

CHAPTER FIVE - PART FOUR

NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

Introduction

The central theme of the Gospels has to do with the offer of the heavenly realm of the kingdom to Israel, in which they rejected the offer and their Messiah, resulting in the crucifixion of the Lord. (**Matthew 16:21; 20:17-19; 23:37-39; 26:3-5, 14; John 19:11-16; Acts 2:22-25, 36; 3:12-15**)

Then, the Book of **Acts** brings in the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel, beginning on the day of Pentecost. There were approximately two million Jews on that day hearing this message in Jerusalem from all over the world. The prophecy of Joel was partly fulfilled that day (**Joel 2:4, 16-21**) when the filling of the Holy Spirit produced signs, wonders and miracles. The apostles, through the Holy Spirit, were granted the gift of speaking in different languages (tongues) so that all of the Jews who were from different countries and spoke different languages were able to understand. This was done so that these Jews would go back to their nation and deliver the message to their people. But even though these Jews were astonished at hearing the message in their own language, they continued to have doubt.

Why the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel? The first offer was given so that the nation of Israel would repent for their sin of unbelief in the coming of their Messiah; the second offer was given so that the nation of Israel would repent for crucifying their Messiah. Twice, the nation of Israel as a whole rejected the offer of the kingdom, which resulted in the offer being set aside and given to the Gentiles, as noted in **Acts 28:28**. This opens up the Epistles, which centers on the offer of the kingdom to the “*new creation*,” the one new man in Christ or the Church. At the inception of the Church however, the re-offer of the kingdom remained open to Israel (according to secular history, until early 63 A.D.); therefore Paul, who was called to minister the kingdom message to the Gentiles, went “*to the Jews first, then to the Greeks*.” Three recorded times during his ministry, after he had carried the kingdom message to Israel’s religious leaders, Paul experienced rejection. The Church, however, received the

message with joy, but later as the “tares” were placed within the Church by Satan, those hearing the message began to reject it and many who knew the message fell away from it.

If was after Stephen’s message was rejected and he was slain by Israel’s religious leaders that Saul (his name changed to Paul) came into the picture, which at that time was known as “the great persecutor of the Church.” On his journey to Damascus to find Jews within the synagogues and bring them back to the Sanhedrin, Christ appeared to Paul, revealing Himself to him. The appearance of Christ in glory brought about Paul’s conversion. God chose Paul to be the apostle to carry God’s message to the Gentiles. Paul immediately went forth to Damascus to preach God’s message to the Jews first, but they rejected him as well and sought to kill him. Christians in Damascus helped Paul get out of the city. Afterwards, Christ led Paul to Arabia and personally taught him the *gospel of the glories of Christ* for a period of approximately three years--- the message which he was to give to the Gentiles and which encompasses the central message of all his Epistles — the Word of the kingdom.

Paul had expressed his gratitude to God for calling him into the ministry and showing grace unto him, knowing that he was a persecutor and a blasphemer against Christians (**1 Timothy 1:12-17**). Both Peter, who was first commissioned to carry the message of the glories of Christ to the Jews, and Paul, the one to write most of the Epistles and to spread the message all over the world to the Gentiles, followed God’s commandments with faithful obedience. Paul, however, became the central person in whom God would use to write most of the Epistles to the Church. It is amazing to see that Paul’s conversion transpired at the exact time that the message of the kingdom was to be carried to the “one new man in Christ,” which was man’s conversion, neither Jew nor Greek, but a “new creation.” From that point in time, God used Paul’s conversion as a testimony to those Paul would convert, beginning with the gospel of grace and then moving on to his main ministry: the gospel of glory (the kingdom message). Paul’s teachings included *how one could be saved* (gospel of grace) and then an in-depth view of *why one had been saved* (gospel of glory).

Christ had taught and commissioned Paul in Arabia “the mystery,” an unveiling of that which was taught and hid (veiled) in Moses in the Old

Testament, which is--- “*the new creation*” being heirs with Christ in the kingdom of the heavens. This is the theme of the New Testament with Christ as the center of this message.

In his Epistles, Paul referenced what he had learned from Christ in Arabia as “my gospel.” The word “gospel” simply means “good news.” The entire message of Christ is the good news, both the gospel of grace and the gospel of glory, which includes the unveiling of the “mystery.”

Paul wrote most of the Epistles, covering the Books of **Romans, first and second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, first and second Thessalonians, first and second Timothy, Titus and Philemon**. It is interesting to note that in his Epistles Paul wrote to a total of *seven* churches, just as the Apostle John did in **Revelation** chapter **two**. The number “seven” is the biblical number for “completeness of that which is in view.” As we go forth into the Epistles, let us keep in mind that the central theme is the offer of the kingdom of the heavens given to the *complete* Church, i.e. *all* Christians, and that the salvation of the soul is in view, not salvation of the spirit. Throughout the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, faithful obedience to God’s Word is the main prerequisite in order to become the bride of Christ in the future Millennial kingdom.

SECTION 1 — ROMANS TO EPHESIANS

The Epistle to the Romans

In the Book of **Romans**, Paul begins with the aspect of salvation as it applies to the past, present and future tense — from faith to faith.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”
(Romans 1:16, 17)

The Word reveals that the foundation of God’s comprehensive plan of salvation (spirit, soul, and body) for man is based upon a position of *faith*,

from beginning to end. An individual must come to the understanding that he cannot achieve the “*righteousness of God*” on his own, i.e., on his self-effort or self-worth. The individual who has exercised faith in Christ, *a one-time willful decision* that secures for him the “*righteousness of God*,” the possession of which guarantees him eternal life spirit-salvation, should also understand that his *continuing* soul-salvation may only be achieved by works of righteousness that emanate from a position of faith.

Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6)

Christians who live by faith, obedient to the gospel of Christ, are being qualified for the salvation of their souls. If one allows, his faith will grow “*from faith to faith*” meaning unto maturity; his eyes of understanding will be opened so that “*the deep things of God*” are revealed to him.

Salvation of the Spirit is a past act of Christ at Calvary — requiring only our belief in Him (**Ephesians 2:8**); salvation of the soul is a present act — requiring good works according to the Spirit, but not realized until a future time (**2 Corinthians 2:15**); and salvation of the body is a future act --- requiring a test of the believer’s works (works performed during the believer’s lifetime) at the Judgment Seat of Christ (**Romans 13:11**; **1 Thessalonians 5:23**).

The writers of the New Testament, referring to things surrounding a future salvation, used the expressions “the faith,” “the gospel” [of Christ; of glory], “my gospel,” “the saving of the soul” and the “the blessed hope.” These expressions are referring to things surrounding the same salvation--- the salvation of the soul, with millennial verities in view. These expressions are never used in Scripture after the fashion in which it is often used in Christendom — associating the salvation of the soul with one’s presently possessed eternal salvation (salvation of the spirit). Thus, “*the faith*” was a commonly used expression seen throughout the New Testament to refer to teachings surrounding the proffered kingdom. In each case, “the faith” is articular in the Greek text, so as to highlight something particular; a particular belief. Similarly, those of “the Way” (born again believers) in **Acts 19:8, 9** were those who held to “the faith” (Word of the kingdom). In the Old Testament, Moses mentioned the journey of “the Way” in **Deuteronomy 2:1**.

In **Romans 1:8b**, Paul recognized the Church in Rome in this way: *“that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”* They were born again believers comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. The Church was growing in “the faith” and Paul wanted to exhort them to stay in this path and not cause division amongst themselves because they were of both Jews and Gentiles. According to the gospel Paul preached, he made them aware that together they have all sinned, but through the righteousness of faith in Jesus Christ, all are justified.

Because of the promise granted through faith and not the law, Christians are heirs to the kingdom of heaven. If we live according to the Spirit and not the flesh, we will inherit the kingdom in the age to come. Paul explained that Christians are not saved by the law. Why? Christians are not saved by the law because their sinful flesh cannot keep from sinning. For this reason, Christ died and took on all the sins of the world. He left us the Spirit, so that we can choose to live in the Spirit and not in the flesh. If we are led by the Spirit through faith, we are made righteous, we are justified. **(Acts 13:38, 39)**

The law was not created for salvation or to obtain righteousness. The Law of Moses was created for the ungodly, for those who lived in the flesh and continually sinned against God. The Law was not given to justify sinners but to expose sin.

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made... (Galatians 3:19)

Faith was always the substance for salvation and righteousness, as in the example of Abraham and many other Old Testament saints and prophets.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. (Romans 3:21, 22)

For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. (Romans 4:13)

There are many today who believe that the Law of Moses will save them in the age to come, so they continue to live in bondage to the law. The only way that they can be saved from death in the age to come, is to have faith in Jesus Christ, who took our sin. If we live by faith, according to the Spirit, we practice righteousness and put away sin. **(Galatians 3:2-7)**

The *law* cannot take away our sins, only Christ was able to do this through His death and shed blood. The sacrificial offerings presented to the Lord by the Levitical priests in the Old Testament were done only to *cover* sin, not to wipe it away completely. For those who live by the law will die by the law **(Galatians 2:19)**, but those who live by *faith* will live in the age to come, for as it is written, *“the just shall live by faith.”* **(Romans 1:17b; Galatians 3:10-14)**

“But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners...”
(1Timothy 1:8, 9)

As Christians, we are to accept and believe that the sin-nature no longer has control over our lives and that we, allowing to be led by the Holy Spirit, may be able to live a life of holiness in Christ. Paul states that since Christians are no longer *“under law but under grace,”* they can choose to be slaves to the sin-nature which leads to death in the age to come; or they can choose to be slaves of righteousness (obedience to the faith) which leads to age-lasting life.

Since Christ died for our sins and resurrected so that we may have age-lasting life, we are debtors to Him. We have a positional standing “in Christ” as firstborn sons, and have the opportunity to be “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ” *if*, and this is where conditions are placed, *if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together* **(Romans 8:17)**. Christ suffered in order to gain His inheritance; we too must suffer with Him in order to gain our inheritance. If one is following Christ, suffering is inevitable, because he is not conformed to this world,

but is set apart. Therefore, the flesh, the world and the devil seeks to attack him. How can one win? How can one overcome?

“...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” (Romans 8:13)

Being led by the Spirit means allowing Christ to transform us from within, which brings about a change in our hearts and minds; whereas walking in the flesh means going by our own fleshly acts and thoughts, bringing about no change within.

What motivates us to live according to the Spirit and to overcome our sufferings? The motivating factor is the blessed hope of Christ’s return and the hope of becoming co-heirs in His kingdom. Paul referred to it as this:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

No matter what the sufferings are, if we do not lose heart, nothing can separate us from the love of God. The Day will come when He will redeem us and be with us forever. Paul referred to our present sufferings as “light afflictions” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18), compared to the glory that will be revealed to us in the age to come.

Only by studying and maturing in the Word of God through the guidance of the Holy Spirit can one renew his mind and ultimately transform like Christ --- holy and set apart for good works.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1, 2)

What do some of these “good works” look like?

“Having then gifts (by the Holy Spirit) differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”(Romans 12:6-8)

Ministry means “service” and is in contrast to the gift of speaking to others:

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10, 11)

Stewards are managers who will be held accountable for using their gift in the best interest of the One who gave it to them. Not relying on their own strength, stewards should use the power of the Holy Spirit which God gave them to do His will.

Paul spoke concerning his desire for Israel to be saved (**Romans 10:1**). Because they sought to establish their own righteousness, they were ignorant of God’s righteousness and therefore had not submitted to God. And because of the hardness of their hearts and their own self-righteousness, they rejected the Gospel of the kingdom and their Messiah.

Before Christ’s sacrificial death, Jews could be looked upon as [eternally] saved, otherwise they would not have been offered the heavenly inheritance. However, after Christ’s death on the Cross, the “new creation in Christ” was born. Many Jews who placed their belief in Christ were now part of the “new creation.” But today, Jews and Gentiles who do not place their belief in Christ are not [eternally] saved. Only the body of Christ, i.e. the Church, is [eternally] saved and being offered the heavenly inheritance (Millennial life).

The Olive Tree

Romans 11:11-32

The context of **Romans 11:11-32** concerns Israel and “the Gospel” (of the inheritance, of the heavenly kingdom) of which national Israel rejected (**Romans 10:1-4, 14-21**).

The Olive Tree – National Israel:

Firstfruits – Old Testament Saints

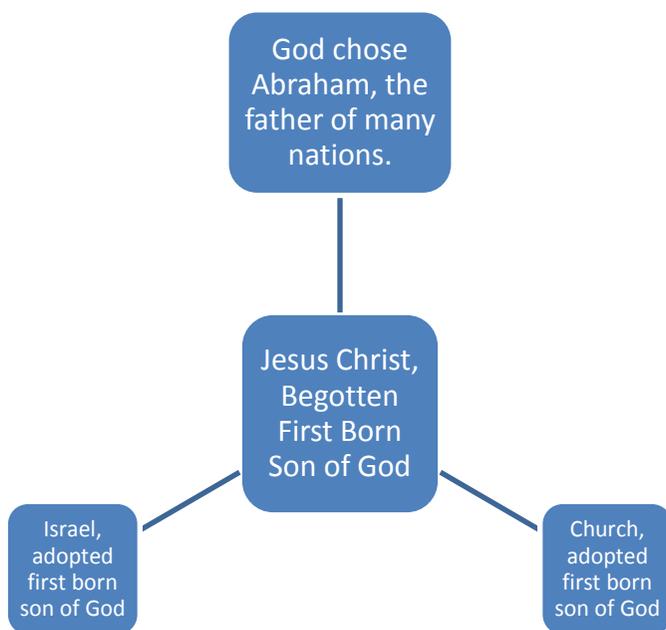
Lump – 12 sons of Jacob

Root – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Branches – Descendants

Because of unbelief to Christ and the inheritance, “some” of the branches (Israel’s descendants) were cut off (from the Gospel, the heavenly inheritance). Therefore, Gentiles were “grafted in” to the lineage of Abraham “through Christ” (a spiritual “grafting”) in order to have access to the covenant of the inheritance. Gentiles were now given the offer (Gospel) of the inheritance, because they believed (**Acts 28:28**). This simply refers to the Gentiles privileged to receive spiritual blessings via the covenant which God made with Abraham through faith. Only through Israel will all the other nations be blessed (**Romans 11:18; cf Genesis 12:3**).

In **Romans 11:23**, reference is given that not only Gentiles will be grafted in and given the offer, but Jews will also be “grafted in” again when Christ returns, if they believe. And this is the “mystery,” that Israel is presently cut off due to blindness and unbelief until the end of the age (**Romans 11:25, 26**).



The “one new man in Christ,” i.e. the Church, is neither Jew nor Gentile but is composed of individuals from both Jew and Gentile who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, a new spiritual creation. **But this does not dispose of national Israel. Israel is God’s firstborn son.** Jews that remain in unbelief make up the nation of Israel. Israel will be dealt with again in the future and the nation as a whole will believe and be saved when Christ returns. God will **never** do away with any of His firstborn sons: Christ, Israel and the Church! **(Romans 11:29)** Three firstborn Sons, One Begotten and two adopted – all from the seed of Abraham – will exist forever.

Paul was exhorting the Christians in Rome not to be ignorant of this mystery of the kingdom as Israel was. Israel will remain in a state of blindness until the end of the Tribulation, a time of extreme persecution, which will cause Israel’s eyes to be opened unto repentance. They will, at that time, call on the Lord for help and He will save them. Therefore, let us keep our eyes focused on the future kingdom of Christ, not in

drunkenness, but sober, walking in His light, fully armored with the Word of God and performing divine good works. Our obedience to “the faith” is the key to His acceptance.

The Epistle to the Corinthians

Paul had left the Corinthian Church in 53 A.D. to continue his ministry with other Churches. While he was away, he had received report that the Corinthian Church was experiencing many problems, especially divisions and immorality. The Church was placing emphasis on man’s wisdom rather than the wisdom of God. They were immature Christians who were not growing from the gospel of grace, but rather were self-centered, boasting upon man’s wisdom and causing divisions amongst each other concerning who they should follow.

These problems of the early Church led to the divisions of many who separated and began their own denominations. Hence, we have hundreds of denominations today. This resulted in the forming of man’s “religion,” which was not God’s intention for His church. The early Church consisted of small groups who met in homes to study and grow in the gospel of Christ. But today, importance is directed in bringing in large denominations where the pastor-teacher becomes the focus of attention. An example can be seen in many Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, where the pastor’s main focus is to mesmerize believers with emotional rituals and deceiving doctrines; their destructive ways lead the Church far away from ever coming to the knowledge of the truth.

Paul detected that the Corinthian Church was under much distress, being led into different directions and placing importance on deceptive practices instead of the true message, the gospel of Christ. He then wrote the following to the Corinthian Church:

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." 1 Corinthians 1: 17-19)

Paul's ministry was to preach the gospel of Christ, the kingdom message. He warned Christians not to take lightly the message of the Cross (in relation to the "purpose" of Christ's death and resurrection), or they would perish in the age to come. For those who are "wise according to the flesh" are "foolish" and are already perishing, having no divine good works to their name. But to mature Christians who grow in the Gospel and heed the message of the kingdom for good works "are being saved," that is, presently working to be counted worthy into the future kingdom by the power of God — to attain the salvation of the soul.

For this reason, God has called on the weak and humble to the kingdom and not the wise according to the flesh (man's wisdom).

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."(Matthew 5:5)

Those who boast in their wisdom forget that true wisdom comes only from God. Therefore, as it is written, "*He who glories, let him glory in the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 1:31). Therefore in all things we should glorify the Lord!

Paul admonishes the Corinthian Church to be humble, to seek the wisdom of God and have faith only in His power:

And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of man but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:4, 5)

Being rest assured of God's promises spoken of in the Word of God that will be made manifest by His power in the near future, we need to make sure that our faith does not rest on the wisdom of man but rather on the

wisdom of God. The wisdom that Paul was teaching was the “*hidden wisdom of God*” to those who are mature.

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Corinthians 2:7, 8)

We can see how extraordinary God’s power and wisdom is in that before God created heaven and earth, before He created the angels, before He created man or any living thing, He finished all of His plans and works --- *for our glory*. Christ’s kingdom will be set up on earth and in heaven for God’s firstborn sons to inherit --- it is a surety. Who are God’s firstborn sons? Christ Jesus is God’s only begotten Firstborn Son, Israel is God’s adopted firstborn son, and the Church is also God’s adopted firstborn son (to be realized yet future). So far the only firstborn Son to finish the race, overcome and be found worthy is Christ. Do we realize what is in store for those who overcome?

But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9; cf Isaiah 64:4)

This is the “mystery,” the hidden wisdom revealed to Paul by the Lord in Arabia. Paul was called to carry this mystery, which he referred to as the “gospel” (good news), to Christians. It had to do with the Jews and Gentiles becoming a new creation, being placed together in the same body as “joint-heirs with Christ” and possessing the hope of one day ruling and reigning in the kingdom of the heavens. This “mystery” is documented in **Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Romans 11:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 4:1; 15:51; Ephesians 1:9; 5:32; Colossians 1:26; 1 Timothy 3:16**. God’s plan from the beginning, before the ages began, was that He would be manifested in the flesh, suffer, and be received up in glory *for our sake*, so that we also, through our sufferings, may overcome and be received up in glory in the future kingdom of heaven. The “mysteries of the kingdom” concern the Church, the “one new man in Christ,” being given the offer of the inheritance into the kingdom of the heavens during the Messianic Era.

But Paul made the Corinthians aware in his Epistle that they had not grown in the faith. They believed in Christ but their behavior did not line up to a righteous position in Christ. Therefore Paul could not speak or teach them the “mystery” or the mature Word of the kingdom because their carnal ways were hindering them from receiving it. Not only were they not growing in the Word, but they were also causing dissention and division amongst themselves. Paul called them “carnal” (fleshly) and not spiritual Christians. He could only feed them “milk,” which is the gospel of grace, because they were living in the flesh. He could not feed them “solid food,” which is the mature Word of the kingdom, the Word surrounding Christ’s second return.

Paul wanted to make clear that ministers of the Word are merely God’s servants --- God is the true Leader. Paul had laid the foundation, which is Christ. It is the believer’s responsibility to build and mature on this foundation from the Word for good works. God will ask each and every believer to give account of his works on that Day, whether good or bad, and “each one will receive his own reward (or loss) according to his own labor.”

For we are God’s fellow workers, you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it.

But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear, for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire;

and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:9-15)

The basis for all judgment is *works*. Every Christian, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, will be judged on the basis of his works, works performed during the present age. Sin has already been judged at Calvary on the basis of Christ's death and shed blood. As noted in **1 Corinthians 3:9-15**, works for the kingdom can emanate from faith or without faith. The faithful workers produce fruit of *gold, silver, precious stones*, but the unfaithful workers produce *wood, hay and straw*. Therefore, it is possible to produce fruit out of faithfulness or unfaithfulness. And each will be tested through fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

A comparison Scripture to the judgment of works at the Judgment Seat of Christ can be seen in **1 Peter 1:4-9**:

...to an inheritance incorruptible...In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ...receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

Paul was instructing the Corinthians not to boast in men who are wise in the flesh, but in Christ, who sent them the Holy Spirit. And Paul was exhorting the Corinthians not to go beyond the teachings of Scripture, for by doing so they would avoid the pride, divisions and immorality that were destroying their Church.

By and through the Word of God, we have everything we need to make us wise for salvation. The Word of God is the unadulterated Word, which is pure and true. We do not need man's wisdom to stray us away from the Word of God. There is nothing that needs to be added to it or taken away from it. We need only to receive the Word and study it exactly as it is, perfect and lacking nothing. The moment man begins to give his *opinion* on what the Word says, it is adulterated. Even if man speaks or writes *some* truth but mixed in with false doctrine (for example, the foundation which is Christ or the building upon it is not true) --- *it is false teaching*. Throw it away and do not adhere to it! If we continue to listen to it or read it, then it adheres in our mind and it may entice us to receive it. And if we

receive it, then we have chosen to lay aside the Word of God. We need only to adhere to the truth of the Word which only comes from the Spirit.

In the following Scripture, Peter exhorts his recipients to desire only that which comes from the Word of God:

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (1 Peter 2:1, 2)

To ‘*desire the pure milk of the word*’ does not mean here immaturity, but to desire the pure, clean and unadulterated form of the Word like the innocence and curiosity of a newborn babe. We need to lay aside *anything* that will hinder us from receiving the knowledge of the truth, to include any pre-conceived notions or any doctrines and traditions of man. A companion Scripture can be seen in **James 1:21**:

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

Because the Corinthian Church was carnal (living according to the flesh), they were being drawn away by their own desires and thereby habitually sinning. Paul warned them of these sinful acts of sexual immorality, suing a brother and idolatry. He warned them not to keep company with brothers within the Church who were committing these sins, but to discipline them. He also instructed them to refrain from taking their disputes into the hands of pagan courts. Instead, they were to consult the Church to handle such matters.

“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that you shall judge angels? (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3)

Therefore, Christians today are to handle disputes amongst each other within the house of God.

Paul then taught about the unity of marriage as it relates to the marriage of Christ. He addresses the problem of adultery and idolatry in the Corinthian Church. There were pagan temples in Corinth where they worshiped many gods formed by their ancient Greek culture. Today, pagan worship continues to be the actions of many denominations. Paul explained that it was a violation of the believer's union with Christ. He warns the Church to flee ("to run fast away") from idolatry, that is, the act of worship or sacrifice to anyone or anything other than God. The armor of God must be worn at all times in order that we might be strong against others who entice us to follow their gods and their religion.

When given the opportunity, we must be faithful to spread the gospel of Christ to unfaithful Christians. If an unfaithful Christian promotes you to worship or sacrifice idols with him, do not do it for his sake. If you do worship with him, make known to him that you are worshiping the True God, then you are not allowing evil to reign over you. By continuing to imitate Christ, you may save the unfaithful. In this respect, we are servants to all men that we may win souls in the kingdom of heaven. We therefore conform to all men, knowing that everyone is in a different area in their walk, and for the sake of the kingdom, we strive humbly to make them partakers with us and with Christ. Paul associated this with running a race and striving for a crown:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receive the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things.

Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

In order for the Church to understand, Paul drew a comparison between the Christian life and an athletic competition, specifically the Isthmian games held in Corinth. The contestants had to complete a mandatory rigorous training for a year. Those who failed to complete this training were disqualified from running the race. The same applies to Christians. First, one must prepare for their lifelong race with a clearly defined goal,

that is, he must discipline his body and bring it into subjection (die to flesh) so that he will be qualified to minister to others, resulting in his qualification into the kingdom.

An example of the Christian race is pictured for us in the Book of **Ruth**. It presents a complete picture of the preparations needed for qualifying as the bride. First, Ruth made a commitment to take the journey to another land with Naomi. For the Christian, it is acknowledging through baptism to take the journey to the kingdom. Second, she was faithfully obedient to the Word, being led by Naomi, who is a type of the Scriptures. Third, she was set apart, staying close to her group of believers and working only in Boaz's field for a complete period of time. This work involved doing three things in order to be prepared to meet Boaz at his threshing floor.

For the Christian, these works prepare him to meet Christ at the Judgment Seat:

- 1) Washing oneself by confessing and putting away sin;
- 2) Anointing oneself by allowing the Spirit to work through him unto maturity;
- 3) Putting on the white garment by living holy lives.

Upon doing this, one will be prepared to minister to others. Paul clarified that if he did not do these things, and he went out and preached to others, he would be disqualified. These things *must* be done continually so that we can produce fruit for Christ and His kingdom. As Paul states in **Philippians 1:27**: "*Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...*" Paul clarified that the difference in the winner's prize in the athletic games as oppose to the prize of the Christian race is that the athlete receives a crown that perishes in time, but the prize for the Christian will never perish. This should be extremely encouraging and motivating for us.

Paul exhorts us to "*run in such a way that you may obtain it.*" The Christian is to eagerly strive to produce fruit, looking forward to receiving the prize. God provides a variety of gifts to all Christians, and it is their choice whether to use them in the race of the faith. Paul knew that if he was faithful to his calling he would receive a prize from God for his

service. Yet, he never assumed that he would automatically persevere to the end. He continued to discipline his body and bring it into subjection [die to flesh], and to remain faithful to his calling (**1 Corinthians 9:27; Philippians 3:12**). For Paul, this meant enduring much persecution and suffering for Christ until his death. For Christians alike, the prize or reward into the kingdom will be attained by enduring hardship and suffering for the ministry of Christ. Suffering precedes glory, which is why Paul says that we are firstborn sons “*if indeed we suffer with Him.*” Before Paul’s death, he knew he had finished the race and won the prize.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7, 8)

When we focus on Christ’s future appearing and our inheritance, we can strive to accomplish our service to Him even during much suffering. And God is faithful in providing us strength through our sufferings when we ask for it in prayer.

God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13a)

The exact opposite can occur when we do not focus on Christ’s future appearing or His kingdom. This occurs when we stray away from the Word, allowing our fleshly desires and lusts over evil things to take control. Our focus becomes the things of the world and not of God. And when we are carnal, we cannot produce fruitful works for the Lord. This state of disobedience is pictured for us in Israel during their Exodus from Egypt and is written as an example for Christians. Though they believed in God and were baptized into Moses, they did not continue in the path of righteousness nor did they focus on the kingdom, therefore they continually fell into the sin of unbelief. And, as a result, most of them died in the wilderness.

Now all these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not

become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” [Israel took God’s Word lightly concerning the inheritance]

Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer [Satan] . Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Corinthians 10:6-11)

We realize then that if we are to be fruitful ministers, we must be mature in the Word, being led by the Holy Spirit, and we must be holy. In **Galatians 5:22**, we are given the characteristics of the Spirit; the way in which we should minister the Word of the kingdom:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.
(A companion Scripture is recorded in **2 Peter 1:5**)

When we have the knowledge and the conduct then we are prepared to spread the kingdom message. And by fulfilling the role of ministers of His Word during the present time, we will be preparing as king-priests for the coming kingdom. This relates to **James 1:22** when he said:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Therefore, knowledge of the Word of the kingdom [hearers of the Word] and producing fruit with the characteristics of the Spirit [doers of the Word] go hand in hand.

In this Epistle, Paul reveals the greatest characteristic that God has given to man, a gift that will never perish, even when the world has been destroyed. God’s gift is love; it is of God Himself, for God is love. Love is able to overcome all things. This is the kind of love that God shows to us — an unconditional, sacrificial love— “agape” love. When we die, our faith and our hope will be finished, but love will continue on forever, in

the Messianic age and throughout the Eternal Ages. Love is the greatest characteristic we can possess. When we love others unconditionally during our race of the faith, then we are truly walking with God and have put on Christ.

Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthian Church pertains mostly to his testimony of his trials and tribulations. Most of his trials were attacks against his character, in which he faced slanderous accusations from among false teachers in the congregation. He reveals the problems he faced with his ministry and how he was able to endure and overcome --- only by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. He teaches us that we too can overcome our trials and sufferings for the ministry of Christ; and through our experiences we can comfort others who are suffering. Our faith in God is able to sustain us, knowing that He is our Deliverer. In **2 Corinthians 1:9, 10**, Paul refers to our deliverance in the past, present and future tense:

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us....

Paul wanted the Church to open their eyes to the hope that he had and to the truth of his ministry.

“Unlike Moses—who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

(2 Corinthians 3:13-18)

After Moses had been on the mountain of Sinai for forty days to wait upon God's giving of the law, the Ten Commandments, Moses requested to see God's glory. God granted his request, however Moses was only able to see God's back and not His face, otherwise he would die. When Moses returned to the people of Israel, they were deeply afraid of the glory that shone on his face; therefore Moses put a veil over his face for them so that they could not see the glory. This relates to the blindness of their minds and the hardness of their hearts. Paul used this example so that the Corinthian Church would be aware of their condition, being immature in the Word of God and blinded by false teachers in their congregation. The veil they place over their hearts and minds hinders the gospel of Christ from shining in and it stops the glory from shining out. And the darkness will remain in Israel until they acknowledge Christ at His second return.

We must realize that our faith in the Word is never stagnant but is either growing (going from *'faith to faith'*) or it is diminishing. "*Faith*" is simply believing what God says about a matter. As we study the Word of God (beholding as in a mirror), being transformed "*by the renewing of our minds*" thereby choosing to die to our flesh and walk in the Spirit, then our faith grows. We begin to "live by faith" and we go from one level of faith to a higher level of faith. As we make the progression from "faith to faith" then we shall be transformed from "glory to glory." We are then *being saved* until that future Day at the judgment seat of Christ when we will receive our glorified bodies and our inheritance into the kingdom.

Have you ever wondered what this glory looks like? The word *glory* is translated "heavy, power, magnificence, riches and splendor" (Strong's #3513). The glory of God is His magnificent light that will illuminate the future New Jerusalem and there will be "*no need of the sun or moon to shine in it.*" How difficult for anyone to fathom the magnitude of this very thing! Those who overcome will possess this glory during the Messianic Era. But before glory comes suffering. Paul expressed the test of our faith as a condition for acquiring the glory:

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present

time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:16-18)

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.... (1 Peter 1:6, 7)

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.... (2 Corinthians 4:17)

As one beholds the mirror (the Word) with an unveiled face (believing the gospel of Christ), then he will progress from “faith to faith” (maturity in the Word of the kingdom) and “glory to glory” (process of being saved on that future Day), qualified to rule and reign with Christ. In that Day, we will see the glory of the Lord and we ourselves will be transformed into His glory, in the image and likeness of God. The question lies, “*How much glory do you want?*” Just as there are different levels of faith, there will be different levels of glory rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

But if we keep the veil over our face, then we cannot understand the Word, and therefore our faith will not grow. Paul made it clear to the Corinthian Church that this blindness comes from Satan and the outcome is death in the age to come.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age [Satan] has blinded, who do not believe [in the gospel of glory], lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4)

The reason that some in Corinth were blinded to the truth was due to the tares whom Satan had placed in the Church, tares who were preaching false messages and blinding the congregation. But Paul was there to preach the gospel of the glories of Christ as a slave to the Church for Jesus’ sake. God had shown in Peter’s heart “*to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” to them. And

this is God's will for all Christians, that they mature in the gospel of glory, both in word and in deed, taking on the very image of Christ.

Peter refers to the Church as living stones, just as Christ is a Living Stone, *“being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5)*. The Church, as part of God's great spiritual building project, is called to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. What are these spiritual sacrifices?

Romans 12:1-8 reveals the spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God:

- 1) Present our bodies a living sacrifice --- holy living.
- 2) Not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind --- to be set apart and mature in God's Word.
- 3) Remove the pride and be humble in our walk with God.
- 4) Use the gift(s) given to us by the Holy Spirit, which are:
 - a. Ministry, let us use it in our ministering
 - b. Teaching
 - c. Exhorting
 - d. Giving, with liberality
 - e. Leading, with diligence
 - f. Showing mercy, with cheerfulness

These sacrifices are good works for the building of the kingdom. In **Hebrews 13:15, 16**, a similar summary of these sacrifices are presented:

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Believers are to continually offer *the fruit of our lips* which is ministering the Word of the kingdom to other believers according to the fruit of the Spirit (in love, joy, peace). The fruit of the Spirit is given in **Galatians 5:22, 2 Peter 1:5; Colossians 3:23; Ephesians 5:1-21**.

Paul's Epistle emphasized the importance of ministering the Word of the kingdom to other believers, and he was saddened that the Corinthians had

not yet matured. What about ministering to the unsaved? Yes, we are to give the gospel of grace to the unsaved, which pertains strictly to the belief that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again on the third day. But soon after they acknowledge their belief in Christ, they are to move on to the meat of the Word. In other words, they are to continue on to maturity — the Word of the kingdom.

When Paul first went to Corinth, he found a city filled with unsaved Gentiles. Therefore, he could not begin with the message surrounding the gospel of glory; he had to first proclaim the message surrounding the gospel of grace. Paul proclaimed the good news surrounding *the grace of God* with the intention that afterwards he would then be able to proclaim the good news surrounding *the glory of Christ*.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

Paul explained to individuals *how they could be saved*, with a view to afterwards being able to explain to them *why they had been saved*. It is imperative that one receives and ministers “the gospel” in this order. God has structured His Word after a particular fashion for a reason and within this structure He has imparted His truths. The Book of **Hebrews** provides a warning to those who do not adhere to the orderly fashion of the gospel:

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection [maturity], not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 5:13-6:2)

Why are we to move on to maturity? Why are we to lay aside the doctrine of eternal judgment and of baptisms? Is there more that God wants us to know? What is the purpose of Christ dying for us and being resurrected to heaven? Why should we live holy, be set apart and be led by the Spirit? Why should we abide in the Word and be faithfully obedient? Why should we produce fruitful works? If we are eternally saved, why does the Word speak of loss? The answer to all of these questions pertains to the salvation of the soul in the age to come; the reward of the inheritance into the millennial kingdom. This has nothing to do with our eternal salvation, but with millennial salvation, the thousand year reign of Christ.

Our eternal salvation was based strictly on our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ apart from works. But our millennial salvation requires divine good works. At the end of this age, all Christians will account for their works at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. (2 Corinthians 5:9-11)

The believer, on that Day, will either be approved or rejected. This truth should dramatically change the way we live, for our actions will be evaluated by our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the reason Paul exhorts the Corinthians to live for Christ. We have been given *the ministry of reconciliation* through Christ, a ministry that reveals to believers that they will one day in the future be reconciled to the Lord. God sent His Son to reconcile all things to Himself --- and this has not yet been manifested. Reconciliation is something yet future. Until Satan has been put down, until the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord Jesus Christ, until the bride of Christ has been revealed, until Israel has been restored, the ministry of reconciliation will continue. *Final* reconciliation, when *all* things are reconciled to God, will be after the thousand year reign of Christ.

Since God reconciled believers to Himself through the blood of Christ, we are a “new creation” in Christ and no longer should we live for ourselves, but for Him (**2 Corinthians 5:15-21**). All believers will appear before Christ to be judged on their works. Paul therefore pleads with the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain, in other words, not to live for themselves. In **2 Corinthians 5:19**, Scripture records that *God has committed to us the word of reconciliation* and **2 Corinthians 6:4** says *But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God*. We are not to take the ministry lightly nor should we allow circumstances in our lives to deter us from ministering the Word of the kingdom, even under persecution, rejection and suffering.

But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;

by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report;

*as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live, as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. (**2 Corinthians 6:4-10**)*

Paul endured through all of his sufferings by the grace and power of God. We also, as ambassadors for Christ, should follow his example, for He says, “*In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you*” (**2 Corinthians 6:2**; cf **Isaiah 49:8**). Now (in this dispensation) is the acceptable time to do our works of ministry; now is the time to work out our own salvation.

Paul had also addressed the topic of giving, because false teachers in Corinth were questioning Paul’s motives for ministry. They were claiming that Paul was keeping the tithes for himself. Consequently, the Corinthians had not contributed to the ministry despite their prior

willingness to help. Paul then defended his integrity and gave reasons why they should give.

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

God loves a cheerful giver. Giving is like sowing seed. Knowing this, a Christian should give cheerfully for the ministry of Christ. God sees to it that the generous giver will be blessed and not suffer want; he is doing a good work unto the Lord for the building of His kingdom.

Paul was concerned for the faithfulness of the Corinthians because of their belief in these false teachers claiming to be apostles of Christ. These false teachers were not only slandering Paul, they were denying his authority. Paul's defense to the Church was that although he had no formal training in Greek oratory or had not schooled in professional rhetoric, this does not mean he was an inadequate or an unqualified speaker. He did not lack knowledge because he had received direct training and revelation from the Lord Himself! Paul truly was an 'apostle of Christ' for he had been trained by Him. The false teachers had not been with Christ, therefore could not be true apostles.

Paul ended his defense by stating that if he boasted, it was done in the Lord, as oppose to the false teachers who boasted in themselves. Paul reaffirmed that in all of the sufferings that he endured he did it for the ministry of Christ. Last, God had given him visions of Paradise, whereby the place of the righteous dead, Hades, was moved to the third heaven.

Because of what Paul had witnessed and testified, He exhorted the Corinthians to examine themselves as to whether they were in "the faith." As brothers in Christ, he wanted them to test themselves and to be established in Christ. Finally, he prayed that they would be complete, mature, lacking nothing.

When we are mature in the Word and are walking in the Spirit, we are strong to remain faithful and less likely to fall back. But when we are immature in the Word and walking according to our fleshly desires, we can easily be swayed, even to reject the message of Christ. An example of this very thing given to us in the Word is with the nation of Israel. At Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday), the Jews were yelling '*Hosanna!* (meaning "Oh Save!") *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!*' (**John 12:13**). Israel knew Jesus was the Son of David, the coming Messiah, yet they had not matured. Afterwards, the false teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees swayed them to fall back and reject Christ (**Matthew 27:20**). These same Jews, who had praised Jesus at His first coming, killed Him yelling, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" (**Luke 23:21**). And *the chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"* (**John 19:15b**)

Are we any different today? Unfortunately, we are not. Many Church leaders today reject Christ when they reject His message of His second coming and His literal millennial kingdom to come, leading the sheep astray. Yet how many Christians today want to hear the kingdom message? Sadly, it is very, very few. It is a shame to see that a majority of Christians are no different than the Jews were back then.

What happened to Israel after they rejected and crucified Christ? God destroyed most of them, their city and their temple in 70 AD, the rest were driven out of their land and scattered amongst the Gentile nations. The offer of the heavenly kingdom was then set aside and given to the Church. Knowing this, what do you think He will do to believers who reject Him and His message today? The Word is clear. Christ will reject *them*. They will be cast out of the kingdom, separated from Christ for one thousand years. Therefore, we must be determined to stay strong in the Word, being cautious of false teachers in the Church who sway believers to reject the gospel of Christ. And even if they reject only part of the gospel, they reject Christ altogether.

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have [hold fast to; devote oneself to] God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” (2 John 7-11)

The “doctrine of Christ” encompasses all that Christ taught at His first coming and all that He received from God the Father. Christ is coming in the flesh for the second time — apart from sin (having wiped away sin at Calvary) but for salvation, that is, not for Spirit Salvation (our eternal salvation already secure) but for soul salvation (our inheritance into the Millennial kingdom).

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. (Hebrews 9:27, 28)

Loving God means supporting the whole gospel of Christ and standing away from those who reject it. Loving God means loving others, abiding in His Word and ministering His message surrounding the Word of the kingdom as good servants. We are not to concern ourselves with those who reject the message, but we are to humbly ‘shake off the dust from our feet’ and move on. We can be sure that many will speak evil of us, just as they spoke evil of Christ when He ministered the kingdom message. But we must endure, for how do we know that we will not save a soul into the kingdom? And if this is the will of God, should we not obey Him? We must continually look at ourselves and not lose faith. We must endure through Christ!

The Epistle to the Galatians

Paul became aware of a perversion of the gospel (the good news surrounding the message of the kingdom) that was actively deterring the Churches of Galatia away from the Truth. There were false teachers, primarily Jews, who were advocating salvation by "the works of the law." These false teachers were then placing emphasis on Jewish practices, specifically the Jewish rite of circumcision. In the early years of the Church the majority of those who became Christians were by birth Jews, who were very familiar with the ritual and practice of the tabernacle. Yet in **Hebrews 9:6-12**, we see that these practices were only "*symbolic for the present time.*" And that which was symbolic could not "*make him who performed the service perfect in regard to conscience.*" The performance of religious rituals for its own sake (legalism) is quite useless in respect to it being accepted as righteousness. These laws and rituals in the Old Testament were meant as a "sign" for the Jews, pointing to a future fulfillment. It was imposed only until the time of reformation – these things having been fulfilled in Christ.

Paul's letter to the Galatians was an attempt to bring the Church back to the correct gospel and to counter the false message, a distortion of the gospel of Christ. First Paul had to reassert his authority as an apostle of Christ, proving that his message of the gospel was the true message as it was taught to him by Christ Himself. Paul had personally taught the Church just previous to these false teachers, therefore Paul referenced them as his "little children in the faith" as they were still new to the understanding of the gospel.

Paul emphasized to the Church that there was only one gospel of Christ and if anyone preached any other gospel besides what he had taught them, then "*let him be accursed.*" By calling these false teachers accursed, Paul made it clear that they would undergo a stricter judgment from Christ. *Pastors and teachers possess a greater influence over Christians and with that require greater responsibility, as they are representing His Word.* Pastors and teachers who refrain from feeding their sheep as well as those who influence the sheep to reject Christ and His message of the coming kingdom will have to face a stricter judgment at the Judgment seat of Christ.

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect [mature] man, able also to bridle the whole body...Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. (James 3:1, 2, 5)

When we preach according to man's wisdom, we allow the sin nature to inspire false and evil words beyond our control. Only through the work of the Holy Spirit within us can we bring these destructive words under control. When one has the full knowledge of the gospel of Christ, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide him, then he is able to preach in spirit and in truth. Otherwise, he will speak according to the flesh, bringing others to follow his false word and destructive paths.

This was the case with the false teachers among the Church in Galatia. The Galatians were on the verge of becoming enslaved to the law because of them. As an example, Paul explained to the Church what had happened fourteen years following his conversion when he went back to Jerusalem to preach the gospel. False teachers were brought in amongst them then, who were teaching Jews and Gentiles about the law of circumcision. Paul, as the apostle for the uncircumcised (Gentiles), was to go and preach to the Gentiles, and Peter, commissioned to preach the Gospel to the circumcised (Jews) was to go and preach to the Jews. But when Peter went to preach to the Jews in Antioch, he withdrew himself from eating with the Gentiles in front of the Jews, because he feared the false teachers. When the rest of the Jews who were with Peter, including Barnabas, saw this they too refrained from eating with the Gentiles. Peter's hypocritical example implied that Gentiles had to behave like Jews in order to receive salvation. And this hypocrisy was received because of the false teachers whom they feared. Paul, defending the gospel, exposed Peter in front of everyone saying,

If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?" ...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but

Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." (Galatians 2:14c-21)

This event was the exact situation that was leading the Galatians away from the truth. Paul called them *O foolish Galatians!* and said to them,

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just shall live by faith'. (Galatians 3:1-11)

The Greek word for “foolish” is *anoetos* (Strong’s #G453) meaning “unintelligent or stupid.” The Galatians were unwise according to God’s Word, particularly the spiritual lessons regarding the purpose of Christ’s death. Faith in Christ (abiding in the Spirit) replaces the law (according to the flesh; fleshly works). Yet, as long as there is sin in the world the law will remain until the end of the Millennium in order to expose sin. (**Matthew 5:17, 18**). But faithful Christians are to look to Christ, to be transformed from within.

The false belief that works of the law must be adhered to for salvation and righteousness is prominent in the Jewish and Christian community today. There are Jews (by birth) who have become Christians who are led away from the truth and return to the law. There are Christians who are not Jews who are also entangled in this false message, being taught that they must be like the Jews and follow the law in order to obtain righteousness and be saved. Many of these Christians call themselves, “Messianic Jews,” which has no foundation in God’s Word. This title goes against Scripture, for there are only three creative acts of God: Israel, Gentiles and the Church. Like the Galatians, Christians today are being tossed to and fro, carried about by every wind of doctrine to include these Jewish legalistic messages, taught by the “Jewish Roots Movement” cult. Yet the Word clearly teaches that *faith* is the only substance for salvation and righteousness.

Paul strengthened his defense of the Gospel by recalling God's promise to Abraham and his Seed (Christ) that was made four hundred and thirty years before the Law of Moses was enacted. And God's promises are never annulled. God's covenant with Abraham was made because of his *faithful obedience* to God (**Hebrews 11:17**). This has not and will not change. And because we are in Christ, we also are part of the seed of Abraham, as first-born *adopted* sons. There is no Scriptural basis that the Law of Moses was the fulfillment of the covenant made to Abraham for the inheritance. This is man's way of adding to or taking away from the Word of God. *The Law of Moses was added after God's promise to Abraham to clarify the issue of sin until Christ the Seed came.* Christ's death and shed blood not only covered sin, but took away the sins of the world.

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made...Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Galatians 3:19-24)

Christ's death and shed blood took away our sins and redeemed us from the Law; and His resurrection allowed us to be heirs with Him. Through faith in Christ, we are considered Abraham's seed, grafted in as adopted sons of God and heirs to the inheritance.

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:6, 7)

All Christians are considered to be one "in Christ" as part of the body of Christ. But those who allow the Spirit of Christ to work through them for good works, awaiting that future Day, are mature and complete. Not only are they "in Christ" but "*Christ is in you.*" The Scriptures in **Galatians 4:6 and Colossians 1:27** provide reference to this very thing:

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. (Galatians 4:9, 10)

After Christians have come to know God and the magnitude of His promise, it is shameful how easily it is for some to stray away and be entangled again in man's wisdom. A proper understanding of the purpose of "Christ's death and shed blood" will clearly show that the laws, regulations, feasts, celebrations and sacrifices no longer apply for the atonement of sin and for pleasing God --- only *faith* in Christ, who took away our sins by His blood, is pleasing to the Lord. Because of Christ, believers no longer live in bondage to the law and no longer are slaves to sin. The feasts were given to Israel as a "sign," which pointed to a future Day, in order that they would keep it ever in their minds.

Paul gave the Galatians the example of Sarah (the freewoman), Abraham's wife; and Hagar, the bondwoman. God had given Sarah and Abraham a son, Isaac, who was the child of promise. Ishmael, born from the bondwoman Hagar and Abraham, was born according to the flesh.

Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free." (Galatians 4:30, 31)

Isaac, the son of promise, is a type of Christ, the Son and Seed of promise, and through Him we are children of the freewoman. The law was our bondage, but Christ set us free from it. Yet Jews and Christians continue to seek the law to obtain righteousness and salvation, performing works according to their flesh. Only works done according to the Spirit through faith are qualified for righteousness and salvation.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. (Galatians 5:1)

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. (Galatians 5:4, 5)

Christ paid the price to give us freedom from the law, the Law of Moses. When we entangle ourselves in the law, we are denying Christ and His works. By sending us the Holy Spirit, Christ gave us the ability to choose to live holy lives and put away sin. We can do nothing in the flesh, but we can do all things in the Spirit. In the Spirit, we can abide in all of God's commandments. And we have Christ acting as our High Priest, presently in the order of Aaron. When we do sin, we are to confess our sins to Him and He will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (**1 John 1:9**).

In what manner are we able to put away sin? Paul tells us by “walking in the Spirit:”

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22)

The desires of our flesh are always at odds with what the Holy Spirit desires. The only way to fight off the flesh is through the Spirit. In **Galatians 5:19**, the “works of the flesh” are revealed and those who practice these works will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But when we put on the fruit of the Spirit, we are able have victory over sin. We also are able to restore another Christian from the bondage of sin. When we act according to the Spirit — in love, kindness, and gentleness — we can show our brethren how they too can be free from burdensome sin. Through the ministry of the gospel and the characteristics of the Spirit, one may be able to win souls and turn them from the error of their ways.

In addition, we are to give cheerfully to those who teach the gospel of Christ in order to grow His spiritual house, Christ's future kingdom. Last, Paul tells the Galatians *not to grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:9, 10)

We must strive to be on the path of righteousness by walking in the Spirit, performing good works for the ministry of Christ so that on the Day of the Lord we will be rewarded. Paul exhorts Christians to do good to all but *especially* to the household of “the faith.”

Why do you think Jesus in His last 40 days on earth taught believers the Word of the kingdom instead of giving the gospel of grace to the unsaved? Christ wanted to make sure that His people would carry this message of the kingdom to all nations. Therefore, our priority is to build God's spiritual house by carrying the message of the kingdom to other believers. Furthermore, we are to continually exhort other believers of “the faith” and stay close to them.

Seek righteousness by faith in Christ (through the Spirit) and not by the works of the law (through the flesh)!

The Epistle to the Ephesians

Paul spent three years teaching the Word of the kingdom to the Church in Ephesus, a port city in Asia Minor. Afterwards, he journeyed to Jerusalem where he was rejected by the religious leaders. He was later delivered to Rome where he was imprisoned for preaching the kingdom of God. While he was in prison, Paul wrote his Epistle to the Church in Ephesus. Even through much suffering, Paul sought only the furtherance of God's kingdom and the strengthening of the Church. This is the determination and love that Paul had for Christ, for his brethren, and for the hope of his soul-salvation. *Nothing* would separate him from God's love and work in him. An obvious sign of Paul's determination can be seen in **Acts 20:22-27**:

And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulation await me.

But none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.

Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

Paul's focus was not on his suffering or the desire to hold on to his life in this world but on the "joy that was set before him." *Nothing* was more important to him than honoring and serving the Lord or striving to win the crown.

Although Paul was in prison, the gospel of the kingdom spread to numerous groups who met in homes all over Asia. Paul wrote exhorting them to encourage each other in *the faith*. His opening letter addresses them as *the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus*.

Paul begins his Letter with praises to God for His blessings, which were finished before the foundation of the world, and will be made manifest *in the dispensation of the fullness of the times---* that is, at Christ's second coming. Paul spoke of the "mystery" — the offer of the inheritance to those "in Christ" *who are holy and without blame before Him in love*.

But without the Holy Spirit, we can do nothing. The Holy Spirit in us is the guarantee of our inheritance into the kingdom *if* we chose to be led by the Spirit during our lifetime. By doing so, we have redemption in the age to come. The word *redemption* is translated in Strong's # G629 as "a ransom in full" or "deliverance." Paul refers to our (soul) salvation as the *redemption of the purchased possession*. Christ paid the price for our salvation at Calvary, and when He returns He will redeem believers who are found worthy (those led by the Spirit) to enter the Kingdom.

Therefore, Paul prayed that God would grant the Ephesians the Spirit of wisdom in the full knowledge (*epignosis*) of Christ and *that the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the*

hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints... (**Ephesians 1:18, 19**). What is the hope of His calling? It is having the hope of entering the kingdom in glory with Christ. For this reason, Paul wanted the Ephesians to continue growing in the faith.

Man is born spiritually *dead in trespasses and sins*, and because we were without the Spirit we followed the flesh, the world and the devil. Upon one's belief in the Lord, the Spirit is made alive in his spirit and he now has the ability to run the race of the faith towards his heavenly calling, looking forward to God's promise of the reward of the inheritance into the kingdom.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ [by grace you have been saved], and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (**Ephesians 2:4-7**)

God does not change His mind. God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. We were saved in the past by Christ because of God's grace and our faith; and we will be saved in the future because of His grace and our faith. Salvation of all three parts of our being — spirit, soul and body — only comes by God's grace through (our) faith. As noted in **Ephesians 2:5**, it has already been determined before God created anything that we would "*sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*" God knows who will receive Him. Therefore, He has already placed His elect to sit on Christ's throne, ruling and reigning in the kingdom of the heavens. We have to choose whether we want to be a part of the inheritance.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (**Ephesians 2:8, 9**)

God's gift, by sending His Son as the sacrificial Lamb for our sins, is eternal salvation. And because it is a gift, no works are required. We cannot do anything to earn this salvation. The moment one acknowledges their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is assured eternal life. This is

spirit salvation. Part of this gift involved sending the Holy Spirit to guide us to our inheritance — the Millennial Kingdom. The Holy Spirit leads us unto maturity and prepares us for good works.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

After we have received the free gift of the Holy Spirit, we are then to perform good works for the building of His kingdom in order to inherit with Christ. This is soul salvation.

Before God's sacrificial offering of His Son, the Gentiles were without Christ and therefore without the covenants of promise. Without Christ dying for us, the Church would not have been created, and we would be without God in this world. We would have remained Gentiles in sin, spiritually dead and nothing to look forward to, whose end would be death in the lake of fire forever. But because of God's grace, because of His love for us, even while we were yet His enemies, He gave us His only begotten Son, who paid the price for our salvation by His blood.

Then, because of His resurrection, Christ grant us access to His inheritance, the Church being grafted in with the Jews, providing us the offer to be king-priests during the Messianic Era. In this, we can realize how much God desires for us to be with Him and His Son.

We now are no longer apart from God or His covenants, but we share all with Christ and our brethren. We are now part of God's spiritual house, being built on the foundation from the teachings of the apostles and the prophets, who were taught by Christ Himself and who is the Chief Cornerstone, preparing a holy temple of God.

Paul speaks of this as *the mystery of Christ* because it was hidden in ages past, but has now been revealed by the Spirit: *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel... (Ephesians 3:6)*

This is the “mystery” and theme of the whole Gospel --- Christians having the opportunity to be partakers with Christ in the kingdom of heaven —

with Christ being the center of this theme. Why was this mystery hidden in the past but now revealed? God waited until the Church was created to make known this mystery, so that His plan and purpose would be fulfilled and Satan's plan thwarted. God's manifold [having many parts; various in character--Strong's #G4164] wisdom concerning his plan and purpose for man regarding rulership may now be seen by the Church to Satan and his evil spiritual beings.

...and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ: to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places... (Ephesians 3:9, 10)

Satan and his fallen angels are considered “*the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.*” If they would have known that Christ's death and resurrection was God's plan to create the Church for the purpose of replacing them as ruler, then they would not have allowed Christ to have died. But Christ succeeded in accomplishing the will of God, so that now the Church may show to Satan and the fallen angels what God's will and wisdom is concerning their placement in the future Millennial kingdom. *Each and every one of us has the opportunity to rule and reign with Christ and to show to these evil powers that we can overcome.*

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (1 Corinthians 2:7, 8)

After Christ's death and resurrection, He visited the fallen angels in prison for the purpose of revealing the mystery to them and proclaiming victory.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient...who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. (1 Peter 3:18-22)

Paul was in awe to this incredible offer that God had bestowed to the Church. He got down on his knees and prayed for the Church to be strengthened by the Spirit and to be filled with all the fullness of God. Paul wanted the Ephesians to comprehend the magnitude of God's offer to them, so that they would continue in the faith and not lose heart; walking in unity so that they would endure the longsuffering and win the race.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
(Ephesians 4:4-6)

Christians are in this race together as one body. We are not competing against each other, rather we are wrestling against *principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* (**Ephesians 6:12**). Christians, therefore, should walk in unity, be of like mind and not be divisive. There should be no dissensions and no rivalries, for we know that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism in the Spirit that places all believers in the body of Christ. And if there is one God the Father, then we are all called in one hope --- the hope of His glory, the future Millennial kingdom.

And as one body, Christ ascended to heaven leaving us the responsibility as servants to exhort one another, to do good works according to the Spirit for the building of His kingdom, so that we may qualify for the inheritance --- *reserved in heaven for us*.

Christ first descended into the lower parts of the earth, then ascended to heaven, thereby moving Hades (Paradise) up to the third heaven (far above the heavens) where He sits at the right hand of the Father as High Priest, according to the order of Aaron (**Ephesians 4:9; 2 Corinthians 12:2, 3**). Upon doing this, He sent us the Holy Spirit along with spiritual gifts. The faithful stewardship of our gifts on earth will determine our position in Christ's kingdom.

Christians have the responsibility to use these gifts for the building and edifying of the Church; to make known the whole gospel of Christ and to keep the unity of the faith, for when we are mature together we are able to exhort one another and remain strong in the Lord. Last, our service to

Him is a test: *For how can we serve God as kings and priests in the future kingdom if we do not serve Him now as humble servants, according to His will?* The answer is: we can't.

Paul continues on to explain how we can begin to serve God and use the spiritual gifts that we possess. Before we can ever begin to use our gifts for the building of the kingdom we must first *put off concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.* (**Ephesians 4:22-24**)

A companion Scripture can be seen in **Romans 12:1, 2**:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Christians must make every effort daily to die to the flesh and choose to walk according to the Spirit — holy and righteous. The Greek translation for *holy* (Strong's #G40) is "physically pure and morally blameless." Everything we do in the body, whether by our acts or thoughts or speech, is to be seen as pure and clean. The Greek translation for *righteous* (Strong's #G1342) is "equitable, just, right" (right living). We are to be just with others and live as we are called -- without blame or sin. When we do sin, we are to confess it to God, and as **1 John 1:9** records: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

We must be set apart from this world. This means not to be a part or love the things in this world, a world ruled under Satan. The word *world* means "age." Christians who are dedicated to this world and all its lusts will produce nothing for God, but will only bring swift destruction upon themselves. But a mind dedicated to God and His Word will produce good works for Him and life in the age to come. We are to pattern after the faithful prophets who *confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims*

on the earth...but now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country...for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13, 16)

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Paul mentions ways in which we can put off the “old man” and put on the *new man in Christ*. This must be a choice that we make simply out of faithful obedience to the Lord. We must choose to put to death our fleshly desires by holding back our natural responses and choosing to act according to the Spirit:

1. Put away lying and speak *the Truth* with his neighbor.
2. Put away anger and bitterness in order to obtain peace and forgiveness.
3. Put away stealing. Labor for what is good, giving to others in need.
4. Put away evil speaking and speak only what is good.

If we do not abide in these things, then we choose to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. If we would just keep in mind that the One who dwells in us is God's Spirit, we would be more careful about all that we say, think and do.

There are four ways in which the "new man in Christ" should walk, as imitators of Christ:

1. Walk in Unity
2. Walk in Love
3. Walk in Light
4. Walk in Wisdom

We are to walk in unity as one body in Christ in order to build the Church. We are to walk in love, just as Christ loved us and sacrificed Himself for us. This type of love is "agape" love, an unconditional love not based solely on feelings, but on obedience and devotion; to hold dear. God says if we love him, we will abide in His commandments.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." (1 John 5:1-3)

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." (John 15:9, 10)

We are to love others as God loves us. He loved us even while we were yet His enemies. As imitators of God, we should also demonstrate this type of self-sacrificial love, even to our enemies. This will be a great test of our faithful obedience to Him.

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:44-48)

A companion Scripture can be seen in **Proverbs 25:21, 22**:

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

This act of love and kindness may cause the enemy to feel ashamed. The point is that Christians should be set apart from evil and be a shining light to others. In all circumstances, we are to be examples of Christ. When we do not walk in love, then we are not abiding in God or in His commandments, and our works are no better than our enemies.

"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down

one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” **(John 15:12-14)**

Because of His great love for us, Christ laid down His life. We also, are to lay down our lives (die to flesh) for Christ. If we abide in doing this, we are truly His friends. Furthermore, we are to pattern His love to others.

We are to walk as children of light. Since we possess the Holy Spirit, we are to *walk according to the fruit of the Spirit, which is in all goodness, righteousness and truth.* We no longer are to walk in darkness, or to associate with the works of darkness, which bears no fruit for God. The works of darkness that surrounded the Ephesians were idol worship. Paul advised the Ephesians to expose the idolaters by showing their light, in truth and spirit, for the light exposes the works of darkness. Unfruitful works are exposed by our ministry of the Gospel.

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”
(Ephesians 5:8)

Upon believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, our position changed from darkness (evil or sin) to light (holiness or righteousness). Light therefore references two things in Scripture: 1) Light is goodness just as darkness is evil. 2) “The Light” also represents Christ, and darkness represents Satan.

“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.” **(John 12:46)**

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” **(Matthew 5:16)**

“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place...” **(2 Peter 1:19)**

Believers are to change their walk to correspond to their position in Christ. This means reflecting the very image of Christ. As a new creation in Christ, we are to put away darkness — the sin that comes from the flesh, the world and the devil.

Our minds are renewed by and through the assimilation of God's Word, enabling us to be transformed as holy and loving servants of God. We are to allow the Holy Spirit to change us day by day, minute by minute.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:9-12)

Paul exhorts believers to walk in wisdom, so that we understand what the will of the Lord is. As we gain wisdom from His Word, we are automatically being "filled with the Spirit."

Paul goes on to describe the Christian's part in submitting to another just as the Church must submit to Christ as the Head of the body. In marriage, the relationship between a husband and wife reflects on whether we are being submissive to Christ. God created husband and wife as "one flesh" as a *type* of Christ and His bride. Our marriage relationship is a test of our faithful obedience to God. Wives must voluntarily submit to their husbands as the head, just as Christ is the Head of the Church. And just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her, husbands must love their wives in the same way — as one flesh. Together both are able to build each other up in the Lord.

When one is weak, the other who is strong is able to encourage. If both are strong in the Lord and have put on the armor of God, together they are able to stand against the wiles of the devil. In part five of this chapter under "Battling the three enemies of God," there is an in depth study concerning the whole armor of God. As the present ruler of this age, Satan seeks to attack Christians from submitting to the Lord. This is why the Word of God is our sword and the greatest weapon of defense against the wiles of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

The true battle is with Satan and his demonic beings who work through false teachers, most of whom are unaware. And Satan works through pastor-teachers because he knows that they can do the most harm, just as he worked through the disciple Peter to go against God's plan for Jesus. Satan, not fully knowing God's plan for His Son, used Peter in an attempt to deceive Christ. When Peter tried to get Jesus to change His course, Jesus told Peter,

“Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”(Matthew 16:23)

Jesus forewarned Peter that Satan would have a hold on him — Peter would deny the Lord three times.

“Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” (Luke 22:31, 32)

We can realize with the Church in Ephesus that they were a group of believers who were well taught in the Word of the kingdom and who had every opportunity to go on to maturity. Paul kept them focused on the ‘mystery,’ the word of the kingdom, and did not cease to give them warnings so that they would not drift away. He warned them night and day with tears for three years. Even so, Paul writes a shocking statement to Timothy concerning the actions of the Church in Ephesus and throughout Asia:

This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. (2 Timothy 1:15)

Most all of the Church who had been taught the truth of the Word by Paul had turned their back on their inheritance. The Church in Ephesus had

stopped focusing on God's Word which caused them to fall back into the world with all its lusts, being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine; and over a period of time they lost their focus and love for Christ and the future kingdom to come.

This is pictured in **Revelation** chapter **two**, beginning with the Lord's judgment to the Church in Ephesus at the beginning of the dispensation and concludes with the Church in Laodicea at the very end of the dispensation, a period of two thousand years. These Churches present an overall portrayal of believers who at the beginning left their 'first love,' resulting in a complete betrayal of the Lord's Word at the end of the dispensation, which is nauseating in the Lord's sight:

"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing...and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked'" - (Revelation 3:16, 17)

Therefore, with the Church in Ephesus we must realize that this is a representation of the actions of the whole of Christianity and a warning of the same possibility for every kingdom believer who may become complacent in their pursuit of the kingdom. We can conclude that the Lord's words recorded here will be addressed to a majority of Christians at the Judgment seat of Christ in the near future. The Lord's warning of "*I will vomit you out of My mouth*" should not be taken lightly. With regard to our own choices, let us not make the same mistakes as they did, but do what it takes to be overcomers. Let us not be deceived into thinking there will be no consequence.

Let us therefore move forward with diligence in faithful obedience to the Word of God, and be focused constantly on the kingdom to come, so that we are strengthened and prepared in our fight against the evil one and in our race of the faith till the end.