in sin that grace may abound- and would command that we let not sin reign in our mortal bodies, but instead yield the members of our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:12-13); which command is given with the Lord's promise to those who so yield **“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” (Romans 6:14)** If Romans 7 were Paul's Christian experience, then it was inferior to what he told others their experience could be!⁶⁴ These things need to be kept in mind as we go on, because God doesn't contradict Himself in His Word.

If you look at Romans 7 in your Bible, notice the flashback to the time of bondage to sin **“when we were in the flesh...”** of 7:5 (Paul grouped himself with other Christians here), compared to the present time of deliverance, the **“But now we are delivered...”** of 7:6. Paul would then do an extended flashback of his time in the flesh from 7:7-24, speaking as if he were in the present much of the time to better illustrate the struggle of a man in the flesh to fulfill God's law. By what he had said before, and by what he would say afterwards in Romans 8, about the deliverance that is ours in Christ from the law of sin and death (and no doubt was what he was walking in as well), proves that the constantly defeated man in Romans 7 was not Paul as he was living by faith in Christ, nor is it anyone who is truly abiding in Christ.

64 Note Paul's own testimony to the Thessalonians about the consistency and victory of his own life as a Christian, along with that of his Apostolic co-workers. So very different than the defeated man's of Romans 7. **“Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:10).**

The true Christian experience described in Romans 8 is the exact opposite of the powerless, defeated experience described in Romans 7. The glorious victory of deliverance from sin's death and its effects (these overcome through the life and righteousness that are in Christ's Spirit), expounded on in Romans 8, obliterates any consideration that Romans 7 was Paul's experience in the present.⁶⁵ Paul would return to contrasting the present time of deliverance opposed to the past time in the flesh in 7:25- then move back into the time of deliverance, the "now" of Romans 8:1-4. Then he would follow this by more contrasts between those in the Spirit compared to those in the flesh (from Romans 8:5-8:15).

Here we have the present experience of those truly in Christ, which was no doubt Paul's when he wrote Romans.
"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1-4)

The ultimate lesson then of Romans 7 within the context of Romans is clear: Those who won't submit to God/die to self are bound to the law and its demands upon them. It is God's wisdom that it should be that way, so that when people are confronted with His law, they should see their own carnality/corruption (stemming from rebellion against God and its effects upon the soul), and thus be given a convincing proof that their only hope

⁶⁵ As does the larger context of Romans chapters 5-8, which everything in Romans 7 must be considered in light of.

of ever being right with God and doing right in His eyes is by submitting to God/dying to self and applying His remedy for sin in the Lord Jesus Christ. The power of sin, which is strengthened by the law's demands (which never go away, as we'll see) upon a carnal person will overcome them and give them a Romans 7 experience (when they are attentive to the demands of God's law that is- most carnal people aren't- and thus aren't even in a Romans 7 distress, and therefore deceived that they're okay despite their life of sin).

As we go then into Romans 8 it's clear that Paul's experience, and what needs to be our experience, as new creatures in Christ, is described. This experience is the opposite of the carnal man's experience in Romans 7. We see that the one in Christ Jesus who is now not condemned, walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (8:1), and is freed from the law of sin and death by the Spirit (8:2). This is in contrast to the Romans 7 man who is carnal, sold under sin (7:14) and a captive to the law of sin and death, which captivity is described in 7:15-24. The Romans 8 man, through Christ's death for sin on the cross, has sin condemned in his flesh (8:3) through his genuine faith in Christ (through reckoning himself dead to sin and alive to God with Christ, as Romans 6 instructs on)- and thus by abiding in the risen Christ he walks not after the flesh, but rather after God's Spirit;⁶⁶ and thus genuinely lives to God and fulfills the righteousness of the law by the Spirit (8:4). Think again here of the words of Jesus **"And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it."** (Mark 8:34-35) For those

66

Who is given to them that obey Him- Acts 5:32

who so obey Him, their life becomes Christ's life, as it's no longer they who live (by their own authority), but Christ, whose authority they are under, who lives in them (Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:21). They thus live to God through Him. Hence the power of God that reveals the righteousness of God in their lives (Romans 1:16-17), so long as they abide in Christ.

The man in Romans 7 is trying to do specific commandments of God's law without yielding to/obeying the Lord unconditionally (settling the ageless conflict on the right side). His carnal mindset is called enmity with God, as it is not subject to God's law (Romans 8:7). He refuses to walk in the great commandments of loving God with all the heart soul, strength, and mind; and one's neighbor's as one's own self- which all the other commandments hang upon, as Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40. Therefore we can't pick and choose which sins we want to be saved from, and which ones we want to continue to enjoy the pleasures of. We can't choose which areas we turn to Him for direction and healing in, and which ones we continue to have our own way in. Those who want to be saved from specific sins without yielding control of their whole life to the Lord are left to deal with the bad consequences of rebellion against God by human means and methods. A carnal person may be seeking to control his anger and/or impute thoughts, and by being confronted with God's commandment be made more aware of his own corruption. He will find he is left to himself to overcome specific sins as long as he refuses to die to his own life to start a new life under the Lord's authority. It is the call to do that every commandment of God is meant to give to those in Adam (i.e. those living by their own authority in rebellion against God). Those who consider the true intention of God's commandments (as Jesus gave light on in the Sermon on the Mount) will be given that message of their need to repent towards God

and pointed to God's remedy for sin in Jesus Christ. Those who heed that message are brought out of darkness to light, from sin's slavery to Christ's deliverance. Those who turn their shoulder and refuse to hearken inevitably excuse their sin (or vice-versa) and plunge into deeper darkness.

Ultimately we must not live after the flesh, but after the Spirit in subjection to God/Christ to be God's children and to ultimately be saved. Those who are given the Spirit and are led by the Spirit are made alive in this life, in these mortal bodies to do God's will. **"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."** (Romans 8:11-14)

God never leaves man free to transgress His commandments without punishment. To those who won't die to self unconditionally to obey God the **"thou shalt"** and **"thou shalt not"** of God's moral law testify of who they must be and how they must live, testify of their need to submit to God, and testify of the condemnation⁶⁷ of those who won't. To the one who forsakes their disobedient attitude towards God and sets his/her heart on pleasing Him the true grace of God makes the **"thou**

67 Don't quote the first half of Romans 8:1 here to try to say there's no condemnation for those living in sin who make a profession of faith in Christ. The whole verse reads **"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."** (Romans 8:1)

shalts” and “thou shalt nots” PROMISES that they “shall” do the good God requires and “shall not” do the evil He forbids, when they abide in Christ. “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.” (Romans 6:14-15) “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Romans 8:4) Christ came to save us from our sins (Matthew 1:21)! To say that the passages about the corruption of the wicked apply to even those in Christ is really a denial of the victory of Christ's mission and of the true grace of God.

It's hard to remain in a Romans 7 state for long. You'll either submit to God and truly turn to His remedy for sin in Jesus Christ; or excuse your sin and thereby be given over to a delusion that makes you feel secure in your sin, so that it doesn't bother you much anymore (a false comfort and peace regarding the state of your soul before God). The Gnostic-influenced concept of “I have to sin as long as I am in this body” is one such common excuse for willful sin. May all who read this that have sin in their lives that they are excusing renounce all excuses for all sin now and flee to Christ to truly save them from their sins. We can walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lust of the flesh- and only then not be under the law. This view of Romans 7-8 is also supported and proven by the Apostle Paul's words in his epistle to the Galatians. **“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” (Galatians 5:16-18)**

The following chart illustrates the contrasts between those in Adam and those in Christ:

In Adam	In Christ
Refuses to be under Christ's authority	Takes up cross and dies to self to be under Christ's authority
Kingdom of Satan/Darkness	Kingdom of God/Christ/Light
Under law	Under grace
Walks after flesh	Walks after Spirit
Bound by sin (if tries to overcome specific sins)	Victory Over Sin (as those who consent to sin are necessarily in Adam, and therefore under condemnation)
Condemnation	No condemnation

THE CLASH BETWEEN APOSTOLIC AND GNOSTIC INFLUENCE SUMMARIZED

Apostolic and Gnostic influence ultimately clash on the issue of man's accountability over his own sin and the possibility, as well as necessity, of abstaining from sin's temptation in this mortal body. Apostolic doctrine says that we are accountable when we sin because it is a matter of a disobedient will that is committed to pleasing self rather than God; Gnostic influence says that the reason for sinning is a corrupt body. Apostolic doctrine says that if we will submit to God we need not, and will not, commit sin; whereas Gnostic influence says that sinning constantly

in our body is unavoidable. Apostolic doctrine says that if we are good on the inside and in God's eyes it will be shown by our (consistently) righteous deeds;⁶⁸ Gnostic influence says that we can be good on the inside, or at least good somehow in God's sight, even if our deeds are evil (as it says they will inevitably be as well). Apostolic doctrine says we can actually be delivered from sin and purified through Christ and His promises in this life/in this body; whereas Gnostic influence says that as long as we live in this mortal body we will remain slaves to sin and corruption. Apostolic doctrine teaches that those living unrighteously won't inherit God's kingdom; Gnostic influence teaches that it's inevitable that we will live unrighteously and that having salvation in Christ is "a hidden/invisible thing" that is not necessarily discernible by the way a person lives anyways. Apostolic doctrine teaches that the fear of God and a true relationship with Christ are well able to keep one from giving into temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13, Jude 24, etc); whereas Gnostic influence essentially denies that and says that the pull of one's fleshly desires (inevitably)⁶⁹ causes him/her

68 When the term "deeds" is rightly understood to refer to the quality of our motives, our attitudes, our words, etc- as well as our physical actions.

69 There's no denying that there is a weakness and a frailty to our bodies that make them very susceptible to sin (Matthew 26:41). Yet if we value God enough we'll deny ourselves and take up the cross to follow Christ as we're commanded. If we so take up the cross and abide in Christ steadfastly then we are promised sin will not have dominion over us, despite its strong pull on our bodies. And that is the point of all that's been said here- we can't separate our response to the Lord from whether we actually deny our own desires that would result in sinning if yielded to. We must value the Lord highly enough so that we will do all in our power to not yield to sin for His sake when tempted, through the right use of the spiritual armor that He has made available and through diligent prayer to Him (see

to sin.

Which set of concepts seems more like “normal, sound Christian doctrine” to you? Many, if they're honest, will have to say that the Gnostic influence sounds more like (what they've understood as) Christianity. That just shows the great deception that abounds on issues and in places that many would never suspect! It's easy to see then that a lot of concepts that many regard as Christian are actually Gnostic; and a lot of true Christian concepts have been made to seem unusual and strange. However, by the Word of God we should see through the lies, as well as by the testimony of God's law that we know naturally and which our conscience bears witness to.

When Gnostic-influenced excuses, or any other excuses, are used to excuse anyone who is living unrighteously, it is a challenge to (true) Apostolic Christianity. The doctrine of the Apostles holds people who are sinning accountable for their sin and calls them to repent. It testifies that those who continue in sin have no interest in Christ and no hope of being saved (Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:5-6, etc). It even calls that they be excluded from Christian fellowship until they turn to the Lord and forsake their sin. The Apostle Paul thus wrote: **“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or**

Ephesians 6:10-18- a very key passage and one that is very relevant with all that is being said here).

with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother⁷⁰ be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” (1 Corinthians 5:6-13)

The widespread disobedience to this scripture and the widespread Gnostic influence in churches everywhere are not unrelated. After all, if we really have no choice but to live in sin, how can anyone be expected not to? Christ doesn't have unreasonable expectations though, and the Apostles only commanded the things which they received from Him. True Christian doctrine is that we can and must obey God. Satan will always deny that truth and/or counterfeit obedience to God somehow! We need to take God's Word seriously. To be on the right side of the ageless conflict we must reject the Gnostic idea that we can't obey God and therefore reject the thought that we would ever have any excuse to consent to sin. We must be truly obedient to God like the doctrine of Christ and the Apostles teaches is possible, and expected of us.

70 Clearly meaning one who is called a Christian brother.



CHAPTER 12: A RIGHT RESPONSE TO SIN AND FAILURE: KING SAUL VERSUS KING DAVID

The way of life that is true Christianity then is to surrender to God through Christ and to walk in God's ways, keeping His commandments. We need to understand then the true repentance necessary to put us on the right way, and to turn us back into the right way if we should turn away from it. The Bible is clear that we never *need* to turn aside out of the right way ever. **"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."** (Jude 24-25) The Bible says it's possible to endure every temptation by watching and praying to the Father through Christ in humility for wisdom and strength to overcome whatever trial we face (1 Corinthians 10:12-14, Hebrews 4:14-16). Indeed, this walk is possible and must be our normal walk.

Nevertheless in learning to walk with the Lord

and learning to put on and use the whole armor of God spoken of in Ephesians 6:10-18, through the strength and/or subtlety of sin's temptation, many of us will fall. And if we do, we need to be honest about it.⁷¹ We need to know how to get back up on the right path and keep going if we sin and fail. Many will say that if you get born-again you're still saved even if you don't get back up after you sin. But we will see more in the next chapter how the Bible doesn't teach that!⁷² However if we go astray there is a way to come back, which is also the way in which we must come to Christ at first- *confessing our sin as it really is with no excuses, submitting to His righteous authority, and asking for forgiveness and cleansing for our sin through Him.*

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation⁷³ for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But

71 One major problem with the teaching that it's impossible for Christians to sin is that those who heed it will necessarily not watch and pray always like the Bible says that we must in order to not enter into temptation. Ironically, the effect of such a teaching is similar to the effect of the teaching that we must sin all the time- both these doctrines naturally keep those who believe them from taking diligent heed to abide in Christ so that they sin not- as well as from truly coming to the Lord and dealing with their sins before Him in true repentance after they have sinned.

72 For now see 2 Peter 2:19-22 and Hebrews 3:12-15.

73 i.e. atonement

whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him." (1 John 1:9-2:5)

In Israel's first two kings, Saul and David, we have a clear contrast between the wrong way and the right way to respond after one disobeys God and fails.

KING SAUL

The sin that destroyed Saul doesn't seem very serious compared with the sin that almost destroyed David. Saul's sin that destroyed him was disobedience to a commandment that the Lord gave specifically to him through the Prophet Samuel. **"Samuel also said unto Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." (1 Samuel 15:1-3)**

God had a right to give Saul this command and a very good reason to. The Amalekites, like the Canaanites whom Israel destroyed through the leadership of Joshua at God's commandment, were an exceedingly wicked people that had corrupted themselves terribly. Had the Amalekites repented of the evil of their ancestors they surely would have been spared, just like God had Israel spare some of the Canaanites who repented of the heathenish ways of their culture to worship the God of Israel, most notably Rahab (see Joshua chapters 2 & 6). Since Christ's kingdom is not of this world/not a political entity (John 18:36-37), in the New Covenant the government of God's people and the government of

society as a whole are separated. The authority therefore of God's church no longer involves the right to take vengeance on evildoers.⁷⁴ The authority to punish those who (truly) corrupt and endanger society is committed now into the hands of earthly governments that are separate from the power of the church (Romans 13:1-7).

However God told King Saul here to be His instrument of judgment and He told him exactly what to do. Saul however only did MOST of what God commanded. **“And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.”** (1 Samuel 15:7-9) Saul was told to destroy all the Amalekites and all their animals. But Saul spared Amalek's king and the best of the animals. This was a *big deal* to God. **“Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night.”** (1 Samuel 15:10-11)

When Samuel first came to Saul, Saul professed to have kept God's commandment (vs. 13). When challenged by Samuel about the noise of the animals that Saul had kept alive (vs. 14), Saul spoke the truth about his actions (vs. 15). Yet even when his disobedience was clearly proven by Samuel he maintained his own innocence and blamed the people that had been with him (verses 15-21).

74 Besides expelling from the church unrepentant sinners who try to be part of the church- 1 Corinthians 5:6-13.

It brings to mind how Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed Satan when the Lord questioned them over their sin in the garden (see Genesis 3:11-13). There can be no true repentance when the guilt of one's own sin is denied and pinned on another (even if they did tempt/influence you to sin).⁷⁵ *Shifting the blame for a sin on another, or on a circumstance, is denying it.* But if we disobey God's Word, there's no point blaming anyone or anything else. *If we are really forced into something then it could not be disobedience and therefore could not be sin on our part.* If Saul had been intent on executing God's command, and the people really wouldn't cooperate with him despite his best efforts to get them to do so, then there would have been nothing blameworthy in Saul. But Saul let the voices of the people prevail against the Lord- very similar to how Pilate would play a role in crucifying Christ about a thousand years later, because he also wasn't willing to stand against a multitude who were pressuring him to do wrong and oppose God.

It's important to understand that we must repent of our sin at its root of transgressing God's authority, *we must repent of the pride of the heart that made us think that we had the right to disobey God's commandment.* If we place the blame *at all* on a person or circumstance *we are actually defending our right to sin by the implication that the sin was inevitable because of the temptation.* Guys will say all the time "Oh, if that girl hadn't been so beautiful, but I'm sorry" or people will say "Oh, there was just such a great opportunity (that involved sin) when I needed the money so badly, but I'm sorry I did that," or "If only I had a good marriage/more money/I wasn't so stressed out at my job/that guy hadn't been so annoying/if only I had gotten more sleep, if only my life was better, etc etc." But we don't have the right

75 This applies to the Gnostic excuse of blaming one's own body too.

to lust after someone, do something financially dishonest, or commit any other sin no matter the difficulty of the temptation.⁷⁶

Consider: Has anyone ever sinned, except when they were tempted? No, not even Satan. If we cite how bad the temptation was as the prime reason that we sinned, we are not only justifying our sin and defending our right to sin, but also blasphemously implying that something we might be tempted by is more valuable and more worth serving than God is. We will see that David didn't defend himself with the temptation excuse, and therefore God restored him, unlike Saul. *If we could have done the right thing if someone put a gun to our head (insisting that we do the right thing), we definitely have no excuse to not do the right thing for the Lord's sake.* It's also possible to call your sin by a nicer name like an "error in judgment" or "a mistake." It's also highly blasphemous and dishonoring to God to equate an offense against Him with doing something innocent like taking a wrong turn or honestly forgetting to do a chore! The excuse of "I'm not perfect" is really pathetic too. It is just a way of avoiding full responsibility for your sin like Saul tried to do. We consider "I'm not perfect" as a shallow apology if we are wronged. Yet many actually think it's okay to deal with their wrongs towards God this way. These are all excuses people make that are really cop-outs against the need to own themselves for what they really are and to come into alignment with the law of God.

76 God promised in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that those who are humble and obedient to Him will not be faced with a temptation that is really too great which they could not get through by His grace. So if we think our temptations are too great we either need to repent and be obedient to God OR if we really are being obedient, He really has a way for us to overcome the temptation as long as we continue to be humble and obedient to Him.

Saul didn't think that it was so bad anyway that he didn't do all that God had said to do. He was pleased that the people were sacrificing the best things to the Lord. But Samuel would give him a rebuke that all who think they can decide how they want to serve God and don't think *a little bit of disobedience could be that bad need to take heed to*. **"And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."** (1 Samuel 15:22-23) There is great wickedness in disobedience to God, though it can look respectable and even good in the eyes of men.

At this point Saul says some good sounding words, but even these betray him. He is not interested in justifying God's Word against him, nor in obeying Him henceforth. By his words to Samuel we can see that his real interest *is self-preservation* before people. **"And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord."** (1 Samuel 15:24-25- notice too that Saul looked to Samuel for pardon, and there is no record that he sought the Lord Himself for it). After Samuel insisted to Saul that the Lord had rejected him from being king over Israel (verses 26-29), Saul would then say **"I have sinned: yet honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God."** (1 Samuel 15:30) Saul said twice that he had sinned. Isn't that enough? No, not necessarily, even if he said it with tears. He admitted that he sinned because he feared the people and obeyed their voice. True, but had

He feared God more He wouldn't have. But ironically, a minute later he is telling Samuel **"I have sinned: yet honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel..."** The mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart- Saul's confession that he sinned was given so he could retain his honor before the people and his position as king. Ironically, it was the same seeking honor of people over God's that led him to transgress to begin with!

We can't be right with the Lord if we are seeking the honor of people ahead of His honor. Seeking the two are mutually exclusive. Jesus said **"How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44)** The Apostle Paul said **"For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."** (Galatians 1:10) There is a time when saying "I have sinned" can be said selfishly, especially when it's not accompanied by a real admission of guilt.⁷⁷ We'll see that in David's case his concern was God's interest and God's honor in his repentance- not his own honor in the eyes of people nor his own satisfaction.

We know what happened with Saul. He continued as king for a while and reigned by his own self-interest. He would repeatedly persecute and try to kill the young man, David, who had become the star of Israel's army, whom Saul considered a threat to his throne. David hadn't done anything to him besides be a faithful warrior and attendant of his, yet Saul didn't care. Eventually Saul would show his unrepentant, lawless spirit by actually

⁷⁷ The biblical sense of the word "sinned" implies guilt- but many, like Saul use it in a wrong spirit, as if to say "I couldn't help what I did. So let's move on and forget this happened."

going to visit a witch to find counsel when he was faced with a battle that he knew he'd be overmatched in (1 Samuel chapter 28). He would die in that battle, of which we are told **"So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; And enquired not of the Lord: therefore he (the Lord) slew him (Saul), and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."** (1 Chronicles 10:13-14)

KING DAVID

King David overcame many trials and temptations in his youth. He was exalted from being a shepherd boy because of his genuine zeal for the Lord and his blameless life. He even had a few easy opportunities to kill King Saul when Saul was persecuting him and trying to kill him. He refused to do this because God had anointed Saul as king and he rightfully feared to kill one whom the Lord had anointed. He left vengeance in God's hand,⁷⁸ and as we know from the previously quoted 1 Chronicles 10:13-14, the Lord took vengeance on Saul Himself and gave the kingdom to David.

After having been promoted to King of Israel, and having a prosperous reign for a good while as king, David became complacent. When Israel went to battle he didn't go. His great chain of transgression started with laziness, then it became lust (the root of adultery- Matthew 5:27-28), and soon it became the physical act of adultery. The woman he committed adultery with, Bathsheba, became pregnant. When David sent for her husband Uriah, a chief soldier in his army, he was unsuccessful in getting him to go to his own house while Israel was at battle (an

78 See 1 Samuel 26:7-11

attempt to make Bathsheba's pregnancy not seem suspicious). Uriah wouldn't allow himself pleasure with his wife that his fellow-soldiers, who were away at battle and enduring hardship, couldn't have at the moment. With no way to hide his adulterously begotten child, David therefore made arrangements for Uriah to be placed in an especially dangerous place in a heated battle, and forsaken in it, so that he would die. The plan was executed. David then took Bathsheba as his wife. King David had gone from a godly man to an adulterer and a murderer quickly. His plan to hide his adultery by murder seemed to have worked. However the Scripture notes **"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."** (2 Samuel 11:27b)

The Lord sent Nathan the Prophet with a wise rebuke for David's sin. He didn't directly rebuke David for what he did, but rather told a story about "a rich man" who had done a heinous crime against a poor man. When David was angered at what the man did and proclaimed how the man should die for what he did and have to restore what he had taken four times, Nathan then boldly told David **"Thou art the man."** He then recounted God's blessings to David to show the extreme unreasonableness of his sin. Though there could never be any justification for what David did, his sin was aggravated by the fact that he already had more than he could want anyway. Nathan then went on to say **"Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me,⁷⁹ and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will**

79 Notice by the underlined phrases the truth that despising God's commandment equals despising Him.

raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.” (2 Samuel 12:9-12)

Though David's sin seems worse than Saul's (and in terms of harm done to people, it was) they both involved the great transgression- despising God's commandment, and by extension, despising God. Note though how David's response to rebuke for his sin is so different from Saul's. **“And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.” (2 Samuel 12:13a)** No self-justification about how beautiful Bathsheba was or about how he had it so hard because of his position and how easy it was for someone like him to think they'd get away with it, no protest about what bad luck it was that Bathsheba had gotten pregnant “the very first time.” There was no protest about the chastening that Nathan said God would bring on David and his house. David would fast and pray for the life of the child Bathsheba was carrying that Nathan would go on to say would surely die (see 2 Samuel 12:14-23). But that was not a matter of self-preservation, but a plea for an innocent life that was being taken in place of his for his evil deeds. Even when that life was taken which David desperately wanted saved and which he pleaded with God earnestly to spare in fasting for about a week, he submitted to God's dealings without complaint/anger at God and worshipped Him still (2 Samuel 12:14-20).

Note too that David said he **“sinned against the Lord”** unlike Saul who merely said **“I have sinned.”** This was no public relations statement, it's possible to say the right words when you know what you “ought to say” but David didn't say this to look good in the media (or before

the religious people around him, “the church”). He regarded God's worship and honor as having been violated by his sin, and was grieved at himself over that. He dealt with his sin at its root. If we call our sin for what it is and don't justify it all there is no guile in our spirit (Psalm 32:2). If that's really so, we're also acknowledging that we have no right to continue in it and that we have no right to continue in any sin at all.⁸⁰ We're also thus acknowledging, like David, the need to make restitution in making right whatever wrong we've done the best we are able to. That's what truly repentant people do.⁸¹

*When there is no zeal to honor God's law, no zeal for Christ's interest, for holiness, for purity, zeal to be reconciled with those we've hurt/refused to forgive, etc then there is no true repentance. True repentance will seem radical to the unrepentant, or it is probably not true repentance at all. **“Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”** (2 Corinthians 7:9-11)* This must be our response to sin and failure if we are to make the right response. This response can be seen in David by a reading of Psalm 51, which many believe he wrote just after Nathan the Prophet rebuked him.

80 Remember how Jesus told the woman caught in adultery **“Go and sin no more.”** (John 8:11b)

81 Remember here the account of Zaccheus the tax collector from Luke 19:1-10.

True repentance accepts God's discipline without murmuring and complaining. Just because we repent of a sin doesn't mean there won't be consequences for the sin. Often they are just natural consequences that the Lord doesn't intervene to stop. He may also drive the lesson we need to learn home to us in a painful way to produce a deeper brokenness in us and a fear to sin. He might also do this as an example to make others fear,⁸² or for other reasons that only He knows. Such discipline happened to David more than once.

David's son Absalom eventually rebelled against him and got a following to crown him (Absalom) king and to help him invade Jerusalem. When this happened David saw God's chastening hand (remember how Nathan had said that the Lord would raise up evil against David out of his own house). David didn't fight for his kingdom. He left Jerusalem as Absalom was coming, ready to accept whatever happened to him. This was so different from Saul who, when he was king, persecuted a young David and tried to eliminate him- even though young David wasn't even a rebel against Saul, like Absalom was against David. **"And the king (David) said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation: But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him."** (2 Samuel 15:25-26) *David was intent on being the Lord's and serving Him even if he lost his position and his honor before men.* He proved that when such loss actually happened. This is a necessary characteristic of a right response to sin and failure.

82 And it is a biblical truth that we should fear to sin and learn from the rebuke and chastening of others who sin, especially when leaders who sin are rebuked/chastened- see 1 Timothy 5:19-20.

David's men would eventually defeat Absalom and David was restored to the throne. David **"died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor"** (1 **Chronicles 29:28**). He is proof that one can possibly be restored and overcome after a very great sin, while Saul is proof that one's destruction can come from an act of disobedience to God's voice that is not even a big deal to most people. Their response afterwards made the difference. Those who respond like King David care more about honoring God by getting back on the right path and doing their best, even when in a cast-down/shamed state, than they care for holding on to self-pity in such a state (the sorrow of the world which works death- 2 Corinthians 7:10). The example of King David gives hope that we can repent and find mercy of the Lord- and by His grace, rise up and yet walk victoriously with Him, though we have failed badly before.

The caution should be given though that David came to hate his own sin with intense, bitter grief (as Psalm 51 proves). Some take comfort in David's sin, as if sin isn't such a big deal because David got restored. That is a lie from the pit of hell! *The hatred and utter detestation of God over what David did, and how David eventually aligned himself with God's mind regarding his sin and was only restored because he did so, should make us hate the sin all the more intensely!* The Bible speaks of the damnation of those who have pleasure/express approval over the sins of others (Romans 1:32, Proverbs 28:4, etc). *That certainly includes pleasure in the sins of people in the Bible- even if the people themselves repented and were restored.* The fact that we have the lessons and warnings from the lives of people in the Bible makes us all the more guilty if we don't learn from them and thus continue in sin. To end up on the right side of this ageless conflict we need to have a right response to sin and failure, with no sin in our lives

justified and/or harbored. Saul continued to disobey God's voice after he sinned and failed; David returned to the Lord that he might heed His voice.



CHAPTER 13: WORTHY OF THE KINGDOM: THE NEED TO BE ALTOGETHER FOR THE LORD

We have shown throughout this book that the purpose of the true gospel of Christ is to bring us back under God's authority from a life of disobedience to Him. There can be no "easy out" out on this issue for us if we are to be saved. You will hear many (alleged) "outs", many voices offering an easier way, while calling the truth set forth here as being too severe and/or fanatical. There are also many counterfeits to obedience to God/Christ that substitute partial obedience or something He never commanded at all in place of unconditional obedience to His Word. The sure way, and the only way, to be saved from deception is to come to God's Word honestly and diligently, praying to God in truth to show you the right way- and obeying that revelation as soon as you possibly can. That is the faith of Abraham- he took God at His Word, believing that He IS God. He acted on what God told Him instantly (Genesis 22:1-3). He abandoned control of Himself to the Lord. This must be our faith in response to the Word of God. The times Abraham went astray, he

turned back to this faith.⁸³ That must be our response if we are gone astray/should go astray.

What we need to know is that the Lord will work to persuade us to make the right choice, but we can ignore Him rather easily if we really don't want Him to have His way. He won't force us. He'll let us be deceived by the lies around us if we really don't want to walk in the truth. There are many voices that will offer the type of religion we want, one in which we don't really have to turn from sin and obey God's Word unconditionally. The serpent's lie of **"Ye shall not surely die"** (Genesis 3:4) is alive and well. That should bring great concern, to say the least. If we really just want to live our own lives and not be bothered with going all the way with Him in obedience, He just may honor that and not bother us until the inevitable day of judgment when the chance to make the right choice is gone. We have a small window of opportunity to prepare to meet our God that won't open again once it is shut (Proverbs 29:1). Those in Noah's time found that out.

The greatest danger that most of us face is a "Christianity" all around us that makes disobedience to God and unholiness not seem like a very big deal- and that makes true obedience to God and genuine holiness seem crazy, fanatical, extreme, etc.⁸⁴ A "Christianity" where living "somewhat" Christian and obeying "some", or even

83 See chapter 6 where this was discussed in detail.

84 Some counterfeits of obedience to God could seem this way, and indeed *really* be crazy. The true obedience to God should never seem crazy at all- it is what we were made for! I mean here that even the genuine obedience will seem this way to those who fear not God- even to multitudes of professing Christians. We need to come to the Word of God and honestly learn of Christ (Matthew 11:28-30) the true will of God- that we might do it (James 1:21-27)!

“a lot”, of the light you have is considered enough. A “Christianity” where you can answer the following question of “*Are you hearing the Word of God regularly and obeying everything you possibly can?*” with an answer of “Well, not exactly”, and few people, maybe nobody else at all, will even warn you that you need to repent and truly regard Jesus Christ (whom the Bible is a testimony of) as Lord. A “Christianity” that doesn't require you to live an ALTOGETHER Christian life; a “normalization” of disobedience to God and unholiness among even those who profess to know Christ.

“This know also, that in the last days perilous⁸⁵ times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent,⁸⁶ fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness,⁸⁷ but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

SUBJECTION TO THE TRUTH MEANS ALIGNMENT WITH THE TRUTH

That is the issue of the ageless conflict- we can't be a saved Christian who truly worships God while disregarding/brushing off/casting aside/disobeying what God's Word says. We can't live two separate lives, even if the “Christian” part is the dominant part. We can't pick and choose what we'd like to obey/believe that the Bible teaches, and that which we'd rather not. Some things may

85 Extremely dangerous

86 Without self-control

87 Meaning a form (appearance) of Christianity, obviously- hence the peril (danger) in it.

not honestly make sense to us, we may need time to pray and get a clearer understanding on some things that honestly seem complicated to us, we may be limited in some ways (i.e. through maybe not having an ideal church to serve God in available to us), *but there needs to be a total willingness to change our lives and our beliefs to align with the truth.*

This means opening our eyes and our ears for God's answers to the things we're confused about (otherwise praying for wisdom in something is mocking Him). **"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not;⁸⁸ and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."** (James 1:5-8)

A girl gave her testimony about how she had come to dress modestly in ways that she would have shuttered to dress at one time. She said something like "Just ask God to show you what's acceptable, and you'll be amazed at how you change in one year." When we take off the self-imposed conditions of receiving truth, our eyes will be opened to truth. If you ever became a true Christian you *did* take off the self-imposed conditions regarding the place of supreme authority God/Christ should have in your life (Acts 5:31-32). If you never have done so, that is what you need to do. And if you have, you must continue in that way. **"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"** (Acts 16:31a) **"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name**

88 i.e. Doesn't scold for asking.

of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:12-13) Our heart must be obedient to Christ's word and willing to be changed/molded thereby, or we mock Him by calling Him Lord. He truly said **“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46)** If we refuse Christ's word (and refusing could simply be not seeking the truth from it with a willingness to change), no matter how “right” our reason to seems, *we are then denying Him.* **“Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth⁸⁹ my voice.” (John 18:37)**

THE NEED TO ENDURE IN THE FAITH AND BE WORTHY OF THE KINGDOM

So we need to be subject to Christ and thus obey the true gospel, and we need to continue in subjection/obedience to Him (Colossians 2:6-7, Hebrews 12:25-29, etc). It's often said “We didn't do anything to be saved, so we can't do anything to lose our salvation.” Though we didn't/can't do a literal work with our hands to earn our salvation, the constant condition of being a partaker of Christ (i.e. true faith/the faith of Abraham) is that we be subject to Christ at heart with a willingness to obey Him. *When there's a true willingness to obey, there will be true obedience.* When one is being disobedient to Christ who was once obedient, it happens because their heart turned away from subjection/obedience to Him. We are thus warned that those who are disobedient to God's voice and turn back to sin cease to be partakers of Christ.

“Take heed, brethren,⁹⁰ lest there be in any of

89 Heeds/obeys His voice- see also Luke 8:21.

90 Some people dismiss this passage's relevance for us now, saying it was written to Jews who weren't Christians. But

you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation⁹¹." (Hebrews 3:12-15)

It is true that Christ is the Great Shepherd and Keeper of the souls of His people, whose hand no external force⁹² can tear them from. Yet His keeping us unto eternal life to never perish is conditioned on our heeding

verse 1 of this very chapter shows that Hebrews is indeed addressed to Christians. **"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus"** (Hebrews 3:1) Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians, like the Gospel according to Matthew and the Book of James were. These books therefore apply to all Christians, just as the New Testament epistles written to gentile Christians apply also to Jewish Christians. True Jewish and true gentile Christians are made one body in Christ (Ephesians 2:13-22, 3:6). There is only one Christian faith and one Lord, with the same conditions for all who are/would be Christians (Ephesians 4:4-6).

91 A reference to the Israelites' refusal to obey God's Word and enter the promised land of Canaan in Numbers chapter 14.

92 See also Romans 8:35-39 where this truth is further proven. Multiple external forces are cited as never being able to separate God's people from the love of God in Jesus Christ their Lord. But one item that is not on that list is our own sin/disobedience, because where that exists in one they are no longer glorifying Christ as Lord. In that case, one is necessarily separated from the love of God in Jesus Christ the Lord through their own rebellion/disobedience- which by its very nature could never do anything besides separate a rebellious person from God/Christ, as was seen in the garden at the beginning of history and as we've seen throughout this book. See also Isaiah 59:1-2 in the context of Isaiah chapter 59.

His voice that we might know Him in truth and follow Him in obedient faith (i.e. really be among His true people that aren't gone astray from Him).⁹³ That is often not pointed out when the following verses from John 10 are preached on, though that is a plain truth that Christ gives therein. **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.”** (John 10:27-30)

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge⁹⁴ of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” (2 Peter 2:20-22)

We must be worthy of entering the kingdom of

93 **“That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord God.”** (Ezekiel 14:11)

94 The Greek word translated as “knowledge” here is *epignosis*- a reference to the true, experiential knowledge of God- this verse then is talking about the state of those who were true Christians that turned back to disobedience/sin. If they were still saved in that state then it would still be better for them than it was before they knew the way of righteousness- but Peter clearly said that they would have been better off if they hadn't known it. I dare say such are no longer saved in that state.

God in the sense that we must choose Christ and being an obedient subject of His kingdom over the pleasures of sin and things of this world that would require denying Him in order to have (or maybe even to seek to have). The power/ability to endure to the end must come through abiding in an obedient relationship with Christ. We have the responsibility to keep coming to Him in faith for strength and wisdom to do His will, even though it will very often appear easier and better *for the moment* to go our own way in disobedience/sin. We are thus given many instructions along those lines regarding continuing on the right way and overcoming trials and temptations so that God will accept us at the end as those whom He regards as worthy of His eternal kingdom.

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” (Hebrews 10:35-36)

We are also given many warnings as well about turning away from the Lord and losing out on God's eternal kingdom, as we have seen examples of. Over and over the Bible testifies of our need to be worthy of entering the kingdom, in the biblical sense of the word “worthy” that we are looking at here. These are truths that will be opposed greatly in many circles of professing Christians, but we can't ignore the Word of God, though the doctrines/theologies of many attempt to explain plain

truth from His Word away. It's no wonder that Satan would seek to bring so much confusion over this essential issue. The serpent's initial words in his initial attack on mankind were **"Yea, hath God said...?"** *If he can move us from the exact words God has spoken, he's got us where he wants us.* We need to stand on the **"it is written"** of the Word of God like Jesus did when He was tempted of Satan so that we can have a clear, renewed understanding based on truth (the truth sets free), and so that we don't oppose the truth. Many will be horribly shocked to learn on judgment day that the holy standard of first-century, Apostolic Christianity never changed.

Jesus said the following about our need to be worthy of being a partaker of Him: **"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny⁹⁵ me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."** (Matthew 10:32-39)

"But they which shall be accounted worthy to

95 It's possible to deny Him by our works- see for example Titus 1:16 with Luke 6:46.

obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead,⁹⁶ neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.” (Luke 20:35-36)

The Apostle Paul would say: **“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.” (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)**

“Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” (1 Thessalonians 2:10-13)

There is a suffering that we must endure to inherit Christ's kingdom. If we are not absolutely fixed on siding with Him and being on the right side of the ageless conflict we have no chance of enduring. This world is opposed to Christ (James 4:4) as much now as when He was crucified. It would crucify Him again if it could, and it fights against those who are/would be on His side

96 Obviously the wicked are raised again bodily too- but unto the second death in the lake of fire- not the resurrection of life- see Daniel 12:2 with Revelation 20:14-15.

(sometimes directly and openly, and very often in a very subtle manner). Consider how Pilate wanted to release Christ, but his efforts to do it peacefully failed, and a tumult arose (Matthew 27:24). He backed down and gave in to the voices of the crowd (Luke 23:23-25), though he (falsely) proclaimed his own innocence. Just let Jesus really be Lord and obey Him unconditionally, don't seek trouble with anyone (as we shouldn't), and you will find opposition quickly somehow that calls you to turn against Christ. There will be a raging battle, if not outwardly, at least in your own heart. We can't back down then like Pilate did when faced with a tumult. We may proclaim our own innocence in backing down, but we can't fool God. We must value Christ's righteous reign over us more than our lives in this world. In that sense, when we understand that we can only stand by knowing the resurrected Christ and by the strength He gives to those who abide in Him, we must in thus siding with His reign and trusting Him therein through tribulation/temptation, be worthy of the kingdom of God/worthy to partake in His eternal glory.

“And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:21-22- see also 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12)

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:17-18)

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty

hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 5:6-11)

HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD

When we are subject to Christ, as the gospel calls us to be, we will be holy and acceptable to God. A life of true faith always is.⁹⁷ **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable⁹⁸ service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."** (Romans 12:1-2)

The choice to so offer ourselves to the Lord is the choice of whether we'll obey the great commandment to love God with our all or not (Matthew 22:37-38); and therefore the second that is like unto it of **"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"** (Matthew 22:39). Though some say that such obedience is impossible, in God's eyes it is. It is a matter of the will to give Him the glory and obedience He is due, not a matter of strict justice and of technical disqualification. With this understanding God could even say of men like King Josiah in the Old

97 See Hebrews 11:1-6. Actually, see all of Hebrews chapters 11-13 which deal thoroughly with this truth.

98 This word could also be translated as "logical."

Testament that they truly obeyed Him in keeping the great commandment (see 2 Kings 23:3 with 2 Kings 23:25). And we are even told in the Bible how God was merciful to preserve Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah **“Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.” (1 Kings 15:5)** Just reading through the books of Kings and Chronicles shows how God distinguishes between those who do right in His eyes and those who do evil in His eyes. How much more then are we, under a better covenant, able and expected to turn to the Lord with our whole hearts and do right in His eyes, by obeying that which He has commanded us?

We see a sample of this instruction in Romans 12 after the call to yield ourselves to the Lord. We see then commandments that are based upon Jesus' words in the gospels that we are actually expected to obey (Matthew 28:16-20); and only truly can obey when the issue of God's rightful authority over us through Christ has been settled on the right side of the ageless conflict. We can only be Christ's obedient subjects when there is no rivalry to Him in our affections, and our (supposed) “right” to refuse Him has been renounced (i.e. His authority as Lord is received unconditionally- see Luke 14:25-33). Otherwise we can't truly be obedient to His commandments, having refused the foundation of obedience to God. This refusal is therefore called **“the great transgression.” (Psalm 19:13)**

Some say we just have to be concerned about the great commandment and no other commandments- and they thus foolishly scorn large portions of the Bible. *However being obedient to the great commandment means receiving specific instruction from the whole counsel of God's Word. All of God's commandments are upheld by the commands to love God with our all and to love our*

neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 7:12, Matthew 22:40). We are thus commanded as Romans 12 goes on:

“Let love be without dissimulation.⁹⁹ Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”
(Romans 12:9-21)

It's in how we receive the specific instruction of God's Word that shows whether we really love Him with all of our hearts, whether we're really settling the ageless conflict on the right side (provided that we don't pick and choose what we want to obey from His Word and what we don't, as many do). We're warned of the possibility of denying the faith (denying Christ) by disobedience in any of many possible ways, implying that we are obligated to obey in such ways. Our response in them shows our true response to Christ.

99 Without falsehood/not fake

We are warned that setting our hearts on riches/becoming rich will lead us into temptations/traps/many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown people in destruction and eternal damnation (1 Timothy 6:9-10); and likewise warned of the Word of God being choked in us with cares and riches and pleasures of this life (Luke 8:14- giving such pre-eminence over hearing and obeying the Word of God is idolatry); we are warned that if we refuse to forgive/hold a grudge against anyone that we will not be forgiven (Matthew 18:23-35); we are told that those who neglect to support their own family and household (who need support) deny the faith and are worse than (most) unbelievers (1 Timothy 5:8); we are commanded to abstain from fornication (sexually related sin) with the guarantee of God's wrath upon fornicators (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Hebrews 13:4, etc); we are warned of the damnation of those who refuse to be subject to God-ordained authority (government, parents, etc- Romans 13:1-7); as well as warned about the damnation of idolaters, which include those who disobey God's commandments/deny Christ out of pressure from man, even from a God-ordained authority that we are required to obey otherwise¹⁰⁰ (Luke 12:4-9, Acts 4:18-20); we are told that Christ will be ashamed at His second coming of those who are ashamed of Him and His words in this life¹⁰¹ (Luke 9:26, Revelation 21:8); we are commanded multiple times to walk honestly towards all and guaranteed multiple times that liars will have their part in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8, Revelation 22:15); we are

100 More on this in Appendix 2

101 Even the thief on the cross in Luke chapter 23:39-43 confessed Christ by rebuking the other criminal who was reviling Christ for his lack of fear towards God, by acknowledging his own rightful condemnation, and by calling on Jesus as Lord in sincere faith publicly (which is essentially the same as what baptism represents, when done for the right reason).

told of the absolute need to endure trials/persecution for Christ's sake when obeying Him requires that we face them, and are told that those who don't endure them won't be saved (Hebrews 10:32-39, Matthew 11:1-6, Matthew 13:21, Matthew 24:9-13, etc); we are told of the need not to forsake the fellowship of other Christians to endure in the faith (Hebrews 10:23-25), as well as told of the requirement to minister to other Christians in any type of need in order to respond rightly to Christ Himself (Matthew 25:31-46).¹⁰²

Those are just some key examples of the specific commandments and principles that we are required to be obedient to if we will really settle the ageless conflict on the right side and honor Christ as Lord in truth, without turning back. We need of course to hear the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:26-27). There is no substitute for that. These things should also all be taken in light of the previous chapter on a right response to sin and failure, so no one will unnecessarily feel that they now have no hope of being saved (over sin that they are willing to repent from in truth, like the Apostle Peter repented-who found mercy and restoration after he had denied Christ).

It's obvious then that the need to set our hearts on obedience to Christ and following through on that is a necessary response to gospel of the kingdom, the true gospel message. God is glorified by true obedience to Him from the heart, and in that sense we must indeed do good and be worthy of God's kingdom. To many that is

102 For those who have little solid Christian fellowship available to them and/or have few means to bless other Christians, remember that Jesus said that he who is faithful in that which is least is faithful in much; and he who is unjust in the least is unjust also in much- Luke 16:10).

heresy. But true heresy is to deny the words of Christ. To receive His words we must sound like heretics to those whose man-made doctrines/theologies have no place for the whole counsel of God's Word and the plain truths it teaches.

“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” (John 5:22-29)

“Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.” (Luke 13:23-27)

“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” (Matthew 24:9-14)

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful (i.e. cowardly- the disobedient to God out of fear of man/fear of discomfort), and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers (i.e. fornicators/the sexually immoral), and sorcerers (which include those who practice magic/witchcraft/wizardry, those who get high on drugs and/or drunk, and those who willingly aid others therein), and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:7-8)

GENUINE OBEDIENCE GLORIFIES GOD· DISOBEDIENCE DISHONORS HIM

It is interesting in a troubling way how many are so afraid to say that a person's obedience to God should have anything to do with their salvation. They say that this steals glory from Christ. Not so- He died to reconcile man to God- not God to man (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). To deny the need for man's unconditional obedience to God as a necessary foundation of the gospel of Christ is the equivalent of saying that God lets rebellious man fight against His righteous authority, and win in his resistance, by saving rebellious man anyway. That idea is truly

blasphemous and really does steal glory from God! God says in His Word that His name is polluted through man's disobedience to His commandments (see Jeremiah 34:10). From heaven's perspective,¹⁰³ God is glorified and praised by man's genuine obedience to Him.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:22-27)

“And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” (Revelation 19:5-8)

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of

103 The perspective we need to align ourselves with.

his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (Revelation 14:6-7)

The necessity that we prepare to meet the Lord and be obedient to Him doesn't contradict the gospel message; it is a necessary element of it.¹⁰⁴ **"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." (Jude 20-21) "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." (John 14:23-24)**

Therefore we should do whatever we need to in order to get in line with the Lord and His Christ. Peter thus testified to and exhorted the crowd that he preached to on the day of Pentecost **"Save yourselves from this untoward¹⁰⁵ generation."** (Acts 2:40b) The Apostolic truth is that there is no true repentance and thus no true faith in Jesus Christ in those who do not save themselves from this wayward generation by forsaking the disobedient attitude towards God which put Christ on the cross; and which will be the cause of God's coming wrath upon the world. Many are all too ready to accept a false salvation that doesn't insist that we die to ourselves to obey God unconditionally in whatever His Word commands (i.e. honor His authority as God). Many are willing to do almost anything and/or give up almost anything so long

104 Again, remember the stated purpose of the gospel given in Romans 1:1-5 and Romans 15:16-19 as that of making those of all nations obedient to Christ the Lord by word and deed.

105 i.e. Wayward/out of line

as they can avoid the sword of the Lord's judgment (1 Peter 4:6) putting to death their life of independence from God's authority (i.e. avoid taking up the cross to follow Christ in truth). God's true people however do die to themselves and render such unconditional obedience to His authority, no matter how inconvenient and hard it seems to them. This has been the condition to be on the Lord's side since the beginning of time- and that truth will never change. *Therefore it is the ageless conflict.* We do well to get on the right side of it and to refuse to depart.

“And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and shew thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers; When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God.”
(Deuteronomy 13:17-18)

“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.” (Matthew 12:30)

“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.” (Romans 16:25-27)



APPENDIX 1: EXPOSING THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

One key enemy that is against all of us coming out on the right side of the ageless conflict is the religious system. It could destroy us if we are ensnared in it and are a part of it. It could also destroy us if we react to it in such a way that we become bitter towards everything related to “church” gatherings and church authority, even the gathering of God's true people and true authority from true men of God.

To understand the religious system we need to understand that it is not limited to one church/denomination, though several churches and denominations are inherently part of the religious system. The religious system can be traced to the building of the city and the tower of Babel that is recorded in Genesis chapter 11.

“And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” (Genesis 11:4)

The religious system is planned by man, built by man, for man's honor/name- like all schemes that men try to accomplish without God. Sometimes though, as is especially the case with the religious system, God's name may still be invoked and given lip-service in these schemes. God would come down to see the city and tower, and confound the language of the people so that they could not unite to accomplish their evil imagination. From thence He would scatter the people abroad upon the face of the earth (Genesis 11:5-9). Unity that is not based upon God's truth, but upon man's convenience and glory, is an abomination to God. The push for worldwide unity of this nature is very strong in the last days, and the religious system is/will be a key part of that. But the Lord will confound this unity (which will be the kingdom of the beast/antichrist in its maturity), and will destroy rebellious man's glory at Christ's second coming.

“And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of? (Isaiah 2:17-22)

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

Since the religious system is by man's appointment (instead of by God's commandment), by man's own power (instead of man's dependence on God in poverty of spirit), and for man's glory (instead of God's), it therefore is influenced heavily by the changing trends of culture. It is about giving the people what they want, so long as it preserves the power of the leaders and doesn't affect their salaries, job benefits, and titles too much. It is about catering to the desire of people to feel good and religious, people's desire to feel like they've done their duty and couldn't be "that bad" because they "go to church." In revolving around man, it is also about providing support, comforts, and/or honor for those who provide the "religious services" to the people.

It shouldn't be a surprise that the religious system will (often) use the Bible; it couldn't be a counterfeit of God's pure worship if it didn't! Even religions that admit the Bible is not their authority will still quote a half-verse of it here or there if (they believe) it supports *their* beliefs and standards. *However even the groups in the religious system that say the Bible is an authority to them will not preach the whole counsel of God in the Bible. They will be selective in the passages they choose and the topics they choose to give attention to.¹⁰⁶ Otherwise, they'd not be part of the religious system anymore!*

The thing is, most of the people would be gone in that case, as the multitude of Jesus' disciples dwindled upon His hard sayings (John 6:60-69, Luke 14:25-33). This

106 This goes hand-in-hand with chapter 7 on false prophets. False prophets and the religious system were made for each other- literally!

would also necessarily mean that the leaders' financial support and honor would dwindle too. But remember that the religious system, though it uses God's name, is about serving man. Therefore the preaching of the whole counsel of God (preaching God as He has really revealed Himself in Scripture and preaching what He actually requires of us) and the religious system *by their very natures cannot co-exist*. The whole counsel of God puts God and man in their proper place- the religious system makes (seeks to make anyway) God a slave to man's preferences. The whole counsel of God being proclaimed in the religious system is truly as crazy as the world being turned upside down (Acts 17:6). Therefore, though the religious system uses the Bible, it disregards the Bible in reality.

The essence of the religious system is: We don't REALLY care what the Bible says. Wherever that attitude is, and there is yet a religious group/service, there you have the religious system. That is how it can be recognized, whether this attitude should be in a church with a billion members that spans the whole world, a mega-church that fills a basketball arena, at a small-town chapel, or a small house gathering of 1-10 families.¹⁰⁷

107 That is, when they care more for their comfortable group and its advantages to them of making them feel secure and of meeting their social needs, than they do for obeying God's Word and being a true testimony for Christ to the world around them (which makes life messy and uncomfortable when seriously undertaken- or at least risks that). The same can even really be said of the family or single person who "has church on their own" and is unwilling for things to be otherwise (which we'll deal with more shortly). They may think they're out of the system, but the system is certainly not out of them. While many seek their own comfort/feel-good satisfaction at large churches, these *do the very same thing in a different way*.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Now of course the leaders/defenders of the religious system rarely say directly that they don't care what the Bible says. They may have other "prophets" or church tradition that will be given priority over what the Bible says, though they claim to accept the Bible as from God too. However to truly accept the Bible as God's Word does indeed mean taking it as the sole source of doctrine and practice, whereby the words of all other people, councils, etc must be filtered through to discern whether what they say is true/valid or not. The Apostolic declaration on the perfect sufficiency of the Scriptures to make us wise unto salvation and to equip us for every good work makes this necessary. **"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."** (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

However, a group may still say that the Bible is their sole inspiration for their worship, and yet still be part of the religious system. Often when confronted with what the Bible says on areas of doctrine and topics where they are in error/in the wrong, the one showing the error will just be ignored or attacked. I've heard of one church service where the pastor's point in his message was questioned by one of the people during the time after the sermon that was open for the people in the congregation to share (something most churches don't even have, but this one did). The pastor in this case didn't even address the man's concern at all. He just said "The pastor knows the Bible better than the people" and left it at that. Arrogance indeed, however many go about it in a more

cordial way, *yet still refuse to be corrected by Scripture*. A true church leader can be approached and questioned about what he is teaching¹⁰⁸ and handle that scrutiny by proving the things he has taught thoroughly from the Bible. And if he can't, he'll honestly consider that he may be wrong and need to change. We are told in James about one with godly wisdom, whether church leader or not **"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."** (James 3:17)

With this understanding, it can be seen how a church/group can go from being part of the religious system to being a true church when it humbles itself (particularly the leaders thereof) to be ruled by the authority of God's Word, and to therefore change to align itself with the Word's instruction. We can see as well how a group that was a true church at one time can go from being such to becoming part of the religious system, should it harden itself (particularly the leaders thereof) against the instruction of Scripture.

The Bible is a book with clear truth that we are obligated to receive and obey, as we saw from 2 Timothy 3:15-17. The Holy Spirit who gave the Scriptures is also in charge of showing us what they mean. It is not within the rights of an (allegedly) "elite" person or council to mock our God-given intelligence and explain away what the Bible clearly says. Nor is it our right to determine what the Bible means for ourselves *based on what we want*. Either would be making the Bible a matter of private interpretation, which we are warned against from the Bible. **"For we have not followed cunningly devised**

108 Don't use this as an excuse to be disrespectful or unnecessarily confrontational with anyone.

fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1:16-21)

The Holy Spirit gave us objective truth as He inspired the Scriptures and we are each accountable to receive that inspired truth and be subject to it (as the Word of God is a testimony of Christ the King). That is why Peter called the Scriptures **"a more sure word of prophecy"** than his own personal encounter with God/Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (the account of which is in Matthew 17- Peter is recounting it in 2 Peter 1). The Bible is a straightforward book that people can understand, *unless they don't really want to*. Often when confronted with truth from Scripture someone will say "That is just your interpretation." But we don't take the clear statements from any person as "just someone's interpretation", and the Bible is God communicating His truth to us on a level we can relate to (that is why He can and does rightfully hold us accountable for our response to His Word- John 12:44-50). If somebody is truly wrong in their understanding of Scripture, then what they are saying should be able to be proven as wrong from the rest of Scripture, rather than just being brushed aside. Those who are honestly not sure a statement is true, but also can't prove it wrong, should go back to the Scriptures and

look more into it, rather than attacking the messenger and/or attacking the possibility of us understanding the truth in the Bible. Any who won't do that are unteachable and resistant to God's Word (and thus to God) anyways. Of course these will be blind to the truth in the Bible. **"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." (Matthew 11:25) "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." (John 9:39)**

DISCERNING A TRUE NEW TESTAMENT FELLOWSHIP

We have to discern the difference between a church that is part of the religious system and a true New Testament fellowship. Our walk with God is VERY MUCH dependent on that. If we are in the religious system, even if we are not deceived and led astray by the false teaching (which can simply be incomplete teaching), we will at least be left with a strong pull towards complacency and left dry spiritually. We will also be badly influenced by the poor examples around us (Cains fit right into the religious system and feel at home there, just as false prophets do). Those who have children will also be leaving them especially vulnerable to the bad influence of the other youths who are not being seriously taught to fear God.¹⁰⁹

The call of the Bible to those in the religious

109 Of course at some churches that may not be much of an issue because the people hardly interact at all, but that just proves something is wrong anyway. People who are being led by God's Spirit and seeking Christ's interest will rejoice to see each other and genuinely care for each other, as well as care for all others- Galatians 6:9-10, 1 Peter 1:22-23, etc.

system who would seriously seek the Lord on His terms and live acceptably to Him regarding all yokes that require compromise to be part of (such as being part of the religious system), is **“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”** (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

We can't let our affiliations, our past good experiences, the sentiments of our families, and any other lower reason than the response of a church to the Word of God determine whether we join to it or not. It's not enough to only leave churches where Christ is dishonored and His words not taken seriously. We also need to join to those where He IS honored and His words ARE taken seriously. **“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”** (Hebrews 10:23-25- to honor God's Word ourselves, we can't disregard this commandment)

There are two basic requirements for a true New Testament Church:

- 1) Faithfully handling the Word of God- The

whole counsel of God is preached without compromise. There is a willingness in the leaders and the church as a whole to be corrected if they can be shown to be in error, or shown that they are missing something in their doctrine/message (i.e. they are truly subject to Christ's word, and therefore subject to Him).

2) Faithfully living out the Word of God/filled with the Holy Spirit- Christ pours out His Spirit to those who obey Him as King (Acts 5:31-32). That is true of a church, as well as for individuals. The power of God's Spirit must be on a true church group,¹¹⁰ and *the norm* of the people in the church must be that they walk in an obedient faith which works by love (Galatians 5:6, 2 John 6). The church discipline regarding 1 Corinthians 5 must be practiced towards those who profess Christ who try to "be part of the group", yet continue in sin and won't receive correction. There should be a godly fear of joining to the group that comes upon those who are exposed to it that is difficult to shake off (Acts 2:43, Acts 5:11-14).

The leaders should be men with blameless lives and homes who faithfully adhere to the Word of God (see 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 for the true qualifications of church leaders). Those who meet such qualifications should be followed in terms of their faith, honored, and submitted to¹¹¹ (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, Hebrews 13:7, 17). They don't need Bible college/seminary degrees, but they need to know God's Word very well and have

110 This can be counterfeited though by emotion and maybe even demonic spirits, especially in a scheduled meeting. Therefore we need to be careful and consider both #1-2 here- if something's wrong it should be clear soon enough if we pray for wisdom and are honest/neutral in our discernment.

111 If someone tells or asks you to do something that is wrong they definitely don't meet the biblical qualifications, and should not be submitted to.

spiritual maturity.¹¹² If there is not such a church near us, it is very worth driving a long ways or moving to be part of such a church, if the only one we know of isn't that close to us geographically. It's wise to pray to the Lord and ask Him for direction to show us where a church¹¹³ that is acceptable to Him can be found.¹¹⁴ **"A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land."** (Psalm 68:5-6)

A NECESSARY REMINDER OF AN UNCOMFORTABLE REALITY

Though it's not always the case, it is very often

112 Many formal Bible training schools teach people more to explain away the Word of God than to really understand it anyways. In most cases you don't even need a corresponding godly life/character to even do well at them and graduate from them either. Even true leaders who have gotten degrees from them in the past often have had to renounce some or most of what they learned at these institutions anyways as they studied the Word of God closer and deeper afterwards. Jesus didn't send His hand-picked leaders (the 12 Apostles) to Bible school. They did however have valuable experience learning of Him and walking with Him before they were put in authority. They were not novices, as such are forbidden to be leaders before they become mature and better experienced (1 Timothy 3:6). Knowing how to run a program and make speeches don't qualify anyone for leadership in a church either- but many times these are the things people mistake for qualification for that, though they are not.

113 I use the word church to refer more to the people than an actual building, though a group isn't disqualified or qualified to be a good church simply based on where it meets.

114 A good church will seek God's acceptance more than it will seek to please the people. Otherwise it is definitely not a good church and is part of the religious system.

true that groups which are part of the religious system are large, prosperous, and/or powerful (that can happen when a group's existence is intertwined with money and power). Usually these groups are considered "mainstream" and "safe" by most of society; whereas groups that are not part of the religious system at all (i.e. New Testament churches) very frequently are more informal,¹¹⁵ meet in homes, and are outside of the mainstream (like the early Christians were to both Roman and Jewish society). Hence they are often considered "dangerous cults" and are criticized/ridiculed by many mainstream churches; especially when their members start getting serious about God's Word, leave the religious system, and join the New Testament church(es). Church history bears witness that this has been the norm through the ages, and it will be just as true (if not much more the case) from henceforth until the end of this age when Christ comes again. An example would be how both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant movement (which ascended quickly to become the established religion in many European nations) both violently persecuted the Anabaptists in the 16th century. Catholic and Protestant churches harassed the Anabaptists and would not tolerate their witness in the nations in which they were in power. One scandal in an Anabaptist community was used by the press (of which the mainstream groups had power to sway) to discredit most or all Anabaptists as evil and dangerous. The religious system can usually influence the media by the great wealth and influence that frequently accompany it, as well as by the fact that it will often have members who are powerful anyways and may even own

115 This is not to say that being outside the mainstream automatically means that a church is a New Testament church, as we saw previously in this chapter. Nor does it mean that a church could not possibly be a New Testament church just because it meets in a church building and/or has a more formal meeting.

newspapers, television networks, radio stations, etc.

This all just means that those who would not be ensnared by the religious system have to put their own reputations on the line to forsake it and follow Christ without its suffocating shackles. There is earthly gain, at least in terms of reputation (and quite possibly business/job opportunities), to those who will serve the religious system and comply with it. On the other hand there is loss, at least in terms of dishonor and isolation (and maybe business/job related loss), for those who won't compromise the truth. As always, the issue of honoring God's authority and being unconditionally obedient to His voice is the real issue here. Will we seek God's honor or man's? Will we seek that which is earthly and temporary; or that which is heavenly and eternal? Will we be alone if need be for Christ's sake, and yet not be closed to the genuine New Testament church that is often inconvenient and uncomfortable to join to? These are questions we should deal with the Lord honestly over, as they cannot be separated from our response to the real Jesus of the Bible.

“Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.” (Hebrews 13:12-14)



APPENDIX 2: FACING THE FIRE

We are certainly commanded to be subject to authority on this earth as a matter of obedience to God Himself; all authority is (in some way, somehow) of God (Romans 13:1-7). However, when that authority seeks to play God and restricts the worship the true God requires by its laws, then compliance to that authority in the area(s) where it seeks to restrict God's worship becomes idolatry.

LESSONS FROM SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABED-NEGO'S STAND

In the Book of Daniel chapter 3 the Babylonian Emperor Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold that he required the officers in his province to worship, under threat of death in a fiery furnace if they refused. In how the three young Hebrew men who were called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego handled this unrighteous demand we have an example of how to stand for the Lord when the government abuses its power and makes demands that none can comply with who would stand for

Christ, and not deny Him.

“Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego;

these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" (Daniel 3:1-15)

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church and of God's true people. When any person or entity sets any restrictions as to how God ought to be worshipped, requires us to do or accept things His Word calls evil (as we see King Nebuchadnezzar doing here), and/or forbids us from things that His Word commands us to do/believe, they are then usurping Christ's authority. To comply with them then regarding any of these matters is to deny Christ and to commit idolatry; just as these men would have had they bowed to this image of gold. Of course the religious system is usually a willing accomplice to power-hungry usurpers, because the religious system is about earthly gain, glory, and security. The religious system will usually comply with unrighteous decrees by government and it will give reasons why everyone should likewise comply (such as by inappropriately quoting Romans 13:1-7). The religious system and those who share in its compromise are then spared, coddled, and rewarded by the power-abusing state. Harlotry at its worst.

Sometimes a state¹¹⁶ accepts no compromise at all, and thus even many of those in the religious system will be persecuted if they don't renounce their religion. But usually what was said before has been the typical pattern throughout history and it will be until Christ comes back. We will yet see this pattern repeat itself.¹¹⁷

These men could have just satisfied King Nebuchadnezzar's pride, bowed down to the idol, and saved themselves a lot of trouble. Surely just bowing down wouldn't be so bad, would it? What if they didn't mean it at heart, but just did the action? Could just doing that really be evil? It indeed would be. Doing so could not be done without committing great sins in the heart. They'd be essentially saying that the true God's honor and glory are less important than their own comfort and self-preservation. They'd be testifying (falsely) that man in his ascendancy to power has a right to mold "God" as a servant to his own pride. They'd thus be bearing false witness before God and before everyone who saw their action and/or would hear about it. They'd be taking God's name in vain by consenting to a horribly wrong misrepresentation of Him; and thereby be misrepresenting Him themselves as well. They'd be committing the ultimate form of idolatry, adulterating (mixing) the glory of the uncorruptible God with **"an image made like to corruptible man."** (Romans 1:23) Along with that they'd be stealing the glory which God is due for the sake of their own convenience and the pleasure of proud, power-

116 Most likely an atheistic government or one that requires everyone to convert to its own branch of the religious system.

117 Most of the time tyrannical governments, even atheistic ones, do offer a compromise that allows for religion on their terms, even (a counterfeit) "Christianity." The norm is that the state will also even work with influential leaders within the religious system to control the masses.

hungry people. They'd also be stealing a true witness for Him from all the other people present with them, and those who'd hear about this occasion. That is many of the Ten Commandments broken, as well as many other commandments and principles from God's Word violated. As we go on, we'll see that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would make the right choice- the choice we need to make as well when we face the fire of pressure from the world to deny God and His truth, with its terrible threats.

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage (face) was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.” (Daniel 3:16-20)

These men understood the truth of God's absolute power and utter sovereignty in heaven and earth, that Nebuchadnezzar himself would come to acknowledge in the next chapter of Daniel. **“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Daniel 4:35)** They were set on being on the Lord's side, no matter how bad things looked. They understood that God doesn't always deliver His servants from the fire, though he is well able to. They seemed to think He would spare them from

going through the fire, but they acknowledged He might not. They didn't know though the awesomeness of the miracle He was about to do, which we'll look at shortly.

They did however understand the truth that the Apostle Paul was certain of as he was imprisoned and near death. **“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (2 Timothy 4:18)** He knew that nobody ultimately loses out by following the Lord through the fire and keeping His Word; while nobody ever ultimately gains by turning away from Him. **“And he (Christ) said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.” (Luke 9:23-24)**

I believe that these men also understood the eternal fire prepared for transgressors of God's commandments, as we are certainly warned of by Jesus Himself. If we want Him to confess us before His Father on the day of judgment, we must certainly confess Him and keep His Word here. **“And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.” (Luke 12:4-9)**

We can afford to suffer here and even die for Christ's sake. But we can't afford to deny Christ to preserve ourselves here and end up in hell! We are told by Jesus to not fear man which can kill the body, but to rather fear God who has power to cast into hell. That is a commandment! There is the story of how the early disciple Polycarp, who when arrested and threatened to be burned with fire if he wouldn't bow to Caesar as a god, replied to the one threatening him *"You threaten fire that burns for an hour and is over. But the judgment on the ungodly is forever."*

It should also be noted how Nebuchadnezzar had the fire heated up seven times in his rage at the three men's refusal to comply with his unjust commandment. There is a rage that Satan has toward God's servants which he demonstrates through wicked people, especially those in power. Satan's rage against God's people is always hot and he's always walking about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). However when he can get a government to seek extraordinary power, and obtain it to the point of compelling all the people to commit idolatry (which would never happen if the people hadn't already corrupted themselves greatly), there is a beyond ordinary fury that God's servants must face to stand faithful to Him. It looks especially fearful, and if we think we could never bow to the idol of man's power we are like Peter, who in his human confidence, boasted that he'd never deny Christ. We need to watch and pray that we'd enter not into temptation as Jesus instructed (Matthew 26:41a). If we try to stand in our own strength (i.e. without desperate, persistent prayer- I dare say, without continually begging the Lord for grace to stand) we will fall hard! Peter's case is proof that those who so fall may possibly yet turn to the Lord and find mercy- but as with all temptation, we shouldn't dare assume we can handle it casually and that God will just automatically make sure

we get through. Peter WAS serious about being faithful to the Lord before he denied Him, but he didn't go about standing for Him with the carefulness and brokenness that he should have. He would yet rise and stand for Christ, yet share in His sufferings, and by all accounts he was killed for His sake eventually. There is no way around sharing in Christ's sufferings if we want to be saved (Romans 8:17), though there has been known to be mercy and another chance for those who fail in moments of shock and surprise.

It's also worth noting that Nebuchadnezzar had the mightiest men in his army bind the three men to throw them into the furnace. In the extreme heat of persecution's fire even the pressure from ordinarily weak and pathetic people can seem intense and intimidating, as even the naturally bold and strong Peter would learn. But corrupt governments up the ante and use naturally strong, intimidating, and/or fierce people to carry out Satan's malice towards God's servants -whether through soldiers and law enforcement officers who also disregard the Lord and are rewarded for their "work" of putting down the "criminals" who won't bow to "Caesar" (even when these "criminals" are rendering to Caesar the obedience and tribute that people can give without committing idolatry) OR through true criminals who are already imprisoned, whom those who would be faithful to the Lord are threatened to be put among for not committing idolatry and bowing to Caesar.

There's no doubt that even the naturally toughest men find large groups of these "goons" who are turned against them disturbing and fearful. This intimidation can cause idolatrous compliance in virtually everyone, even in those who had been determined to resist it steadfastly for some other reason than the genuine worship of God (like patriots standing for their constitutional rights). We

absolutely **MUST** be ready to follow the Lord no matter the cost if we will avoid being snared by base idolatry (and thus spiritual destruction). Those who waver at all are ripe for the snare. **“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” (Proverbs 29:25)**

It's important that we obey the Lord and lay down our lives to follow Him in smaller things while the fire is at a normal temperature, or we won't stand when the fire is heated seven times. We absolutely must be persuaded to fear God more than men and what they can do to us. We also need to remember examples like the one we are looking at and the one shortly after in Daniel chapter 6, where Daniel himself would be put among lions for being faithful to the Lord; and the Lord would rescue him by shutting the lion's mouths. It may be better to be put among a group of lions than a group of hardened criminals, but the Lord has power to deliver from both easily. **“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.” (Psalm 27:1-3)** By heeding the whole counsel of God's Word we can believe Him for miraculous deliverance and yet trust Him even if He doesn't give it; and therefore stick with Him through mundane and/or miserable circumstances if He sees it fit to allow them. As we'll see more as we go on, to those who endure there is always a resurrection eventually.

“Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the

furnace exceeding hot, the flames of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace."
(Daniel 3:21-23)

I don't know exactly what these three men were thinking when they were cast into the fire, but I dare say I know what they were tempted to think. I know also that they didn't yield to the temptation. They had trusted the Lord to deliver them, but now had the Lord failed them? No, but it sure looked that way as they were falling into the fiery furnace! However God is so powerful that He can even make it seem like He's not in control; and yet still be in total control! You can stand for Him and trust Him to help you as you do. It doesn't mean you won't face circumstances that seem despairing and discouraging. That however is no reason to forsake Him. These men understood that. How do we know? For one, we saw in the previous verses that they were indeed ready to suffer and die for God's truth even if He didn't deliver them. Secondly, it is just an eternal law that God somehow helps those who trust and obey Him. When the trust and obedience cease in one, so does God's assistance- like a spring being clogged and ceasing to flow, that would have kept flowing, had it not been interfered with. A true, living faith is always the pre-requisite for God's mighty work on one's behalf. Two men can be tested the same way- one trusts God, stands, and sees God's mighty work on his behalf; the other doesn't, stumbles, and is left to his own devices. Both cases are just the effects of this eternal law of faith.

"Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we

have trusted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee." (Psalm 33:18-22) "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." (2 Chronicles 15:2b) "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." (2 Chronicles 16:9a) "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." (Matthew 13:58)

So it's not just guessing to say that these men didn't regret their decision to stand for the Lord and that they kept trusting Him even as they were (apparently) falling to their deaths. Who we are when stripped of every possible motive to do right besides to genuinely worship/glorify God and trust in His promises, is *who we really are*. If we complain if our lives don't go well and we say "Well, if only these things weren't happening I'd be obedient to the Lord and wouldn't be acting like this..."; we are then essentially saying that we'll only worship God on certain conditions. But who then really is our "God?" We're on the wrong side of the ageless conflict in that case, placing conditions on our obedience to God's commandments. Only the fire of testing proves whether our worship of God is genuine, and can purify/perfect genuine worship. Whether that's the threat of a literal fire or the fire of temptation, tribulation, and/or affliction in whatever form(s) they come.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part

he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." (1 Peter 4:12-19)

If we know that fiery trials are inevitable to overcome in obedient faith if we are to be saved, and that the furnace could yet be heated seven times hotter, it is all the more reason to prepare by making absolutely sure we are on the Lord's side now; to have our lives established in a foundation of being sober-minded and obedient to Him, in light of the eternal consequences of our response to the Lord in this life.

"Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the

smell of fire had passed on them.” (Daniel 3:24-27)

As these men trusted in the Lord and stood for Him, He delivered them in a way that maybe even they wouldn't have guessed- a way that testified who the true God is, of the falsehood of Nechuchadnezzar's idol, of the wickedness of those who bowed to it, and of the righteousness of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego who would not. This also showed the power and the awesomeness of the true God more than had He kept them from going into the fire at all. If that had happened, an honest person may have questioned whether it was really God who had delivered them. But no honest person could deny this! It is one thing for God to deliver someone from being put in the fire; it is another thing for Him to deliver someone in the midst of the fire. King Nebuchadnezzar saw what happened, with the others who were there, and acknowledged that these men were **“servants of the most high God.”**

Notice in the passage that they were walking in the midst of the fire and were not harmed by it. They came out of the fire with no hurt on them nor their clothing, nor even with the smell of fire on them. The shackles wherewith they were bound were loosed by the fire that was meant to destroy them. It was the Son of God who was walking with them in the midst of the fire, and it was by Him that they were brought out of it. The same Lord that they were obeying and standing for was faithful to honor them in their stand. He is with those that trust and obey Him. He didn't ask for anymore, and He took care of that which was beyond their control for them as they did so. This is the true grace of God. Christ Himself would tell the Apostle Paul **“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”** (2 Corinthians 12:9a) Paul could thus say **“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the**

power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9b)

Christ Himself is the deliverance and the resurrection of His servants, whether in renewing, purifying, and strengthening their souls as they die to self to live in Him; whether in preserving them in, and eventually delivering from, hardships; or whether in raising them again unto everlasting life on the day of resurrection. He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Those who forsake Him to preserve themselves temporarily will be ashamed. But those who yield themselves to His rightful authority and lay down their lives for His name's sake will ultimately be delivered, honored, and made whole- though they had to suffer hardship and loss temporarily to side with Him. It is always better to go the Lord's way, even when the furnace is turned up and the wrath of man against God's servants is hot. **“For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.” (1 Peter 3:12-16)**

There is a peace and a strength that are promised to those who follow the Lord in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. The rod and the staff of the Lord can be a comfort to us whatever storm we must face. Jesus therefore said **“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John**

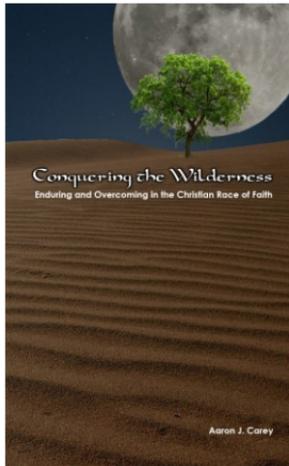
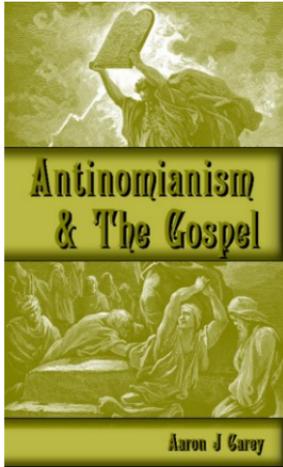
14:27) We can therefore follow Him in confidence, even through the valley of the shadow of death, knowing as we do so that He will be with us and (eventually, in His time) deliver and honor those who stay with Him in the paths of righteousness.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”
(Psalm 23)

“Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.” (Acts 13:43)

“Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” (Acts 11:23)

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