

The Accountable Christian



Gerald A. Kirby



DARGER
PUBLISHING

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DEDICATION

To My Beloved Darlene:

I cannot thank you enough for being my rock during the process of writing this book. You encouraged me when I wanted to throw in the towel, you lovingly critiqued me, and you kept me focused on the call that God had given me.

I love you more and more each day.

Thank you, my love.

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CONTENTS

Preface.....	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The Right Time and the Right Place	1
Here's to you... ..	8
Stop Lights and Stop Signs	9
Challenging our Assumptions	13
Chapter 2: Destinations	1
Opposing Positions.....	1
Your Call	9
Chapter 3: The Process of Salvation	1
The Make-up of Man.....	1
Baby Steps.....	3
Salvation of the Spirit.....	6
Salvation of the Soul	8
Salvation of the Body	49
Chapter 4: The Trouble with Knowing.....	17
Fruit Inspectors.....	17
Send in the Doctor!	19
What's the Point?	21
The Lumbar Cushion.....	22
Chapter 5: The Three Kingdoms of God	59
The Kingdom of God the Father	59
The Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit.....	61
The Kingdom of God the Son	29
Which Kingdom Is It?	66

SHEEP!!!	41
Clarifying the Kingdom of Heaven.....	79
Matthew 6:33.....	45
Matthew 7:21	47
Matthew 21:42-43	48
Galatians 5:19-22.....	50
Summary	87
Chapter 6: The Judgment Seat of Christ.....	88
Two Different Judgments.....	58
The Epi-what-ever.....	97
STOP!! In the Name of Love.....	66
Chapter 7: Israel as our Example	1
The Promised Land	4
Korah's Rebellion	7
The Plague.....	8
The Fiery Serpents	10
Moses	11
The Exile of Israel.....	13
Conclusion	15
Chapter 8: Payback Time.....	17
Just Like Kids.....	17
Negative Consequences	18
Second Death.....	20
The Outer Darkness	25
Matthew 8:11-12.....	27
Matthew 22:13	29
Matthew 25:30	32

The Blackness of Darkness.....	35
Hell vs. Hades.....	40
Chapter 9: Rewards!	49
The Overcomer.....	50
The Overcomer's Rewards	51
Crowns.....	61
The Bride of Christ.....	69
Chapter 10: Stirring the Pot	77
Did Jesus Have Amnesia?	77
Now What?.....	79
My Prayer for You... ..	82

PREFACE

There is a question that people keep asking me: why are you writing this book? I guess if I were to answer that it is because I have a “Nehemiah Complex.” *What is a Nehemiah Complex*, you say? A Nehemiah Complex is when a man of God is so burdened by something which God lays on his heart that he has no choice but to respond. This Nehemiah Complex is used by church planters all over the world as they attempt to describe their callings to plant churches. It’s used by pastors who see their congregations dwindling down in numbers and long to change the tide. It’s used by teachers and laypeople that just want a little clarity when it comes to what the Bible says about—well—anything!

In the book of Nehemiah, we see the story of a man who has a rather nice job as a cupbearer and it’s a job that he does very well. He serves at the pleasure of the king. One day Nehemiah gets word that his home city of Jerusalem is in shambles and there are no walls. This news distresses him to the point that he is brought to tears.

Then, one day, when he is in service to the king, the king sees that Nehemiah has his heart set somewhere else, so he asks Nehemiah what his trouble is. Nehemiah’s response is one of the most wonderful answers in Scripture. Nehemiah in effects tells the king, *my heart is broken because my city lies in ruins and has no walls*. When the king asks him what he can do to help Nehemiah, his first response is to pray. But once done, he comes back to the king and asks to be allowed to go to Jerusalem, so he can rebuild the walls. The king sympathizes.

Nehemiah was moved to the point of tears because he could not stand the status quo. There was something terribly wrong in Jerusalem and Nehemiah wanted to do something—anything about it. I imagine that the thought of going back and rebuilding the walls was on Nehemiah’s thoughts every day.

When God gives you a call like that, you cannot help but to respond. It overtakes you. You are constantly thinking of ways that

you can “make it work.” But at the same time, you realize that this task is far greater than anything you can do on your own. You realize that you need help from Someone more capable and able than yourself.

More than anything, it was a call that God wanted to use Nehemiah; and Nehemiah knew it. He just needed the opportunity to get started.

I have a Nehemiah Complex. I have been allowed, by the grace and mercy of God, to see the truths within this book. For far too long the status quo of the Christian life has been focused on how we should fit in, become more culturally relevant, how to prepare for Millennials, and what can we do to bring more people in (besides, we all know that our numbers are down).

But lost in that mad dash to become relevant, somewhere we lost sight of what was clearly in front of our eyes; *we don't have any walls!* There is a truth in Scripture that points us to a life we are called to live as followers of Christ. This life we are called to live as disciples and followers of Christ has taken a back seat to the “next best thing.” Gone are the days when people will listen to sound doctrine. We’ve muddied the waters so badly that most believers don’t know which end is up. When you mention the word “salvation,” Christians scatter like roaches when a light gets turned on.

It should not be so. I want to rebuild that wall.

I have a Nehemiah Complex.

Hear my heart.

The Bible is so very clear on the doctrine of salvation and how we are to live our lives as believers, and then—what our responsibility is to God, that we do a disservice when we do not focus on seeking to understand these truths. The Bible is a treasure of wonderful truths just waiting to be discovered—if you will only seek.

I implore you.

I beg you.

Take the time to seek out the truths of God's Word and see what lies ahead for you as a believer in Christ. You have a path to walk, but there's a fork in the road. That fork is this book. After you are done reading it you will have a choice; continue with the status quo or discover your own Nehemiah Complex.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

THE RIGHT TIME AND THE RIGHT PLACE

PERFECT! Did you see how God just did that?! *Wait...what in the world is this guy talking about?* You may be thinking. You, picking up this book and opening to this page! You see, *if you are reading this book right now you have been chosen of God to read it!* That makes you a very rare person! I mean, think about it for a moment, you just picked up a book called “*The Accountable Christian*.” That alone sets you apart from most folks. I mean, really, who in the world wants to read a book like that?

So, let me set the stage and be brutally honest here: ***in today’s Christian society there is an extreme lack of discipline toward the things of God, our attitude toward God, and toward the way we are to live for God, which has led many a believer to go the way of the Israelites, chasing after the things of the world and trying to make a name for themselves.***

Speaking of the Israelites, when you take a cursory glance of their history, they had a propensity to want what other people had and be like other nations (1 Samuel 8:5). That same trap has been sprung on this generation during this dispensation of grace. We see other churches growing and becoming Megachurches and we think, “If we don’t do that, we aren’t doing what God has called us to do!” That is nothing but a LIE from the pit of Hades! But, the ideology to be the next best thing has entrenched itself in the body of Christ and has crippled us from *true* growth because we chase after the image and not the image maker. We need to stop trying to make a name for ourselves and trust that if it is God’s will to do so, He will do it! It isn’t about the work we do for Him, it’s about the work He does through us!

For about four years, I worked at a children’s enrichment center. Working with children from the ages of six months to sixteen years old can teach you a few things—to say the least. I could

probably write a book solely on the lessons I learned during those years alone! But there was one main thing which I learned during that time and it is a mantra which most teachers adhere to: ***children crave parameters.***

Now, you would think it was the other way around, especially when you see a two-year-old grab hold of a friend's toy which they have decided that they must now have at all costs! However, the more I worked in childcare, the more I found exactly how true that mantra was. If a teacher were to run his or her classroom with absolutely no rules and allow the children to do whatever they wanted, wherever they wanted, however they wanted, you would have a classroom full of pure unadulterated chaos! But, teach the children to remain quiet when a speaker is talking, respect their elders, follow the classroom rules, and walk in a line, and then you will have children that will learn that life contains boundaries.

Being a Christians is no different. We have boundaries as well. We are told in the Old Testament that we are to love the LORD our God, not profane His name, do not commit adultery, do not covet, etcetera. We are called by Christ in the New Testament to love one another, go the extra mile, and pray for our enemies. And believe it or not, each of us as believers in Christ *craves* those boundaries. We instinctively want to do the right things and please God in the deepest recesses of our hearts. No matter *how* we may act, deep down, we want to honor the LORD with all we are. Why? Because the Holy Spirit resides within each of us (Ephesians 1:13) and He leads us into all truth (John 16:13).

This leads me back to the title of this book: The Accountable Christian. When you read those words the thought that comes (or should come) to mind is that you and I, as believers in Christ, are *accountable*. And we *are* accountable—to Someone. All throughout Scripture, and as we spend time together in this book, you will see that the LORD has set before us instances for us to follow according to His will and to live our lives His way. Why? To be a dictator? No. of course not. He could if He wanted to, He is the Creator of the

universe after all, you know? However, God would have us to live our lives according to His way, the same way He wanted Israel to live their lives as a nation—because God knows best, and He love us. Period.

We are finite beings who can never truly understand nor grasp the future and what it holds. We do not have all the answers (although we may think at times we do). We do not know the lasting implications of each of our choices and how those choices may or may not play out. There are far too many variables for us to even ponder the outcome. That is where we need God. We *need* parameters. We *need* boundaries.

But those boundaries and parameters are only of beneficial use for us if we are first, children of God. But as you may know, becoming a child of God is not something that we can do on our own accord. From the beginning with Adam and Eve, man has rebelled against God and sin has entered the world (Genesis 3:1-19). Because of that sin, now, all men have sin (Romans 5:12), and the price that must be paid for that rebellious sin is death (Romans 6:23). And here is the wonderful, incredible, amazing truth about God:

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

—Romans 5:6¹

Here we see that God has provided to each living person the free gift of salvation. That gift of course, only comes from God and can only be accepted by the person to whom it is offered (John 3:16). A person who trusts in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, His death, burial, and resurrection has indeed received the free gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23).

Another wonderful truth of the Bible states that as believers, the LORD would have us to live a life that is victorious and abundant

¹ All biblical references will appear in the New American Standard Bible translation unless otherwise noted.

(John 10:10). But, in my short span on this earth, this is the one of the many areas where believers (I) struggle. How do I, as a follower of Christ, have a victorious abundant life? What would you say if I told you it was connected to the title of this book? Being an *accountable* Christian?

Let's talk real for a moment, shall we? You read the words "accountable Christian" and you think, *Aren't ALL Christians accountable?* Yes. Yes, they are. But if we're being totally honest here, even though those two words *should* go together—often times they do not.

You see, we live in a fallen world with a fallen society that keeps prodding us to "go get your own," "be the best *you*, you can be," "it's ok to step on the little guy to get what you want," "big fish eat smaller fish, it's just the way things are," and "survival of the fittest," those sorts of things. Unfortunately, many Christians (*yes, Christians*) get caught up in the schemes of the world and agree with its pretenses. Slowly but surely, we as believers in Christ, start thinking about us, me, I. We get duped into chasing after making much of our names, our lives, our prestige, and our fame. And what is more, the change is subtle, very subtle at first. That is often how the enemy works.

But being a Christian who is chasing after the things of the world is a dangerous place to be! We are, at the very least, being openly defiant when we choose to live our lives for ourselves and to *not* live our lives for God—plain and simple. But aren't the cards stacked against us? I mean, from the time we were toddlers we were taught to do things for *ourselves*; "tie your shoes," "take out the garbage," "do your chores," "make your bed!" (*Never liked the last one much*). We were thrust into a society that demanded that we do things for ourselves, and by the way, shouldn't we have something to show for all our hard work? Because, as we grew older, we noticed that other people had things, things that we wanted to have. That's when we start to ask the question, "Why can't I have that?" And there, in that subtle temptation, the stage is set.

The fall of man solidified what I like to call, *The chase*. The chase is when we are not satisfied with what we have and take our strength and our focus and try to obtain what we want. Those “wants” come in many different shapes and sizes: houses, cars, wives, children, bank accounts, power, prestige, and fame, just to name a few. But that is not what the Bible tells us to seek after—is it? What does Jesus tell us?

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. —Matthew 6:33

It takes a unique Christian I might add, to denounce the world’s idea of life and live the one that honors and pleases the LORD—on a consistent basis. Which leads me to some other questions: How in the world do we seek first His kingdom? How do I seek His righteousness? What does that even mean? Are we seeking to get into heaven? Are we to seeking to live like God? Is there a way to truly live a life that honors God? If so, what does it look like?

And here we have it: too many questions and not enough answers! Rather frustrating don’t you think? Well, that is one of the many reasons that the LORD has called me to write this book, because far too many believers don’t know how to answer those questions. And let me make a bold statement right here at the beginning—according to the Word of God, there is an answer—and it’s **mind-blowing!**

So, let’s go back to the beginning: here you are, reading this book. If you wouldn’t mind me asking you, why was that? What prompted you to pick this book up? Was it the cool cover? The Title? The snazzy picture of the author on the back? Guess what? I can tell you *exactly* why you picked this book up. Are you ready? It was the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Now, you may be thinking,

Wait, that's kind of an audacious statement there. You're right, it is, but first, let me explain.

You see, I asked God for you to pick this book up. This book you hold (or are looking at on a device) is an answer to prayer. A long time ago, I prayed for *you*. Yes, you. Why? Because I know that the Truths you will read in this book will change your life! They changed mine.

But first, let me share with you that this book is more than just words on a page. For me, this book is a calling. I have desired to write a book for almost all my adult life, and when the LORD gave me the call to do it, I jumped at it, but not with a little nudging first (we'll talk more about this later).

Second, for the both of us, this book is meant to be a journey. For far too long we as believers have missed out on the incredible blessings and promises which the LORD has provided for us. But along with those blessings and promises, we have lost our way. We have become focused on what we are going to get from God and not on Who it Is that is providing those blessings. Let me give you an example: there was a child's birthday party that my wife and I were invited to a few years ago. When it came time to open the presents, the child would tear through the paper, and if he liked it, he talked about it and smiled. But if it was something he didn't want; he would literally throw it behind him. Sometimes, I think that's the attitude that we as the children of God have demonstrated. When we like His gifts, like eternal life, forgiveness of sins, we bounce around and exclaim, "How great is our God!" On the other hand, when God gives us something we don't like, say, the loss of a job, an internal struggle, a loss of a child (which I have experienced firsthand), we throw our hands up and say, "How could you do that? What are You thinking?" When are we going to come to terms with the fact that ALL of God's gifts to us are good—even if *we* don't like them?

Third, it's a way to share what God has willed for each of His children. When we become blinded by our daily lives, which is getting up, doing what we need to do to get through the day, going to

sleep, and starting all over again; we lose sight of what we are here for. Should not our sole purpose in life be magnifying God in all that we do?

Fourth, and finally, this book will give you a renewed sense of understanding of the fear of the LORD. *Wait...what? Fear of the LORD? Um—no.* Yep, that’s exactly what many believers say. When it comes to the fear of the LORD we want to turn to the white bearded Grandpa in the sky and bat our eyes and hope He’ll do what we want Him to do because, for lack of better term, “we’re so sweet.” Not really. If we take a true and honest inventory of our lives, we will soon see that we are, at the very least, selfish, self-centered creatures who need a serious attitude adjustment. By the way, if you have a scowled brow right now that’s sort of proof that you fit into that boat. And to this I say, “Welcome aboard, I’m Gerald, your captain....”

Now, as we continue, let me warn you here, the enemy does NOT want you to have this book! This has been a long road from the initial call from the LORD to you having it in your hands. The Truths contained here are so awesome and life altering, that the enemy will do whatever he can to keep it from getting out there. But let me tell you this for a fact, he is NOT more powerful than God and when God has a plan, it comes to fruition. How do I know? You’re reading this aren’t you? Case closed.

As an example, when I was first given the call from the LORD to write this book, I faced all sorts of obstacles. First, I struggled long and hard with sitting down and making the time to do it. Then I read *The Circle Maker* and *Wild Goose Chase* by Mark Batterson. The LORD used Pastor Mark to convict me that I had been given a gift to write (which it turns out, I *love* to do—which is a telltale sign that it’s a God ordained gift by the way), and by not using my God given gift, I was robbing God of the glory He was due! Talk about a punch in the mouth!

Next, I lagged on getting started because I thought, “Well, what happens if nobody reads it? Then all I did was waste my time.”

That's when I realized that I'm not writing for anyone other than the LORD.

Finally, I even made excuses about not being able to be published. I had seen lots of television shows and movies where the characters had written some great classic story, but they were rejected time and time again by publishing companies. But that's when the LORD introduced me to James Hollandsworth, a fellow pastor and friend who guided me to a place where I could self-publish the book. Can you see where this is headed? God was removing all the obstacles! Except one. And it was a big one. My self-esteem....

HERE'S TO YOU...

So here I sit, tapping away at this computer keyboard thinking about you. Again—yes you. Now, I may not know your name, I may not know where you're from, I may not know where you are right now, but I can most assuredly tell you this: God does. And that my dear friend, is *all* that matters.

At this moment, having you holding this book in your hands is not a coincidence. As a matter of fact, I am a firm believer that there are no coincidences, as many of the stories in this book will reveal. Too many things have happened in my life that blows that whole theory out of the water. I'll even go one step further if I may be so bold—God *wants* you to read this book!

Ok, he's officially gone off the deep end here. God wants me, to read this book? Yes! And I have biblical proof to back it up! Ready? Find a Bible (or open your Bible app on your phone, tablet or device) and find 1 Timothy 2:3-4. Now read it.

*This is good and acceptable in the sight of
God our Savior, who desires all men to be
saved and to come to the knowledge of the
truth.*

Did you see it?! God, *desires* for all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth! That word “desires” is rather weighty; it is the Greek word *thelo* (θέλω) [2309]² which means to will or to intend. But you may be saying, “I already know the truth. I’m saved.” True. But there is a clue here that there is something *deeper* that God wants to show you. It can be found when we look at that word “knowledge.” This is the Greek word *epignosis*, which is a compound word, *epi*, meaning above or higher and *gnosis* meaning knowledge. This word for knowledge is a “higher knowledge!” There is a *deeper truth* which God wants to show you! It is in connection with the *mystery* of God’s Word Paul writes about in Romans 16:25!

Please take a moment to understand this—God *intends* for you to learn and grow in knowledge (the deeper things) of His Word. There are a lot of wonderful, deep truths, full of meat within this book that God wants *every* believer to understand. But the choice is up to you to keep reading.

I can guarantee you that what is in this book will change your life—the life you live now, and the eternal life that follows when we take our last breath. So, what are you waiting for? Turn the page.

STOP LIGHTS AND STOP SIGNS

I live in a part of Pensacola, Florida called “Navy Point.” It is so aptly named because we live rather close to Pensacola NAS (Naval Air Station), which is the home of the Navy’s Blue Angels. You can imagine my delight (and a little bit of fear mind you) when the “boys” go screaming over the house, so low you can see them sitting in the cockpit as they make a hard banking turn to head toward their next maneuver. One of the interesting things about Navy Point is that it is a peninsula. There are two ways in and out of the neighborhood. One way, the major way, is to cross over the

²All references in brackets will associate with the Strong’s Enhanced Lexicon unless otherwise noted.

Navy Point Bridge. The other way is out the back side of the neighborhood onto a major road, Gulf Beach Highway. Gulf Beach is crazy busy and getting out (especially turning left) is almost impossible. Now we're not talking interstate crazy or anything like that, but if you were to ever visit, or even look it up on a map, you'd see that the traffic on that road is rather steady. So, you can imagine the shock to my system when the residents of Navy Point received a letter from the county stating that they were closing the Navy Point bridge to tear it down to build a brand new one! This, of course, left us with only one way out of the neighborhood. The dangerous way! So, the main entrance out of the neighborhood is kaput and now we need to take this kamikaze way out. My wife Darlene and I were rather concerned at first because we thought, *how in the world are we going to get out onto this road?! There's no traffic light there!* Well, wouldn't you know it, the county had the same thought!

About a month before the construction began, a brand-new stop light was placed on the corner of Gulf Beach Highway and Sunset Avenue. And about a month before that, a flashing traffic sign went up saying that the light would be installed. This way, when the construction began on the bridge, the residents of Navy Point could have a safe way out. The purpose for the sign? To get the public *used* to having a brand-new light that was never there before.

I'm not sure if you know this or not, but we happen to be creatures of habit. When we get used to something not being there (say a new stop light) and one pops up one day (even though there was a display sign saying one was coming a month in advance) we can become so content and complacent to what we are used to that we don't see something new. And that was exactly what happened during the first few weeks of the light being put in. During that time, we saw an ample amount of fender benders at that light. Some folks just weren't paying attention; other folks were caught off guard.

But more than the fender benders, we saw people running that light when it was red. Why? It hadn't been there before. It got so bad that if Darlene and I were at the light waiting to turn and our

light turned green, we would look left...pause...look right...pause, and when we saw that everyone had stopped we went.

Now, I was born and raised in Rochester, New York and waiting at traffic lights was a part of life and I received my ample teaching of road rage when I was growing up and learning how to drive. *Wait. Did he just say he was taught road rage?* Yes. Yes, I did. It's part of the culture up there. Not everyone does it, but many, many do. But I digress. You would think that if you were second, third, or fourth in line waiting at this new stop light, and the light turns green and the lead car doesn't go right away, a little impatience would bubble to the top. But not in Navy Point. Why? Because folks got used to the drivers on Gulf Beach Highway blowing that stop light. Nobody honked the horn (*not many folks do down south, it's viewed as rude*), nobody screamed. Folks just patiently waited.

By the way, there was one other type of driver that I failed to mention. They saw the new light—they saw that it turned red—and decided to gun it to get through! Often, it was this type of driver that caused serious accidents at that intersection. These drivers are a brash rare breed that have an “I’ve got stuff to do so stay out of my way,” mode of living.

Now, what in the world does any of this have to do with being an “accountable Christian?” Plenty. Many of today’s Christians tend to have the “driver on Gulf Beach Highway” mentality when it comes to living their lives for Christ and maturing in Him. They sort of cruise along day after day, or should I say week after week, and keep doing the same things over and over again. They go to church on Sunday, or Sunday night, or Wednesday night, or to their life group meeting during the week. They gain a couple nuggets of information, and then they cruise on down the road to Sunday when they do it all over again. Why? We find comfort in the things that we can control because it makes the planning of our lives that much easier.

And so, when God puts up a new stop light in their lives (like a new truth He wants to show them or an area of their life He wants

to deal with), most times, they blow right through it! They either don't pay attention, or they become so used to hearing the same things at worship week after week, that a complacent spirit takes hold. And if they aren't careful, they can become just like the driver that sees the light is red and blows it anyway. Besides—ready? *Nobody's watching.* Or even worse, *I won't get caught.* Ah, herein lays the heart of the matter. These are some of the strongest excuses that believers use for not paying attention to the “red lights” in their life: first, I can get away with it. Second, everybody else does it too!

When I was a teenager and had just begun to start driving, I was cruising the city one night with a buddy of mine. We stopped at a stop sign and he said to me, “You know, if a stop sign has a white ring around the outside of it, it's optional?” *Remember, I told you I was a teenager.* Enter gullibility. As I looked at the stop sign, I was at, wouldn't you know it...it had a white ring around the outside of it! I looked at my friend after turning down the road and I inquired how he got this information, and why I was not made privy to these essential facts before then? That's when he began to laugh uncontrollably. Mud. On. Face. He said to me, “No dude (cause that's how we talked...still do), ALL stop signs have a white ring around the outside!”

He then proceeded to tell me a story that I remember to this day. He told a girl at a party one night about the “white ring” phenomenon and he got distracted and didn't get to tell her the punch line. That very night after leaving the party and driving home, the poor unsuspecting driver came upon a stop sign, (which just so happened to have a white ring around the outside), to which she took as a suggestion. When she approached the intersection, she didn't see anyone on the cross street coming, so, she went right on through that stop sign. Moments later, she saw the flashing of red and blue lights in her rearview mirror. She pulled over to the side of the road and the police officer, who was behind her at the stop sign and was floored that she didn't even think of stopping at the intersection,

made his way slowly to her vehicle. This is how I imagine that conversation went:

Policeman: Young lady (in a rather harsh tone), can you tell me why in the world you just blew through that stop sign back there?!

Our friend: Because there was a white ring around the outside of it.

Policeman: Excuse me? What does that have to do with anything?

Our friend: Duh? There was a white ring around the outside of it, that makes it optional...doesn't it?

Policeman: SPEECHLESS.

The outcome of that exchange was \$150.00 fine and some points off her license. And my buddy got a stiff punch in the arm for his "white ring" story.

Of course, there is a lesson to learn in these stories about stop signs and red lights. In my years as a pastor I have seen several types of believers who are either *blowing the red light*, meaning they live their lives as if to say that it doesn't matter how they live or what they do, God loves us and nothing bad will ever happen to me. Or there are those who treat His Word like that *stop sign*; they believe what is false and make it true for them. And what is more, because someone else told them the falsehood, *they* are the ones who are to blame. For both types of Christians, nothing could be farther from the truth. God will judge His own children (1 Peter 4:17), and we are responsible for what we learn and what we refuse to learn (1 John 4:1). Just because a pastor said something one time, we cannot accept that what he said is true, just because he said it. With that said, let's talk about the things that we assume are true. It is here that your pride will be tested. Ready?

CHALLENGING OUR ASSUMPTIONS

When I was growing up back in the 80s (I know, I'm showing my age here), there was a television show I loved to watch called *Diff'rent Strokes*. It was about a man from New York City named Phillip Drummond who was a wealthy widower. Mr.

Drummond lived in a penthouse of a luxurious apartment building. His wealth came from the fact that he was the president of Trans Allied, Inc. However, the household was shaken up when Drummond's housekeeper died, and her deathbed wish was that he would take care of her two sons, Arnold and Willis Jackson. So, Mr. Drummond took both boys in and they became the sons Drummond never had. The show featured a character, named Arnold, played by the late Gary Coleman. In almost every episode Arnold had a trademark quote which most of us waited to hear week after week. Arnold's brother, Willis (played by Todd Bridges), would say or do something that was hard for Arnold to understand. And with the most interesting face, and puckered up lips, Arnold would say; "Whatchyou talkin' bout Willis?"

I think that's the sort of reaction that we as believers have when we hear or read something new about God's Word that we've never read before. For instance, there is a book written by Mark Batterson called *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day*. In the beginning to the book, Batterson introduces the reader to a story in the Bible about a man by the name of Benaiah who, wait for it, chases a lion into a pit, on a snowy day. My first reaction, you got it? "Whatchyou talkin' bout *Mark*?" But lo and behold, if you turn to 2 Samuel 23:20 there he is, killing a lion, in the middle of a pit, on a snowy day. Who knew? I didn't!

Now, chances are that most of us have never heard the story of Benaiah, let alone heard his name mentioned in Scripture, yet he's there. You want to stump some folks on Jeopardy, drop this question on them, *In the Bible; he chased a lion into a pit and killed it, in the snow no less.*

Now, here's where things get interesting. Not only are there stories and characters in the Bible which we don't normally recognize, we have also taken the Bible and created untruths out of it. Yep—you read that right. We have created untruths. We say things that we *think* the Bible says, which it does not say. For instance, I challenge you to tell me where in the Bible it says that

God helps those who help themselves? If I just stepped on your toes and made you a little upset, I apologize, that is not my intent. But if I did, that reaction proves a point. Ready? We don't like to be wrong. Shocker. I know. And sometimes we go down swinging on the wrong thing. Let me tell you another story.

I was the pastor of a little church in Georgia, and we had these Sunday night “family” dinners where we would come together to share a meal and play games, games that helped us to learn more about the Bible. Looking back now—wish I had known about Benaiah—would have been a good one. One of the games we played was Bible trivia. I would pose a question to two teams. Each team had a captain. After I gave the question, I gave each team a specific amount of time to discuss the answer and when time was up, the team captain would answer for his or her team. One of the questions I asked was this: *Jonah was swallowed by _____*. Now, I gotta admit, I *love* asking this question! And I do it because of the answer that I get!

When time was up, I asked one team what their answer was, and they replied, of course, “a whale!” The other team, same answer; Jonah was swallowed by “a whale!” I mean easy, right? Or is it?

I had to inform both teams that their answer was *wrong*. Yes, wrong. Dead wrong. This is when the looks began. I got tilted heads, raised eyebrows, and wide-open mouths. *This guy must be crazy, didn't he hear us say 'whale'?*

For each question, we would go to Scripture and find out the answer. And that's when I took them to Jonah 1:17:

*And the LORD appointed a great **fish** to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the **fish** three days and three nights*
(Emphasis mine).

If you study the actual Hebrew word listed in the Bible in Jonah 1:17, for fish it is the word *dawg* (not some mascot from

Georgia) meaning a fish in the sea. Granted, the Bible does say it was a great fish, but a great fish is still not a whale.

Here's where things really got interesting. I received three different responses to that trivia question. The first response was, "Wow! I never saw that before." The second response was, "Um, it's the same thing, isn't it?" (No. No it isn't. A fish is a fish, a whale is a mammal). The third response was, "NO! Jonah was swallowed by a whale; I have a book at home that says so."

Not many things in life leave me speechless, but that was one of them. But instead of casting judgment on the poor lady, *which is what I was tempted to feel to be honest*, I couldn't escape the feeling of helplessness for her. She had been taught one thing about that story of Jonah and to change it from a whale to a fish would rock her world. It had become so entrenched in her mind that Jonah was swallowed by a whale that to say anything different was heresy. But here, heresy was truth.

Maybe you already knew that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish. That may be nothing new to you. Maybe you didn't know, and you always thought he was swallowed by a whale. But after reading God's Word, do you now see that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish?

Let me give you a few more examples that I think may surprise you.

Ready?

He who spares the rod _____ his son.

Did you say spoils? Yep, I did too. Until I read Proverbs 13:24:

*He who spares the rod **hates** his son
(emphasis mine).*

There is quite a profound difference between spoiling a child and hating them wouldn't you say? As a grandfather, I love to spoil my grandkids. It's what makes me "Granddaddy." The idea of

spoiling them is letting them get away with stuff they really shouldn't. You know things like 12:00 AM ice cream and cake for breakfast. That sort of thing. But to *hate* my grandchildren is a completely different thing. To hate in the Hebrew sense of the word, *sawney*, means to dislike, be hostile to, or to loathe. I surely don't feel that way about my grandchildren and my children; I love each one of them!

Now, let's try one last fill in the blank, shall we?

Heaven is paved with _____ of gold.

Did you say streets? I guess by now you know where this is going, huh? That's right. Find Revelation 21:21:

*And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the **street** of city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

Did you catch that one as well? It is a street—singular, not plural.

You see, we have been taught that certain things are in the Scriptures when they really aren't. The Sunday school teacher taught them to me, the deacons tell the story, or the preacher talks about it from the pulpit. But here is the *hard* truth. If it isn't in the Bible, it isn't true. Now, flip the coin. If it *is* in Scripture, then it *is* true—right? Case in point—Benaiah!

Now, some may say as they did at the trivia challenge game night, "What's the big deal? It's just a little word change?" Or, "So what if it's singular or not plural, doesn't it all mean the same thing?" Let me answer a question with a question if I may. If we are willing to make those exceptions, what else are we willing to allow? We must always remember that the Holy Spirit had the Word of God written in a *specific* and *purposeful* way. Changing meanings of words is like changing the Word itself. That is why it is so vitally important to allow the Word of God to speak to us no matter what

we may think we know or what we have heard. Just because a pastor said it doesn't necessarily make it true.

It may be at this point that you are saying, "*So, why should I believe you?*"

You shouldn't! But I want to point something out here. Did you go and check those three verses we just discussed? If you did, then I've done what God has called me to do—I've led you to His Word, not mine. And that my friend will be the focus of this book. There will be challenging things that I may say, tough statements that I will make regarding the Word of God, but I assure you that each of them is true and that I am encouraging you, challenging you, imploring you, begging you to ***go to the Word!*** If you do nothing else but seek out His Word, then I have received an answer to my prayer for you.

What we face is really an issue of pride isn't it? If I've believed the Bible said something all my life and now someone comes along 5, 10, 20, 30 years later and tells me that what I thought I knew was wrong, that has a profound effect on me. I'll be honest, when I began to see the truths of the things we've talked about so far, I was baffled. I had the same, "Well what's the big deal?" questions rolling through my head. But by the grace and mercy of God, I was able to see that each of those truths had a significant meaning. It was from there that I had to wrestle with my flesh and put down my pride and come to grips with the fact that I really didn't have the market cornered on understanding God's Word. Once I made that decision, and humbled myself, boy did things change after that.

What we must do is be honest with ourselves. We don't know it all. We want to, sure, but we don't. We're still learning, and we will continue to keep learning (if we choose to). We must come to the determination that there are truths in Scripture that we have decided to take for granted. And this is what this section is all about. We cannot move forward unless we are willing to *challenge* our assumptions of what we *think* we know Scripture says.

Now, let's back up for a moment. As the people of God, we are called to diligently study the Word of God.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. —2 Timothy 2:15.

That's you, me, and every believer that lives and breathes. This passage is not only for those who are called to pastor congregations, like I am; the passage is for *all* believers to respond. This undertaking can seem to be overwhelming when we step back and honestly comprehend the "what" we are called to study. The Bible claims that it is the source of all Truth (Ps. 119:160). This concept stems from the idea that the origin of the Bible is God Himself (2 Tim. 3:16). Man's part is to understand and apply the Truths of the Bible in his/her life. With the leading of God, we can have the Bible's truths revealed to us as we continually seek God and the truth of His Word.

Problems arise however, when men take the Word of God and attempt to make it fit into the ideas and concepts that other men before them have stated as truth; yet the idea was never revealed by the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God does not support the concept. Such is the case with salvation into eternity by works. The Bible clearly states that salvation is by grace through faith without works (Eph. 2:8-9). So, why is there such a disconnect in multiple denominations? Why does one body believe you can lose your salvation, while another says that that is impossible?

The test of a good Bible student is to lay aside their preconceived ideas to see the Truth of God's Word. No matter where that truth takes them. Thomas Jefferson stated, "We are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead." It is my prayer, desire, and passion that the people of God would follow the Truth of His Word to see the wonderful things He has prepared for us.

Now, if you're ready, let's go digging and get dirty...

CHAPTER 2: DESTINATIONS

OPPOSING POSITIONS

As we begin, let's start with a question: do you believe that you can lose your salvation? What I mean when I ask that question is: *do you believe that you can have a salvation experience, and then do something that deems you unworthy to enter eternal life?* The reason I ask this question is for a couple of reasons.

The first reason I ask is because this is a hotly contested issue among certain believers. There are those that would say that it is indeed possible for a person to lose their salvation, meaning that once they appear at judgment before God (or even prior to) they will have been found unfaithful and therefore forfeit their right to enter eternal life. There are those that would say that you were never really saved to begin with. For these believers, they take their stance based on verses like:

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons and, in Your name, perform many miracles?' And I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:19-23)

And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. (Matthew 10:22)

Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. (Matthew 24:9-13)

The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him to pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. (Luke 12:46)

Then he began telling this parable: A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard keeper 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down. (Luke 13:6-9)

Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.' (John 8:31-32)

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (John 15:1-6)

...they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. (Romans 11:20-22)

...but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

(1 Corinthians 9:27)

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet he has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (Colossians 1:21-23)

This command I entrust you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwrecked in regard to their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.

(1 Timothy 1:18-20)

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. (1 Timothy 4:1)

...but Christ is faithful as a son over His house whose house we are if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3:6)

Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart in falling away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest anyone of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-14)

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentances, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but the certain terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and

has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:26-31)

For after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse than the first. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them.

(2 Peter 2:20-21)

You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, (2 Peter 3:17)

As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

(1 John 2:24)

He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. (Revelation 3:5)

On the other side of the coin there are those that believe that once a person accepts Christ by grace through faith, their eternal destination is secure, and it can never be taken away. For these believers they claim what is termed the “assurance of salvation.” They utilize verses like:

All the Father gives to Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given me I lose nothing but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:37-38)

But as many as received Him, to them He have the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

...and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:28)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ: shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered. But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

*...for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.
(Romans 11:29)*

The second reason I ask if you believe you can lose your salvation focuses on another aspect of why this book has been written. Without understanding the entirety of salvation (which we must discuss in detail), and understanding what the Word truly says, there can, and will remain, a lopsided picture of how a person obtains eternal life—and beyond.

So how can this be? How can one side say that it is possible to lose your eternal life (salvation) and have such a convincing case with the verses we've seen, yet the other side has the same legitimate claim with the verses that support their position? How could there be such a rift in the body of Christ with one side saying the other side is misunderstanding the Scriptures?

What if I told you that there was a third option? What if I told you that both sides of the argument had credence? What if I were to

tell you that even though they seem to be various positions speaking from different sides of the coin—they are actually still on the same coin? *Okay. This guy has officially lost his marbles! How can you lose your salvation, yet keep it at the same time? That makes no sense?!*

Could it be that we, yes, we, have misunderstood what God's Word says? What if there really is a possibility to lose ***something***, but at the same time have the assurance that there is something else you can never lose? What if I told you I could offer you biblical proof to that degree?

Now, remember in the beginning of this book that I warned you that our preconceived ideas would be tested? Well, here you go. Now, if you're still reading you either want to see how goofy you think I am, or the Holy Spirit is leading you to look at the Word in a new way—a complete way, a thorough way. Let me premise this next section by saying that there *is* a missing piece to the two views listed above. As believers it is imperative that we clearly understand that salvation is a process. You read that right—salvation is a ***process***!

YOUR CALL

There is a story I read once about a United States Naval aircraft carrier off the Canadian coast of Newfoundland in October 1995. The conversation went something like this:

Canadians: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the South to avoid collision.

Americans: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the North to avoid a collision.

Canadians: Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

Americans: This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert **YOUR** course.

Canadians: No, I say again, you divert **YOUR** course.

Americans: This is the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Lincoln, the second largest ship in the United States Atlantic fleet. We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers and numerous support vessels. I demand that you change your course 15 degrees north—I say again, that is one five degrees north—or counter measures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship!

Canadians: This is a lighthouse. Your call.

This story is a joke and isn't true; however, it is a great illustration for how we as believers tend to treat the Word of God. We'll label the Word of God as a lighthouse and we are the man-made ships on the ocean. We taunt how big we are and how much we know and think that we have become unstoppable because we have cornered all that there is to know about the Scriptures. But the problem is that we are boasting in what we *think* we know. But God's Word is an unmovable rock that could surely scatter us to dust. Furthermore, God's word clearly tells us that the way He views things is not the way we do (Isaiah 55:8-9).

This is how many people view the concept of salvation. "My way is right, now move." But unfortunately, those misunderstandings of the Scriptures have us headed toward the rocks, or should I say ***The Rock***.

When this misunderstanding of salvation occurs, a wide variety of errors can lead the well-meaning believer astray. One misconception, for instance, states that God somehow changed the way the people in the Old Testament, before the cross, were saved as opposed to the way the people after the cross were saved. For instance, they would surmise that the only way a person would be able to obtain eternal life is by keeping the commandments, participating in the correct sacrifices at the correct times, and following the Law. Some would go a step further and say eternal life in the Old Testament times was only for the Hebrews!

Yet, when we look at the truth of God's Word, we see that this is not the case. Malachi 3:6 simply states, "For I, the LORD, do not change." This verse shows us that salvation, according to the

Word, is the same for the Old Testament believers as it is for the New Testament believers because God does not change His requirements. And what are those requirements? The Bible says that man is saved, “By grace, through faith,” (Eph. 2:8). Now, if we say that God changes the way people are saved this would go against the truth of God’s Word, right?

Next, some of these errors are exhibited in the addition of “works” that must be done by a person to receive eternal life. One body of believers may think that unless you do good works you cannot obtain eternal life. This concept is closely related to the one listed above. For these believers, one must adhere to all the Jewish rituals, minus the sacrifices, and keep all the commandments of the Old Testament as well as the commandments given by Christ in the New Testament to obtain eternal life.

Finally, there is a position that is rather slippery, yet no less false. There are many well informed pastors, teachers, and leaders of the Word of God that believe the “once saved always saved” concept, and they claim that works cannot save a person into eternity. However, some of those very same preachers, teachers, and leaders tell their congregations at the end of their worship services that if you aren’t “doing this” or you are not “doing that” then you may need to “check your salvation.” Or as they give their invitation at the end of the sermon they will say, “Do you know, that you know, that you know, that you’re saved?!”

I strongly dislike that statement. Why? The only thing it does is breed doubt! They unintentionally (or intentionally) are asking those believers if they are sure that they are saved by the way they are living. Or worse, they create doubt in their minds and then fault them for having doubts! Now, if I must live a certain way to prove to you, or myself, that I am saved, then I have something to boast about. And Ephesians 2:9 debunks that idea. Little do these preachers, teachers, and leaders realize, these criteria placed upon their congregations are a form of “works salvation.” In other words, they would claim that, according to their definition, a person is not

“truly saved” (has eternal life) unless they live a certain way, finish strong in the faith, and do not fall away.

So, what is the answer? What they and many others fail to see is the distinction of what I will call the “Three Tenses of Salvation.” Because of this, false doctrines arise and lead the preachers, teachers, and leaders of congregations to try to justify whether a person is “truly” saved by their *enduring* actions.

To try and clear the muddied waters a bit, let me share with you an adage used when referring to salvation which is, “I have been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved.” This is also known as justification, sanctification, and glorification. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation does come in three “tenses,” past, present, and future.

CHAPTER 3: THE PROCESS OF SALVATION

THE MAKE-UP OF MAN

As we begin this section it is vital to understand who we are as individuals created by God. The Bible claims that man is created in God's image (Genesis 1:26). The Bible also claims that God, although three separate persons, is also One God (Deuteronomy 6:4). Although this book is obviously not a treatise regarding the Trinity of God, it serves us well at this point to see an example in the Word of God to dispel any doubt regarding the Triune Godhead. The best example to give is found in Luke 3:21-22. There the Bible states,

*Now it came about when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also was baptized (**God the Son**), and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit (**God the Holy Spirit**) descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven (**God the Father**), "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased" (Emphasis mine).*

The connotation is that man himself, being made in the likeness of his Creator must also consist of three parts. Does the Bible give any credence to this idea? Hebrews 4:12 states,

*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the **division** of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Emphasis mine).*

We see from this verse of Scripture that the writer of Hebrews describes a separation or the division between each of the three parts of man: the soul, spirit, and body (joints and marrow). Another Scripture speaks to this same truth:

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your **spirit** and **soul** and **body** be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*
(Emphasis mine).
(1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Once more we see God's Word states that humans consist of three individual and separate parts. Notice in this passage that Paul wrote that he *hopes* that God will sanctify the believer in their entirety. We know this because of the Greek word used for "sanctify." It is the word *hagiazō* (αγιαζω) [37], which is in the optative mood. The optative is the mood of possibility, removed even further than the subjunctive mood from something conceived of as actual. Often it is used to convey a wish or hope for a certain action to occur.³ When associated with salvation, God has promised to redeem the person, in its entirety (spirit, soul, and body). This means that each distinctive portion of the believer must be redeemed completely. If that were not the case, God would fail to redeem His creation and thus He could not be God and man would be eternally hopeless.

Based on the understanding that man is made up of three parts a new question now arises. Once a person believes in Christ, do they become perfect at that moment? The answer is quite unequivocally, no. If believers were made perfect as soon as they believed in Christ, then they would never die and never sin again for they would in fact be perfect. Yet, we instinctively know, this is not

³ https://ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm#OPTATIVE

so. The Bible itself states in 1 John 1:8, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

This verse of Scripture alludes to the fact that the “we” implies all believers. Note that the apostle includes himself in the description. An example I like to use when I teach this would be to say, “If I say we are going out to dinner, that means you and I are going out. Not just you and not just I.” Therefore, the people that the apostle John is speaking about are in fact believers. Since there can be no contradiction in Scripture (or else the Word of God would not be true, thus disproving its own claims: Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2), we see that a believer will continue to struggle with the temptations of this world until a later time. So how can it be that a believer is saved, yet endures temptations and continues to sin? The answer is found in God’s Word and what it says regarding salvation. As a human has three separate and distinct parts, God’s Word states that salvation is also in three separate and distinct parts. As we continue to look at this truth, we must allow God’s Word to speak for itself.

BABY STEPS

For many, salvation has become a “yes” or “no” issue. You are either saved (and act like it), or you are not (because you don’t act like it). We have briefly covered the error with this thinking, but here we need to make it clear. If I have to “act” right to obtain eternal life, no matter how we spin it, that makes my salvation into eternity based on how I live, or what I do; hence, it is a work.

There is an illustration which I like to use when it comes to our lives as believers that will hopefully help us understand the process of salvation. Imagine with me, a labor and delivery room. There are balloons and flowers scattered throughout in congratulations for the new mom and dad. They proudly display their newborn bundle of joy as they smile at the beautiful face staring back at them. A few days later, mom, dad, and baby come home. Once they come into the house, what are the expectations of

that baby? In other words, what does the baby have to do to prove that it is a baby?

Sounds like a crazy question, right? You're probably saying, "It's a baby! You can't prove that you're a baby, you just are!" And you would be absolutely right!

Then why is it that we expect newborn Christians (and even believers who have been saved for years but have not been disciplined), that they must stop going to this or that place, stop acting that way, stop speaking or thinking certain things? Those are all things that come from maturing. You would not expect a newborn baby to get themselves up, take a bath, dress themselves, make their own breakfast, and feed themselves, right? No, of course not. They must be *taught* certain things.

So then, let's ask this question: *whose job is it to care for the baby?* Yep, you got it, the family. It is mom and dad's job to feed, change, bathe, care for, and teach the newborn baby.

Now here's an uncomfortable connection—*guess whose job it is to care for a newborn Christian?* Yep, you got it, the family. Newborn believers also need their family (their church family—***not just the pastor!***) to care for them, to teach them, and to help them grow.

Now, let me throw another wrench in the cog—what if those who are supposed to care for the baby are babies? Here is where things really get uncomfortable. Sadly, we have too many baby Christians teaching (and sometimes preaching) baby Christians. Therefore, their growth is stunted right at the outset. And it can be these believers that are saved for years and years, yet they never really grow spiritually because they don't necessarily know any better. But other believers (especially those who claim to be "seasoned") may look at them with judgmental eyes and say, "Why are you not more mature? Why are you not acting like a Christian?" This can be frustrating for newborn believers, and it can also cause a level of dejection, as if they aren't measuring up.

When it comes to our salvation, we need to see our spiritual life much like that of a newborn baby. And as you look at that life, you can clearly see that there is a growth process that must take place. When we are toddlers the only thing we want to do is play and eat. As we grow into our pre-teen years, we begin to understand that there is more to life; especially when we have to start school! Then come those teen years, when we *think* we know it all and we can take the world by storm. I cannot tell you how many conversations I had with my own mother, and she said those words we almost all hear from our parents when we're that age, "When you grow up, you'll understand." At the time, I thought she was just crazy; but now, some thirty years later—wouldn't you know it—she was right.

Then comes our young adult lives, when we are trying to make a name for ourselves. We begin to plan our lives for the future. We strive to learn more, become more successful, and chase after the things we think we need to survive (whatever we happen to think those things are). But all in all, it's a process. From birth, to toddler, to adolescence, to pre-teen, to teen, to young adult, to adult, and even to the *wise* years (cause I'm not going to use the "s.c." word...).

Think about this illustration for just a moment: if all that you are ever taught is that dogs are mean, whenever you see one, you will be afraid to go near them. Why? Because of what you have been taught, you think, that *all* dogs are mean. It wouldn't be until you interacted with a dog and found one that was lovable and kind that it would change your perspective. The issue is much the same with us as believers. We can be taught that something is a certain way and *never* question it because the authority that taught it to us, we trust; however, that authority may not have the proper or correct information, or they are unable to understand the whole issue.

What is worse, if those that teach that *all dogs are mean*, were taught that same belief, they will hang on to it and then pass it on. This is a great picture of what we would call stunted growth.

In our salvation, we begin as newborn babes, born into a new life given to us by God (John 3:3). We then are called to grow and learn (1 Peter 2:2). Along the way we make mistakes, and we are supposed to learn from them. Sometimes, however, we are (for lack of a better term) “hardheaded” and we make the same mistakes repeatedly. But this does not negate the fact that we have been born again. In other words, the birth of a baby makes them a new creation to this world. The salvation of a person makes them a new creature as a child of God. Once the child is born into the world it is a baby. Once a believer is saved, you are a child of God, you are saved. You can never be “unborn!”

Hopefully, now you can see that salvation is indeed a growing process. It has ups and downs. Good times and bad times. We make good choices and not so good choices. Sometimes we learn, other times we do not. And again, it does not change the fact that we are saved.

To begin this process, we will begin by looking at the first “part” of man that the LORD deals with when it comes to salvation and that is the salvation of the person’s spirit.

As we go through these next sections, I want to take a moment to introduce and describe a few things you will see. I will speak of salvation in the context of tenses, past tense, present tense, and future tense. These three distinctions correlate to specific parts of the person as you will see.

SALVATION OF THE SPIRIT

The first “tense” of salvation is what we will label *past tense salvation* or the salvation of a person’s spirit. Ephesians 2:1, states that we were dead in our trespasses before we accepted and believed in Christ. The Word of God is clear that a person who is separated from God, due to the rejection of His Son (the Word), will be eternally separated from Him (Romans 3:23; 6:23). This first tense

of salvation or the salvation of a person's spirit can be found in Ephesians 2:8-9. The Bible states,

*For by grace you **have been saved** through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast* (Emphasis mine).

The clear indication of this salvation is found in the Greek word for “have been saved.” In the Greek language, this word, *sozo* (σώζω) [4982], is in the Greek *perfect* tense. The perfect tense of a Greek word states that the progress of an action has been completed and the result of the action continues, in full effect.⁴ Therefore, since we are saved by grace through faith and not by works, this salvation is a completed action and can never be taken away (John 10:28). From that point on the believer will forever have eternal life in Heaven. Notice that this salvation is a *gift*. This is a huge distinction that we must take note of. This gift is given from God and once accepted cannot be lost or taken away. To state that a person can lose their initial salvation or do something to renounce the gift of eternal life once they have received it, goes against the truth of the Word of God.

Let's insert an illustration here. Go back to a Christmas or a birthday from your past and remember those presents that were just waiting for you to open. Now, let me ask you; what did you do to receive those gifts? Nothing! Ok, I can hear someone say, “Well, I had to be good all year long.” My response to that—*whatever*. You got presents, anyway didn't you? Of course, you did. Those presents, those gifts were free. *Someone else **paid a price*** for you to have them. Do you see the connection? The salvation of your spirit is a free gift that is yours to keep! *What you do with it is up to you*, but it is still yours and it will always be! But make no mistake, once the

⁴ http://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm

person receives the gift (notice they don't **do** anything to get it) it is theirs forever!

Therefore, we boldly proclaim that a person cannot lose their salvation. You must clarify that statement with this: once a person believes, their eternal destination is forever set. They will have eternal life. Just as the perfect tense of the Greek word describes, a person's initial salvation, the salvation of their spirit, is a completed action and the results carry on in full effect!

But what about all those verses we looked at previously that spoke of holding fast till the end, and not falling away? How do those passages marry up with this idea that you cannot lose your eternal salvation? The answer comes with a clarification and an understanding of our next section, the salvation of the soul.

SALVATION OF THE SOUL

It is here that many well-intentioned Bible students err. As we stated earlier, once the believer has simply trusted in what Christ has done on the cross for their sins, and receive the free gift of salvation, then their eternal destiny is set; however, they now have a responsibility to daily give control of their lives over to God. This salvation of the soul, or the second "tense" salvation, as I will describe it, is an *ongoing* process.

First, let's answer the question: what is the soul? We have already determined that it is a separate part of man. The Greek word for soul is *psuche* (ψυχή) [5590]. In some passages you may see it translated as the word "life," and we will look at those; but for now, it is important to know that unlike the spirit, which is saved by receiving and not doing, the salvation of the soul is gained by doing good works.

Did he just say salvation by works? Yes. Yes, I did.

But we must understand a very vital truth when it comes to this distinction: *the works which we will discuss **cannot be done by you under your own strength**, but rather by God **through** you.*

These are the very works which God described in Ephesians 2:10. Let's look at Ephesians 2:8-10 and see how the Bible reveals to us both the salvation of the spirit and the salvation of the soul:

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast (**here we see the salvation of the spirit!**). For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (**here we see the salvation of the soul!**).*

To further understand what the Lord is revealing to us here, remember that the Bible is very clear that anything that man attempts to do under his own power is worthless (Isaiah 64:6). This means that there are many Christians out there who attempt to do things because it “looks good” and that is the way “I’m supposed to act.”

For instance, there are many who show up in churches every Sunday morning so they can be seen. For them, the relationship aspect of spending time with like-minded believers to truly worship God is just a show. There are many who teach Sunday school classes, Bible study classes, life groups, etc., but they do these things because it's what they *think* the Lord wants them to do and it *looks* good *to others*. That my friends, is a dangerous place to be.

To see a clear biblical example of the salvation of the soul, let's look at 1 Corinthians 1:18. The Bible says,

*For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are **being saved** it is the power of God (Emphasis mine).*

This Greek word for “being saved” is the same root word *sozo* (σώζω) [4982], which we saw previously in Ephesians 2:8. However, this word is not in the perfect tense, rather it is in the

Greek *present* tense. The Greek present tense states that the action is taking place or going on in the present time.⁵ In other words, it calls for *continuous action*. Unlike the salvation of the spirit, which is a free gift from God, when it comes to the salvation of the soul, there are words the Bible uses to describe it like, *holding fast, enduring, abiding, continuing, and striving*. These are all action words, and they all call for an action that must continue on. This is the foundation of the salvation of the soul! You are to hold fast, endure, abide, continue, and strive, not on your own power, but by the power of Christ that is within you! He does the work, and you are to let Him work!

Let's dig a little deeper into this idea of striving for a moment. I want to use an example from Scripture to show you the salvation of the soul.

*And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved (**present tense in Greek**)?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." — Luke 13:23-24 (Emphasis mine).*

This is one of those verses where well-meaning teachers and preachers of the Scripture use to show that if you do not prove yourself faithful until the end, you are not truly saved. But look again at the emphasis. The person did not ask are there only a few who have been saved, he is asking if there are only a few who are being saved. His implication goes with the word choice the Holy Spirit used, a present continual action. Look again how our Lord replies: Strive. That word strive defined by *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary* is *agonizomai* (ἀγωνίζομαι) [75], which denotes (a) "to contend" in the public games, (b) "to fight, engage in conflict," (c) metaphorically, "to contend" perseveringly against

⁵ http://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm

opposition and temptation, to strive as in a contest for a prize, straining every nerve to attain to the object Luke 13:24; to put forth every effort, involving toil.⁶ It is actually where we get our English word “agonize.”

So, let us put this into context; if Christ here is telling a person how to have eternal life, He just told him the only way is to strive, agonize, and do something. That would be a work a person must perform to obtain eternal life! And when we read Ephesians 2:9, we see a person cannot obtain eternal life by doing anything...only believing.

The next question then must be, what “door” would Jesus be talking about? I can tell you that it is *not* the door to heaven. It is a different door. It is a door that leads to something wonderful. What is it? You’ll have to keep reading to find out.

Getting back to our study on the salvation of the soul, we must remember that the Bible says that the soul is the seat of our old nature (Galatians 5:16-17). The old nature fights against the believer’s new spirit to gain control of the body. This is the very reason Paul stated that he had a struggle that he fought daily (Romans 7:15-23):

For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing

⁶ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996), 235.

of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

This is also the reason Paul stated that he had to die daily (1 Corinthians 15:31). He was indicating that he was putting to death the things of the flesh and choosing the will of God. When a believer chooses to do the will of the flesh, they fall into sin and therefore their relationship is hindered with God until the sin is repented and confession (agreeing with God) takes place (1 John 1:9).

To further bring out this idea of the salvation of the soul; let's look at another verse of Scripture that points to a contrast between the salvation of the spirit and the salvation of the soul and will give us a better understanding of the difference.

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. —Matthew 11:28-29

For many, when they see these verses, they see one event, when in the truth of Scripture, it reveals two separate events. Let's take the verses and look at them individually for a moment. In verse 28, Jesus says that all those that come to Him that are "weary and heavy-laden" He will do what? *Give* them rest. Here we see the free

gift of salvation which corresponds to the salvation of a person's spirit. The rest which those people (we) receive from being weary and heavy-laden is a rest from being under the penalty of sin and being made free by what Christ has done on our behalf as our substitute.

But now let's look at verse twenty-nine. You will see a stark contrast here to what Christ tells these people who have now accepted his free offering of eternal life. His instructions are to, "take," "learn," and then they will "find." Here Jesus is encouraging these now saved believers to *do* something. And look at what the outcome is: finding rest for your *soul!* Not your spirit. This is another important truth for us to learn from. We must pay very close attention to what the Bible says and how the Holy Spirit has Scripture written. We must also pay attention to what the Bible doesn't say! Getting back to the reason why this is speaking of the salvation of your soul and not your spirit, is because you already have (or should have) rest in your spirit because you are a child of God. The idea which Jesus conveys here is that we should look to Him to learn how to live the Christian life and let Him live through us! What a difference!

To recap at this point: whereas the believer's spirit is saved immediately once they accept the free gift of salvation resulting in eternal life, the salvation of the soul takes place as an ongoing process. But when does that process end? The salvation of the soul is determined at what the Bible calls the Judgment Seat of Christ. When this event happens and what happens at that point we will discuss in detail later in the book.

For now, I wanted to introduce you to this vital distinction between the spirit and the soul and their respective salvations. One takes place only once and is a free gift (salvation of the spirit) the other takes place all throughout the believer's life here on earth as they learn to allow Christ to be in control of their lives (salvation of the soul).

SALVATION OF THE BODY

The final piece to the picture of salvation comes when the believer is given a glorified body, at a *future* date. As we can all attest to now, our bodies are in a state of decay and are in fact dying. As much as people may try to stop, delay, or even reverse aging, they all ultimately fail. There is only one thing that stops the aging process—death. But there is good news for those that have trusted Christ! There is coming a time when our bodies will never die (Revelation 21:4)! When we study what the Bible has to say about the salvation (or redemption) of our bodies, we see Scripture passages like:

And not only this, but also, we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:23)

Note that the author, Paul, who is writing to believers, uses the pronoun “we.” He includes himself in the group, thus solidifying the fact that he is writing to and about believers. Another note to clarify that point is the term he uses of our salvation, we have “the first fruits of the Spirit.” We all as believers have the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).

Another Scripture:

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

Remember that I said that we have bodies that are dying? That is a perishable body. But there will come a time when according to this Scripture, that we as believers in Christ will have an imperishable body (an eternal body that will not die).

There is one more Scripture we can look at this shows us this future event:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

(Philippians 3:20-21)

So, when does this all take place? When do we get our glorified bodies? To answer this question, we must dig deeper into God's Word because the answer to that question is a loaded one. The Bible teaches us of our resurrection from the dead. This third tense salvation of the body may happen for believers, either at the Judgment Seat of Christ, or a thousand years afterward.

Wait, what? What is he saying?

We have clearly seen that all believers will have a glorified body, but the question which most don't ask (because they don't know) is "when". When will we get our glorified bodies?

That depends.

On what?

On whether we have our souls saved at the Judgment Seat of Christ or not (which we'll cover in Chapter 6).

The Bible is very clear that there is a difference between a faithful and an unfaithful believer. I know it has been taught that we must be one or the other, but there is biblical proof to refute that statement. To further expound on the idea of receiving a glorified

body at a later time than the Judgment Seat of Christ (1,000 years later), I would like to focus your attention to a verse in Scripture which is often overlooked and largely misunderstood. That Scripture is 1 Corinthians 3:14-15. These verses state,

*If any man's work which he has built upon it remains he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself **will be saved**, yet so as through fire* (Emphasis mine).

Once again, the word for “will be saved” is the same Greek root word *sozo* (σώζω) [4982] which we have seen previously with the salvation of the spirit and the salvation of the soul. But in this verse of Scripture the word is in the Greek *future* tense. The Greek future tense tells about an anticipated action or a certain happening that will occur at some time in the future.⁷

There are a couple of things to notice here. First, the persons whose work burns up will suffer loss. But that is not their outcome. Note that the very next part of the verse reads, “but he himself will be saved,” We are seeing here a picture of that unfaithful believer who stands at the Judgment Seat of Christ, yet they have lived for themselves and have nothing to show for it (hence, their works are burned up). Second, the person *will be* saved later (See Chapter 6).

⁷ http://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm

CHAPTER 4: THE TROUBLE WITH KNOWING

FRUIT INSPECTORS

It does us good at this point to address another misconception regarding the validity of a person's eternal salvation. I have heard it said (and you probably have too), taught, and preached that you can tell whether a person is "truly" saved by their fruit. The Scripture that these misinformed believers, teachers, and preachers use is:

You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:16-19)

The principle of their reasoning is to attempt to show that you can determine if a person is saved or not by the fruit they produce. And seeing as how we are being honest with each other; it really is a matter of power isn't it? If you must produce fruit to prove to me that you are saved, that places me in a place of authority over you (no matter how small it is). But then, does it stop there? If you have to prove it to me, then you have to prove it to everyone else, wouldn't you? And unfortunately, that is exactly where many believers sit right now. Stressed, because they don't think they are living good enough to prove they are Christians!

So, let's look at some of the flaws in that thinking. The first clarification comes by seeing the common denominator in the story. What is Jesus giving a description of? Trees. So, one tree produces good fruit (*we would think that this as a believer*), the other tree

bears bad fruit (*we would think this as a non-believer*). However, they are both **trees**! And they are both trees that bear fruit! I have a profound statement for you here; an unbeliever isn't a tree—they're dead. Not only is he spiritually dead, but he can also do no good. It's impossible for him to produce **any** fruit!

Let's get a visual here. I have a brown thumb. That means that if I try to grow anything, I kill it. As a matter of fact, I purchased a Bonsai tree once with the assurance that it could never die. As long as I watered it and kept it in the sunlight it couldn't die. LIES! That thing was dead before the month was up! So, what did I do? I called the nursery I bought it from and explained that the immortal bonsai didn't quite meet up to their standards. Come to find out, when you water the thing every day, you need to do more than mist the leaves. Who knew?

Now get the picture of a completely dead tree in your mind's eye. It can be subject to all the water in the world, but if it's dead, it's dead. There's no hope for life. If we were going to use an unbeliever in an illustration of tree, that would be it. Dead. D-E-A-D. This now brings us back to what Jesus is telling us here; namely, that we as believers produce fruit, it's just a matter of what type.

But wait! Christians can't bear bad fruit; they can only produce good fruit! In answering that question, again, let's turn to the word of God:

*For while we were in flesh the sinful passions
which were aroused by the Law, were at work
in the members of our body to bear fruit for
death. (Romans 7:5)*

The key here is the Law. No unbeliever can be aroused by the Law, only a believer can. Ask yourself this question: when did the Israelites receive the Law? After they had left Egypt (a type of the world), they passed through the Red Sea (a type of baptism) and entered the wilderness (a type of their new life as a believer). It was

only *after* they were in the wilderness that they received the Law. Remember now, if I must keep the Law in order to be saved, I am doing *works*. The Law was given to teach the Israelites how to live because they believed in God's Word! So, as we go back to the good fruit, bad fruit debate, we see that it is possible for a believer to produce both. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (which we will look at in detail later in the book regarding the Judgment Seat of Christ), states that we will be, "recompensed for our deeds done in the body, whether *good* or *bad*." When we allow ourselves to see the truth, that there are times we produce bad fruit, we are able to understand what God's word is telling us.

SEND IN THE DOCTOR!

There are three stories in the New Testament (Matthew 9:10-12, Mark 2:15-17, and Luke 5:29-31) which follow the calling of Levi (also known as Matthew). It is interesting that many teachers and preachers of the word of God use these stories as examples of how Christ came to save unbelievers. However, when you take a moment to meditate on this passage and what it really says, you end up with an eye opener. For the sake of space and time we'll use the account in Matthew 9:10-12:

And it happened that He was reclining at the table in the house, behold many tax-gatherers and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax-gatherers and sinners?" But when He heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick."

Now, at first glance it does seem as though Jesus is dining with unbelievers (besides, they are tax-gatherers and sinners). But there are a few things to notice and a few questions it does us well to ask, like: are all tax-gatherers unbelievers?

It would appear that way. But let's do a little digging here for a moment. In the first century, tax-gatherers were the lowest of the low. They were Jews whom the Romans put in charge to gather tax from their own people. Many of the tax-gatherers took extra money from the people they collected the taxes from to either care for their own families or fill their own coffers. When we think about this deplorable act, the picture that begins to form is that Jesus is surely eating with unbelievers, because believers wouldn't steal? Would they? But what is a sinner? A sinner is someone who misses the mark, they sin or break God's standard because they cannot measure up. If that is the case, every single believer has to be a sinner, right? As a matter of fact, 1 John 1:8 explains this very same concept when he wrote, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." We are all capable of committing sins. That is biblical fact. The problem comes in when we associate how a person lives their lives as a representation of their being saved or not. As we have addressed before, salvation into eternity is not determined by how you act, but rather by Who you believe.

So, what am I saying here? I believe that Jesus was indeed eating with believers, who in fact were sinners. Where do I get that thought from? The passage. Look again at what Jesus said to the Pharisees about those who are around Him. He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick." Did you see it?

Let me put it another way. ***Dead people (unbelievers) don't need a doctor, they need a mortician!*** If I come under the weather and I'm running a fever or have symptoms, I call my doctor and set up an appointment to go see her. The fever and the symptoms are clues that there is something wrong with me. I need to be made better. If I'm dead, you can put me in the doctor's office all day and

the only thing I'll do is attract flies. Ok...that was sorta gross, but hopefully you get my point. What Jesus is telling the Pharisees is that the tax-gatherers and sinners are sick, and they need His healing hand. In other words, they are believers who have fallen away from God and Christ is calling them back. They are sinners in need of repentance!

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Now up to this point, we have covered the total redemption of the person (spirit, soul, body). The final piece to the picture of redemption comes when the believer is given a glorified body, at a future date. But here we want to examine why we need to know that there is a process of salvation. Why would we, or should we, be concerned with a past tense, present tense, and future tense salvation?

The reason, which is critical to understanding Scripture, comes from a connection to the various Kingdom's of God.

Wait. Doesn't God only have one kingdom?

No. The Bible teaches us that there are three Kingdoms of God. And when a believer does not understand the differences between them, just as the differences between the salvations of the spirit, soul, and body, they can be easily mixed up, led astray, and misunderstand what the word of God says.

In the next section, we are going to study the difference between these kingdoms. They are the Kingdom of God the Father, the Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit, and the Kingdom of God the Son. Once through this section, you will have a better grasp on what your responsibility is as an *Accountable Christian*. Let's begin...this is going to be great!

THE LUMBAR CUSHION

My wife and I have a Kia Sedona that we bought way back in 2006. She's a great vehicle. She's been dependable and has taken us from Florida, to Georgia, to New York and back again. As I write this, the year is 2018. So that makes the van twelve years old. It was the first "big" purchase my wife and I made together, and we thought we needed it because at the time we had a daughter in high school who played the trombone in band (ever tried to get a trombone into a Chevy Cavalier?), and we wanted to have the extra room. So, we prayed and considered that this would be a wise choice. But here's the thing with this van, it has all sorts of bells and whistles. There's a light that tells you if there is a person over 100 pounds in the passenger's seat. If not, and the vehicle was involved in a head on or side collision, the air bags will not deploy as it can be fatal to a young child.

Both side doors to this van (yes, both) open. If I stop to get gas and open the latch for the gas nozzle, the door locks and will not open to keep the door from opening on to the gas hose. Both sliding doors have windows that go down. O wait, there's more.

All the seats recline, you can remove the back two bucket seats, there's like 400 cup holders in the thing (o.k., that's an exaggeration, it's more like 350...), there is a middle console between the driver and passenger seats that folds down out of your way. This thing was loaded (to our meager estimation anyway)!

But about a month ago (I said a month, and it'll be painfully important—just watch), I had dropped my license under the driver's seat. When I got home, I got out, opened the door and bent down to find it. I was looking for a way to see behind the seat, so I looked at the side of the driver's seat and there are three levers. I pulled one and the seat sprang backward to recline. I tried to bring the seat forward, but it wouldn't go past 90°. So, I tried the next little lever. It didn't do anything.

Now, I'm the kind of guy that if there's a lever, its gotta do something. So, like a trained monkey, I pulled the lever again. Nothing. But then I had this idea, *look at the seat*. I pulled the lever again, and at the bottom of the seat a lumbar cushion came out! What! Twelve years and there's been a lumbar cushion?! Now, I'm ecstatic. When I pushed the lever back in, the lumbar cushion disappeared!

Now, I know what you're saying right now too, because it's the same thing I said, "What in the world could this last lever do?" As I lifted that lever, the seat started to rise! The thing raked up like a barber chair, click, click, click. When I pushed the lever down the seat went down. I kid you not; I had *no idea* that the seat did that. Twelve years folks and I had features on this thing I'd never seen!

Needless to say, when I shared my discovery with my beloved, she was flabbergasted at my intellectual prowess (actually, she was just as amazed as I was). From that day forward, we have looked all over that vehicle to see what other hidden treasures she held!

Now, let me ask you a question here: did my van always have those features on the driver's seat, or did they just show up one day?

Why does he ask such ridiculous questions...?

I ask this question, because there is an important lesson here, one we can all learn from going forward. ***Just because we don't know something is there, doesn't mean it isn't!*** In this next section, as we study the three kingdoms of God, I want you to think of them being like that lumbar cushion. The truth of the kingdoms of God has always been there, but we may have never seen them before.

CHAPTER 5: THE THREE KINGDOMS OF GOD

Contrary to some beliefs, the Kingdom of God has three distinct aspects or parts. We have previously seen that God, although One, is also three separate persons; likewise, there exists a separate Kingdom for each member of the Godhead! As we will see, knowing which Kingdom of God is being discussed is crucial to understanding Scripture. For far too long teachers and preachers have confused these Kingdoms and tried to make them one, therefore, when they read, for instance, in Matthew 21:43, “Therefore I say to you that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you,” they (along with many believers) struggle to understand what this means. In this passage, is Christ telling the Israelites that they are losing their salvation? And if so—which one? Or is Jesus telling the Israelites that they just lost any opportunity of ever being saved eternally?

We will begin by discussing the Kingdom of God the Father, which by comparison is relatively easy to understand. We will then move on to study the Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit, followed finally by the Kingdom of God the Son. For each of these three parts we will look at Scripture which will clarify which Kingdom is being discussed.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD THE FATHER

Within this Kingdom, God the Father rules over all creation from a literal throne in heaven. Within this Kingdom, all creation, meaning every living creature, the whole universe, all of the heavens, all of the heavenly hosts, angels, demons, and Satan himself are under God the Father’s authority. Let’s solidify the scope of His realm, a person who at this point has rejected Christ and is bound for eternal punishment is *in* God the Father’s Kingdom. Why? Because *all* things are ruled by God the Father. We see this description in Daniel 4:34-35,

*For His dominion is an everlasting dominion;
and His kingdom endures from generation to
generation. And all the inhabitants of the
earth are accounted as nothing, but He does
according to His will in the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of earth; and no
one can ward off His hand or say to Him,
'What have you done?'*

Again, we see in Jeremiah 32:17

*Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the
heavens and the earth by Your great power
and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too
difficult for You.*

Finally, in Psalm 146:5-6,

*How blessed is he whose help is the God of
Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God;
who made heaven and earth, the sea and all
that is in them;*

Regarding the Kingdom of the Father we will not take as much time to describe His Kingdom, as we will with the subsequent Kingdoms of God the Holy Spirit's and God the Son's; the reason being is that God the Father as Creator, Maker, and Sustainer of all things is widely known and understood by Christians. We can clearly see that He sits upon His throne and holds all things in His hands. Nothing escapes His notice, and nothing happens that He does not already foreknow. If there was anything that could catch Him by surprise this would imply that He did not know the event was going to happen, and as such, He could not be God.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

As we now move to the Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit, this is a Kingdom which many believers do not understand. If you were to ask the average Christian to describe with biblical proof the Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit, I'm pretty sure you'd get plenty of the deer in the headlight looks. Yet, to understand this Kingdom is to understand the second Person of the Trinity (respectfully) and His individual role that He plays in the lives of believers. Let's look at a Scripture that speaks directly to the Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit:

...for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. (Romans 14:17-18)

Now, whereas all living creatures are within the Kingdom of God the Father, the same cannot be said for the Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit. Now, I'm going to make a statement here and I want you to read it, and then we will explain it. Ready? Entrance into this Kingdom is by **permission** only. Unlike the Kingdom of God, the Father, the Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit is entered by *faith* at the moment a person accepts the finished work of Christ on the cross for their sins. At this moment of faith, the Holy Spirit enters a person's spirit to seal him forever as a believer to the promise of eternal life.

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise. (Ephesians 1:13)

Therefore, the rule of God the Holy Spirit involves *only* the new creation (a believer's heart and life). In clearer description, only those who have trusted Christ as savior can be included in this Kingdom. However, as you probably know, we as believers in Christ, have two ways to live the Christian life. We can choose to live according to the Spirit or according to our flesh. Galatians 5:16-17 again, is a great verse to understand this.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

In this verse, we clearly see that (1) this Kingdom is specifically linked to the Holy Spirit. (2) This Kingdom has nothing to do with material things such as eating and drinking; there is a higher, spiritual aspect to this Kingdom. (3) When a person is in this Kingdom, they *can* serve Christ.

When we are living according to the Spirit's leading in our lives, we are working within this Kingdom. When we are living according to our fleshly desires, the Kingdom will not be operating within us. As we saw before, when the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit is operating within us then we will enjoy righteousness, peace, and joy. To further understand this distinction, we can look just a few verses later in Galatians 5.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these... (Galatians 5:19-21)

Now hang on with me a second; when most believers read these verses, they think that this is talking about the difference between a non-believer and a believer. But that cannot be the case! Here's why. Ask yourself this question: who is Paul writing to? *The church at Galatia*. Who makes up the church at Galatia? *Believers*. Now, go back to verse 15; who bites and devours? **YOU**. You who? You *believers* of Galatia! What Paul is describing in these verses is the tug of war between the Spirit that is now within a believer and the old nature which hangs on. This is what Paul describes as the flesh. This is so very vital to understand! We have a new Spirit, yes, but we also have our flesh which is bent on doing what it used to do before we were saved. Let's do an exercise together. Ready? Read through that list again in verse 19-21. Now being completely honest have you ever acted that way after you were saved? If you answered "no," read 1 John 1:8—you're a liar. I don't mean to be harsh here, because this is such a testy issue. There is a persona about Christians that they never do anything wrong and if they do, they aren't really saved. But the Bible clearly tells us that the flesh that we are born with never leaves (John 3:6). If it did, we would NEVER sin! But we do! Do you see the conundrum?

So here comes the argument: *how do we know if a person is saved or not by how they act? You can't!* You also cannot judge whether a person is saved or not by how they live. If we commit a little white lie or commit murder, each is an affront to God and in His eyes it's all the same. For far too long, Christians have been pointing fingers at other Christians saying that since they don't act right, believe right, have strong enough faith, that they cannot be saved. Again, look at how that plays out. If I must live a certain way to prove that I am saved, am I not in fact living and proving my eternal salvation (my eternal worth) by works? That my dear friends, is utterly and completely unbiblical. How I live has nothing to do with my eternal salvation. It has to do with the next Kingdom we will discuss, *the Kingdom of God the Son*.

But before we do that, let me give you an example of how God views sin. A wonderful member of Lighthouse Church, the body of believers I shepherd, brought a little Lego® creation to me. It was a tiny staircase. She said to me, “Pastor, this is how we view sin.” She held up the staircase in such a way that I was looking right at it. I could see the pieces stacked as they got progressively higher going from left to right. She said, “You see, we see sin in levels. This one is minor, not a big deal (pointing to the lowest step). This one is a little worse (pointing to the next step), and finally, this is a bad one, this one is the one no one can tolerate, whatever name you want to give it (as she pointed at the last step).” I thought about what she was showing me and realized that we like to categorize sin into boxes (or steps). This little lie—not so bad. This adultery—that’s worse (yet in today’s society it may not be! But I digress). This murder, suicide, or—wait for it—homosexual relationship—is an ABOMINATION TO THE LORD!

Then she did something so intriguing. She looked at me and said, “But Pastor, this is how God view sin.” She took that staircase and turned it on its side so all I could see was the stairs as if I was looking down on them. And wouldn’t you know it, I couldn’t tell the height difference, one from the next. She ended the illustration by saying, “You see, *every* sin (she placed a hard emphasis on that word “every”), is against God. And *every* sin is wrong. It doesn’t matter how bad, worse, or abominable it is.”

THE KINGDOM OF GOD THE SON

In this closing section we will study the Kingdom of God the Son. This is the Kingdom which the prophets looked forward to. This is the Kingdom which the book of Revelation speaks about; this is the kingdom that Jesus taught about. Now, we have seen that all creation is within the Kingdom of God the Father. We have studied and seen that only believers are in the Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, we’ve seen that entrance into the Kingdom of

God the Holy Spirit is by *permission* only, you must have trusted Christ as savior to operate in this Kingdom. But this last Kingdom is different from the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit in the meaning that it is entered by *privilege* only.

Here comes the ***bold statement alert***: NOT all believers will enter this Kingdom. Heresy! Blasphemy! Lies! Why? Can you give me biblical proof that says that my statement is wrong? You cannot. But I can provide, by the very Word of God that the statement is utterly and completely true. As sad as this sounds, it is no less true, not all believers will enter the Kingdom of God the Son.

To explain this, let us turn to a few Scripture verses:

...and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

(Revelation 20:6)

We'll discuss later in detail the "who" these people will be, but for now, I'd like you just to focus on the fact that Christ will reign for one thousand *literal* years. Another Scripture which points to the fact that Christ must reign is found in the Old Testament book of Zechariah.

And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one. All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepress. And people will live in it, and there will be no more curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security.

(Zechariah 14:9-11)

There is a plethora of Scriptures that point to the fact that when Christ comes again, He will set up His kingdom. One needs to look no further than the day which Christ ascended into heaven. Christ's own disciples thought that once He had risen from the dead, He would set up His millennial Kingdom:

And so, when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"
(Acts 1:6)

Now, it is at this point that you are in for an incredible eye opener. We must take a little bit of a respite from our study of the Kingdom's of God and look at a poor misinterpretation which must be corrected. Once we study this next topic and fully understand its implications, it will bring these pieces to the salvific puzzle together. The truth that salvation is a process will come front and center as we move on from this point.

WHICH KINGDOM IS IT?

In Scripture, the terms Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God are identical. Only in the book of Matthew will you see the term "Kingdom of Heaven" (32 times). RC Sproul once stated:

"He does this not because he has a different view of the meaning or content of the kingdom of God; rather, out of sensitivity to his Jewish readers in order to avoid mentioning the sacred name of God. So, for Matthew, the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven is the same kingdom that the other writers speak of as the kingdom of God."

But as we've already learned, if we are talking about the Kingdom of God, we have to ask—which Kingdom is being talked about? The Kingdom of God the Father, the Kingdom of God Holy Spirit, or the Kingdom of God the Son.

Let's take a step back for a moment. Let's ask a question: what is a kingdom? In the Bible, the word “kingdom” in Greek is the word βασιλεία [932] meaning a dominion, realm, or rule. If you look up a definition in which a dictionary it would say something like: it is an organized community or major territory unit having a monarchical form of government ruled by a king or queen.

There is some background that we must look at when it comes to the Kingdom of Heaven (Kingdom of God the Son). The idea of the Messiah coming and bringing Israel back as the head of the nations is seen in Scripture (Deuteronomy 28:13). The reason for this is the promise which God gave to Abraham. Read carefully what the LORD tells Abraham in Genesis 15:18:

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river Euphrates,

God also reestablishes His promise in Joshua 1:4:

From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun, will be your territory;

The book of Daniel speaks of a day when the Messiah will come and set up His Kingdom (Daniel 2:44-45), but the promise does not begin there. God promised a literal King that would reign over the earth and be the new King of Israel. But in order to see that,

we need to look at God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob first.

God promised Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

God reaffirmed His promise to Isaac in Genesis 26:3-4:

"Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

God then restated His promise to Jacob, Isaac's son in Genesis 35:9-12, but there was an added section:

Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; you shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." Then He called him Israel. God also said to him, "I am God

*Almighty; be fruitful and multiply, a nation and company of nations shall come from you, and **kings shall come forth from you**. And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.” (Emphasis mine).*

The addition to God’s promise now includes kings. This was not in either of the previous promises which God made to Abraham or Isaac—or was it? One thing I want you to notice is that the word kings (plural) is used, meaning, more than one. Is it here that God is telling Israel that there would be a succession of a line of Kings leading up to the coming Messiah? Or was God’s reference to something else, something (or some people) that would come later? Or both?

To answer this question, we must begin with the final covenant promise connected to God’s previous affirmations to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; it was a promise made to David:

“When your days are complete, and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, who I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before

me forever; your throne shall be established forever.”

(2 Samuel 7:12-16)

This covenant gives us a clue as to who or Whom God is inferring to, however it is important to note that the line of earthly kings was never supposed to be placed in effect in the beginning! Although God is sovereign and knows everything that would and will happen, He also has a plan of what He desires His people to do. However, many times they (we) don't obey his command.

With reference to the line of the early kings, if we take a step back before David and even Saul, we come to the prophet Samuel. In his days as the prophet of Israel, the LORD was to be the King and lead the people (His desire), yet the people rebelled and wanted to “fit in” just like the rest of the folks in the area:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, “Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” And Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them. (1 Samuel 8:4-7)

When we take our attention back to 2 Samuel 7:12, God makes a covenant promise with David that his descendant (notice it is singular) would come forth from David and God would “establish his kingdom.” Is God speaking about Solomon or Someone else? The quick answer is—yes. God was inferring to David that his

physical line and his son Solomon would be the next king of Israel. However, God, in this incredible prophecy, is telling David, and us, that a descendant (Jesus) would come forth from his lineage (see Matthew 1:1-17) and His Kingdom would be established, for how long? *Forever.*

We also see in Scripture that during the Davidic line of kings, God used prophets to foretell of the coming King, the Messiah, Christ Jesus. I would also have you note that each of these Scriptures listed below are *literal*:

For the sons of Israel will remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterwards the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.
(Hosea 3:4-5)

Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. So, Jerusalem will be holy, and strangers will pass through it no more. And it will come about in that day that the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water; and a spring will go out from the house of the LORD, to water the valley of Shittim. Egypt will become a waste, and Edom will become a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the sons of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood. But Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem for all generations. And I will

*avenge their blood which I have not avenged,
for the LORD dwells in Zion. (Joel 3:17-21)*

*In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of
David and wall up its breaches; I will also
raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days
of old; that they may possess the remnant of
Edom and all the nations who are called by
My name,” declares the LORD who does this.
“Behold, days are coming,” declares the
LORD, “when the plowman will overtake the
reaper and the treader of grapes him who
sows seed; when the mountains will drip sweet
wine, and all the hills will be dissolved. Also, I
will restore the captivity of My people Israel,
and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live
in them, they will also plant vineyards and
drink their wine, and make gardens and eat
their fruit. I will also plant them on their land,
and they will not again be rooted out from
their land which I have given them,” says the
LORD God. (Amos 9:11-15)*

*And it will come about in the last days that the
mountain of the house of the LORD will be
established as the chief of the mountains. It
will be raised above the hills, and the people
will stream to it. And many nations will come
and say, “Come and let us go up to the
mountain of the LORD and to the house of the
God of Jacob, that He may teach us about His
ways and that we may walk in His paths.” For
from Zion will go forth the law, even the word
of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will*

judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war. And each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD OF hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:1-5)

Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away His judgments against you; He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD is in your midst; you will fear disaster no more. In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: "Do not be afraid, O Zion; do not let your hands fall limp. The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, he will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts—they came from you O Zion; the reproach of exile is a burden to them. Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors, I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time, I will bring you in, even at the time when I gather you together; indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I

restore your fortunes before your eyes.” Says the LORD. (Zephaniah 3:14-20)

Finally, Jesus Himself prophesied of His coming Kingdom:

But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a Great Trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.
(Matthew 24:29-31)

Because of God’s promises, the Jews were eagerly waiting for their coming King, the Messiah, who would free them from tyranny. Therefore, when Christ came to earth and began to do signs and wonders and proclaims that He is the Messiah, the Jews mistakenly believed He was going to free them from Roman rule. As we now know, that was not why Christ came. He came to free all men from Satan’s rule.

We need look no further when it comes to the description of the Kingdom of Heaven than the ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus Himself.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:2)

Jesus spoke the same words:

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17)

I want you to notice something very important here: Jesus **never** told the people, "Believe in the Lord and you will be saved." Why? There are two reasons. One, was because He had not died on the cross yet! Two, He was preaching to **saved** people. Jesus main ministry while on this earth was *not* to preach the gospel of grace to unsaved people, but the Gospel of the Kingdom to the saved of Israel.

You ok there? I see you fell out of your chair. Was it something I said? I want you to know that I did not write that wrong! Here is a major distinction that should help believers to understand Jesus ministry. There are two verses we are going to look at and when we do, you will have a better grasp of the statement I just made:

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, saying, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 10:5-6)

Again, Jesus says later:

But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24)

SHEEP!!!

When I first saw these verses and realized what Jesus was saying, my jaw basically hit the floor. My mentor, Eber Overly, who played (and still does) an immense role in guiding me through Scripture, was the first to show me what these verses in the Bible were truly saying. When he introduced me to the information, I am going to introduce you to, it was amazing.

There was one night that we were having a small Bible study with a friend, my beloved, Pastor Eber (who was teaching) and his wife Crystal. We came to these verses, and he stated, basically the same thing you just read, to us. What I saw, heard, and read shocked me! Jesus *only* came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel?! *So, He didn't come to preach the gospel of, "Believe in the Lord and you will be saved?!"* That was so counter intuitive to what I always thought, and it just didn't make any sense. Until Eber taught me about two words; *lost*, and *sheep*.

Question: how many times have you heard that we as believers need to go and share the gospel to the *lost*? Hundreds? Thousands? Hundreds of thousands? Probably (and if you're like me you were made to feel less than a believer, if not a believer at all if you didn't!). We are told that we need to go out and get the lost, and I have heard these passages used to describe what we are to do (besides, in the Matthew 10 passage, Jesus sends out the twelve).

So, take a step back for a moment; what does "lost" imply? It means something was somewhere doing whatever and then it wandered away and cannot find its way back, right? Well, we have been taught that a "lost person" is someone who has never trusted Christ and is bound for Hell (or shall I say Hades? *There's a difference...* that'll blow your mind too when we talk about that later). As the teaching goes, if you are lost (unsaved), the question must be asked: what are you lost from? Being more lost? No. From God? No, He knows all.

NO! Being lost means there's no hope for you, you are lost from being saved! Most would say.

Ok, let me find a little common ground with that statement. Suppose I concede to that idea for a moment. Say the term “lost” was to mean an unsaved person.

Whew...was gonna have to break bad on this guy.

So next question: what's a sheep? Here is where your argument falls apart. In Matthew 25:32, Jesus makes an intriguing statement regarding His judgment of the nations. He says, “And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;” Obviously, the next question must be, who are the goats and who are the sheep? When we keep reading in verse 41 regarding the goats, we see their end, “Then He will also say to those on His left (*the goats—verse 33*), ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for ***the devil and his angels.***”

Well, that's pretty clear. Goats are unsaved people. Agreed? *Agreed.*

So, what about the sheep? Let's look at what happens to them, “Then the King will say to those on His right (*the sheep—verse 33*), ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, ***inherit the kingdom*** prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Well that surely doesn't sound like they're going to eternal punishment now does it?

You see, the disconnection comes when we fail to understand the image that Christ is teaching here. What the Scriptures plainly teaches us is that sheep are *believers*.

For further clarification let's turn to a Psalm you may know, Psalm 23. In this Psalm, David (a believer by the way), is giving an intimate description of his relationship to God. He equates himself as a sheep. He says in verse one, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” David goes on further to describe what a shepherd would do for his sheep in verses two and three.

So, you see a sheep is clearly a saved person! So, then what in the world is a *lost* sheep? Let's go back and readdress that question we looked at earlier, "if you are lost, what are you lost from?"

A little connection here is good: first, Jesus was preaching to the nation of Israel, *not* to all of mankind. Based on the verses we saw previously; we see that Jesus ministry was to preach to Israel so that they could inherit the promises that God wanted them to have. One promise was physical and unconditional, that was the Promised Land. The second promise was conditional, which was that God would have had Israel rule with Christ during His millennial reign over the earth. One physical, the other spiritual. Hence, we can get an unobstructed view of the promise the God made to Abraham when He said:

...indeed, I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens (above, i.e. spiritual blessings), *and as the sand on the seashore* (on earth, i.e. physical blessings—the Promised Land)
(Genesis 22:17)

Second, the nation of Israel was being told to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This repentance is a turning away from something, which was turning away from the manmade rules, laws, and guidelines *they* had created. The word repentance carries the idea of changing the mind or turning back to something. The problem with having to repent to be saved means that I would have to "turn back" to God. But, again, what am I turning back to, being more unsaved? If I was never with Him in the first place, how can I turn back to Him?

Third, Jesus is searching for the lost sheep, those *believers* of Israel who had been following the man-made rules (*now they had lost their way*), to turn back to God (hence repentance) so that they

may *inherit* the kingdom of heaven. In other words, these words of Christ have nothing to do with them getting into heaven! It is about Israel receiving their inheritance into the kingdom of heaven (the spiritual blessings), or as we have seen previously, the kingdom of God the Son!

So, back to our Bible study. When Eber taught through this lesson, I literally sat there with my eyes (and my mouth) wide open. It was then that I blurted out the words, “SHEEP!” Literally, just like that, screaming it! Since then, it’s become sort of a mantra that we use when we see a new truth in Scripture.

CLARIFYING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The premise of this section is to show you the reader that when you read the words, “kingdom of heaven,” the implication is that it is not the Kingdom of God the Father, nor the Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of heaven is not eternal salvation; it pertains to and relates to the Kingdom of God the Son.

Once again, we do not want to just take that statement at face value. I want to offer you biblical proof of this statement. As we study the following passages, take a moment now to stop and first, thank God that He has given you the opportunity to see and to know Him more. Next, take a deep breath and follow along as we get in-depth with the following passages. The purpose of this exercise is to help you see the Bible from the proper view. We will go through a few passages below and for each one we will ask certain questions. These questions will shed light on how we should view the passages.

Have you ever seen one of those pictures where you are supposed to stare at the three little dots in the middle for 30 seconds without blinking? And after you do, you are told to look at the ceiling and a picture appears? Understanding Scripture can be just like that. If you just look at the picture, it seems to make no sense whatsoever. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to the picture at

first, but once you spend serious time studying the minute details and then “look up” the picture becomes clear.

This is how studying the word of God is. I’ve spent a lot of time fielding questions from folks who ask what the best way to study God’s word is. Should I use this commentary or read that commentary? Should I take this class or that class? My response is the same and it’s one of those “answer a question with a question” things. I’ll say, “Who teaches you God’s word?” Now, in response to that answer, I’ve heard lots of answers, but the one and only one I’m looking for is *The Holy Spirit*. The Bible tells us that He leads us into all truth (John 16:13)—if we’re willing to stare at the three dots in the middle.

I would like to begin with one of the most pivotal verses in the Bible when it comes to understanding that the Kingdom of Heaven is in fact the Kingdom of God the Son. For each of the four passages that we will look at, we will ask a set of questions—they may get a little redundant by the end, but trust me, it’s worth it—these questions will help us to understand key points in the passage to properly understand what God wants us to see.

MATTHEW 6:33

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.”

Let’s begin with an easy question: who is the author of the book? Matthew. Good, now, who was Matthew writing to? The answer is *Jewish believers*. We know this because of the way in which he wrote (remember he used kingdom of heaven, instead of kingdom of God to not offend them? Gentiles wouldn’t mind those words as much). We also see that Matthew gives a genealogy for Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17) and many of the terms he used solidify the idea that he wrote to a Jewish audience. Case in point, he used Old Testament scriptures and much of his letter correlates to the fact that

Jesus was the coming Messiah of the long-awaited coming Kingdom of God (the Son that is).

The next question is: who is speaking in the passage? Jesus (Matthew 5:2). Next, and here is a sticky question: who is Jesus speaking to? The answer is *the disciples*. Look at Matthew 5:1-2:

*And when He saw the multitudes, **He went up** on the mountain; and after He sat down, **His disciples came to Him**. And opening His mouth He began to teach **them*** (Emphasis mine).

There are those that would say that Jesus is teaching the multitude because they are within His hearing, but the focus of the passage is clear; the disciples saw Jesus go up and they went *to Him*. At that point Jesus was teaching the disciples. What the multitude may have heard Him say is irrelevant, this was an opportunity for a Rabbi to teach His followers. What He would teach them is what we label the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Let's add a clarifier for you: Jesus could *not* be speaking to non-believers. Why? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 2:14. There the word of God says,

*But the natural man (**unsaved man**) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.* (Emphasis mine)

Therefore, even if those of the multitude (if they were unsaved) heard what Jesus was saying, they wouldn't be able to grasp it to begin with. And if they were believers in the hearing of the Sermon on the Mount, their instruction would be just like ours.

So now we return to our passage. Let's put a few things together. So far, we see Jesus was talking to believers and He tells them to "seek" His Kingdom. To seek something is an action word.

To draw this picture out a little more, the word “seek” is the Greek word *zeteo* (ζητέω) [2212], meaning to go about, to desire, or to endeavor. When we look at the way the word is written in the original Greek, it is in the present tense, active voice, and imperative mood. This means, if you recall, the Greek present tense calls for continuous action. The active voice means that the author sees the action as real or happening. The final piece is the imperative mood. This is a command or instruction given to the hearer, charging the hearer to carry out or perform a certain action; meaning it is a command which calls for continuous action.⁸

Finally, if the kingdom of heaven meant eternal salvation in Matthew 6:33, why would Jesus tell *saved* people to seek for something they *already have*?

That’s because He isn’t. He is telling them (believers) that to attain entrance into the kingdom of heaven, they must do something (seek first). What we are seeing is that entrance into the kingdom of God the Son (the kingdom of heaven) is something that the saved believer must work toward obtaining. The promise that coincides with this statement is that God will take care of all our needs (see Matthew 6:25-32), thereby showing is that He is the One who works through us to obtain that entrance.

MATTHEW 7:21

*“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’
will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who
does the will of My Father who is in heaven.”*

Again, let’s begin with our questions: who is the author of the book? Matthew. Who is the author writing to? Again, Jewish believers. Who is speaking in the passage? *Still* Jesus. Who is Jesus speaking to? *Still* the disciples. Next question: according to this verse, what does it take to enter the kingdom of heaven? A person

⁸ http://ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm

must *do* the will of God the Father. Remember Ephesians 2:8-9? We are saved by grace through faith without works so that no man can boast.

So, here, if the kingdom of heaven were to imply eternal life, I must **do** God's work to enter. And if I don't, I can't get in. Folks, no matter how you slice that, **it's a work**.

There is another clue to this passage that points to the fact that Jesus is speaking to believers. What is it that these people call Jesus? "Lord." Now let's look at a connecting passage:

Therefore, I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

(1 Corinthians 12:3)

According to this passage only one who has the Holy Spirit can call Jesus Lord. The point to understand our passage in Matthew 7:21, is that Jesus is saying that there are believers who will *not* gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Although contrary to what most understand, this is exactly what the Bible teaches. Remember, entrance into the kingdom of heaven has nothing to do with your eternal gift; it has to do with your rewards.

But how can that be? Let's look at one more example in the book of Matthew that truly helps us to clarify this truth.

MATTHEW 21:42-43

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the LORD and it was marvelous in our eyes'? "Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away

from you and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it.”

Again, let's begin with our questions: who is the author of the book? Matthew. Who is the author writing to? Jewish believers. Who is speaking in the passage? Jesus. Again. Who is Jesus speaking to? Here we must dig a little. We see that Jesus is speaking to the leaders of Israel (see verse 23). What is interesting is *what* He says to the leaders of Israel. He is taking the kingdom away from them.

Now, could this be that Jesus is telling these people that they were saved, but they are not anymore? It cannot be! There is a connection that Jesus gives to the leaders of Israel at the end of verse 43. Those who will inherit the kingdom of heaven will *do* so because they will **produce** fruit.

Again, if Jesus is speaking about getting into heaven, He is saying, first, you can lose it at any time; secondly, you must do something to get in (produce fruit), and in effect, do something to keep it! All those statements are false. You cannot lose your eternal gift of salvation, and eternal life is obtained by believing—by grace through faith.

There is one more illustration I normally like to use here. If Jesus really was taking away their salvation, that implies that first, they had to have it to begin with. This means that they were saved but now Jesus didn't find them to be enough (or productive enough) to keep their salvation. Here's the picture: if you give someone a pad of paper and then take it back again, the fact of the matter is that the person has it in their possession and then they have it taken away. Does God really take things away just because we do not produce to His standards? If so, **none** of us could gain entrance into heaven! No human can keep God's standard!

Finally, for one last look at this idea of fruit bearing in connection to obtain entrance into the kingdom of heaven, we'll

looked at a Scripture we've seen previously, but here we will go a little deeper to look how it ties into the kingdom of heaven.

GALATIANS 5:19-22

*The deeds of the flesh are evident, which are:
immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry,
sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of
anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying,
drunkenness, carousing, and things like these,
of which I forewarn you just as I have
forewarned you that those who practice such
things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.
But the fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness,
faithfulness, self-control; against such things
there is no law.*

By now, you know what we're going to ask: who is the author of the book? Matthew. NO! Paul (*just trying to keep you on your toes*). Who is Paul writing to? The church at Galatia (Galatians 1:2). Since Paul is writing to the church at Galatia, he is indeed writing to believers.

Let's focus on a couple things here. Paul is telling believers in Galatia that they should avoid living in a way that will dishonor God, hence the list he gives from verse 19 through the first half of verse 21. Here's where I get lots of grief. So many Christians will say, "Well, no believer acts like that!" Really? I know of a few deacons that would be out on their ear for some "outburst of anger." Tell me you have never been jealous?

But these sins are so harsh! Drunkenness! Carousing! Those are only things that non-believers do!

True. Non-believers do these things. But so, do believers. We can know for a fact that Paul is writing to believers when we look at a certain pronoun, he uses in verse 21, it's the pronoun "you." If Paul

is writing to believers, then he is telling them that he first forewarned them, and he's warning them again that they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Now, our first question needs to be: which kingdom of God is Paul talking about? It cannot be the kingdom of God the Father; we're already in that one. Since he is talking to believers, they are already in the kingdom of God the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the only kingdom left is the kingdom of God the Son.

For further clarification, look at what Paul stated: they will not inherit the kingdom of God if they do what? PRACTICE. This word in verse 21 is so important. When you study the Greek form of the word it is in the present tense (which we've seen before), indicating a continual action.

What Paul is saying, is that if you as a believer *continue* to live this way you will not inherit the kingdom of God the Son (i.e., you will not receive a reward).

Let's clear this up a little more: Paul states that if you, believer, continually practice these things you will not inherit the kingdom of God (the Son). The proof is in the word "inherit." For you to inherit what your Father has, you must first be his child. An unsaved person cannot inherit anything because they are not His children yet!

Here, unfortunately, we look at inheritance from a western point of view. This means that anyone can inherit what a person has if it is left to them whether they are associated with the family or not. This is NOT the way the biblical writers and the people of Jesus and Paul's day would have understood it. Inheritance in the biblical sense comes when a father of the family provides what he has in proportion to his sons. When his sons are born, they are recognized as his children. When they turn the age of 13, they then undergo a rite called a Bar-Mitzvah. It is at this celebration that the then child is "adopted" as the father's son and is now eligible to receive his inheritance. Yet it doesn't end there. Let me illustrate:

Say a man has three sons. He's getting ready to pass away, so he would take everything he has, and he divides it up for his sons. However, he would take all his possessions and divide them into four parts.

But he only has three sons?

That is correct, however, the **first-born** son receives a **double** portion of what the father owns. They all receive a gift from their father of an inheritance, but the first-born son receives a reward of sorts in receiving a double portion.

But if the first-born son always received the double portion, it isn't really a reward, it's a gift, right?

Actually, no. There are two solid biblical examples of first-born sons who did not receive their inheritance, the first was Esau (Genesis 27:30-40), and the second was Rueben (compare Genesis 35:23 and Genesis 48). In Esau's case, his double portion went to his younger brother Jacob (whom God changed his name to Israel), and for Reuben, his double portion went to his younger brother Joseph, whose double portion of land went to his sons Ephraim and Manasseh.

SUMMARY

In concluding this section, we see that there are three kingdoms: the kingdom of God the Father, the kingdom of God the Holy Spirit, and finally the kingdom of God the Son. Only one of these kingdoms is obtained as a reward, implying that there is something that we as believers must do to gain entrance into it and that is the kingdom of God the Son. This is also known as the kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER 6: THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Alright, let's get down to the seriousness of this book and the coming judgment which all *believers* must face. Again, I want to caution you to keep your spiritual eyes, ears, and hearts open as you read through this. There may be things that *seem* wrong, but remember, if the Word of God says that it is true, it must be true.

The Bible is clear that we *all* as believers, must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give an account of our lives to God for the *deeds* we have done. Here are a few Scriptures that point to this truth:

*But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For **we** shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. (Romans 14:10)*
(Emphasis mine).

*For **we** all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10)* (Emphasis mine).

*For it is time for judgment to begin with the house of God; and if it begins with **us first**, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:1)*
(Emphasis mine).

The next question one needs to ask is who the “we” and the “us” are, and what will happen at this event? Previously that the “we” (and us) are *believers*. Remember, if I were speaking to a room full of people, and I said we are going to go outside, the implication is that myself, including all of the people in the room would be going

outside. That is why in our passages listed above I have highlighted the pronouns “we” and “us.” Paul and Peter are placing themselves in the passage when they describe the upcoming judgment of believers.

There is one more Scripture which solidifies the above passages as far as what will happen at this judgment seat of Christ. Paul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, was given a clear explanation of not only the persons involved, but also the outcome of this judgment. We find this description in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

First and foremost, the Judgment Seat of Christ has ***nothing*** to do with salvation of the person's spirit. In other words, those people at the Judgment Seat will not be judged on whether they are saved. As a matter of fact, only those people who *are* saved will be at this judgment seat!

Look at verse 11 again: “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Clearly, we see that those at this event have the foundation of Jesus. This means that they must, and can only be, saved believers. Think of it this way: what is the one thing that all believers have in common, Christ Jesus! We all as Christians have Christ as our foundation because of the gift of salvation He offered, and we received.

But as we continue to look at the passage in detail, we see that Paul is using the analogy of building a house; that house is being built upon the foundation of Christ.

Note carefully that it is the responsibility of each believer to be careful how they build upon the foundation (Christ). Notice, also, that to build is to *do* something. Look closely at what the word says, “Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s **work** will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s **work**.” Note that the word of God here does **not** say that each man’s salvation will be tested! It is only his work that will be tested. And as we draw out the analogy, it is only what the builder builds on top of the foundation.

If you have ever purchased a toy or a book shelf or anything that needed to be put together than you know that it doesn’t get put together by just looking at it—believe me—I’ve tried (besides, that’s what grandchildren are for)!

What we are reading here is a connection to the salvation of the soul. We must build (or do something) with materials. However, the materials which Paul lists are rather interesting: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw (v. 12). But there is a reason for that.

In other words, there are two types of works that a believer can do. One type of work is the work that we do in the flesh. This is representative of the wood, hay, and straw in verse 12. This is anything that a Christian will attempt to do under their own strength

or power. The results of these works, no matter how ‘godly’ they may seem, are done without the help of the Lord Jesus. The result is something that is, for lack of a better term, useless.

The second type of work that a believer can do is the good works which God has prepared beforehand (Ephesians 2:10). These works are represented in the gold, silver, and precious stones. These works are precious and priceless because they are done by allowing God to work through us under His strength and direction.

Now, when you place wood, hay, and straw into a fire, what happens? They burn up. And what are you left with? Nothing but ash (which according to the Old Testament is only good for lamenting a loss).

Contrary to that, when you place gold, silver, and precious stones to fire they become purified and remain. If a believer stands at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and after being tested by the purifying fire, is found to have gold, silver, and precious stones remaining they will receive a reward (verse 14). If you were to ask a silversmith or a goldsmith or anyone who works with purifying metals, they will tell you that if you place the metal to a flame, it will melt and then all the impurities rise to the top and are then able to be scraped away leaving a pure substance. In the days of old, a silversmith or goldsmith knew the metal had reached its desired purity when he could look at it and *see the reflection of his face*. What a picture of what God does to His people; He purifies us so that all that He sees is Himself!

However, for those believers who stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ and are found to only have wood, hay, and straw and are tested by the fire, those believers will *suffer loss*. This suffering of loss cannot be the loss of the person’s salvation! The suffering of loss is the loss of the believer’s reward, or their inheritance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

We must remember that the person is saved into eternity because they believed in Christ by faith which is a one-time event (salvation of the spirit). After this initial salvation, the believer is

called into a relationship to be accountable to God, to receive the reward that God has prepared for us.

What we are seeing here in this description of the Judgment Seat of Christ, along with the passages of Romans 14, 2 Corinthians, and 1 Peter above, is the one area of the life of the Christian which is often overlooked. We spend so much time as Christians trying to be good and do good, that we lose out on the relationship we are to have with the Lord.

It is at the Judgment Seat of Christ that the believer's soul will be judged by Christ as to what the believer did with what was provided to them (which is everything we need, see 2 Peter 1:3). The spirit has been saved, and the promise of redemption is guaranteed. Whereas God granted the gift of eternal life to the believer at the moment of initial salvation, here God will give the rewards to those who have lived a faithful life, and not only that, but have persevered and endured *to the end*.

Romans 8:16-17 is a great verse that truly gives us a clear indication of this inheritance. The Word of God says, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *if* indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we *may* also be glorified with *Him*" (emphasis mine). What the Word of God is telling us here is that at the moment of salvation we are a part of the family of God. We are His children. We will receive the inheritance of being an heir "if" we suffer with Him.

What most do not see, or do not want to see, is that there are Christians who do *not* want to suffer with Christ, meaning they do not want to strive to live a godly life and lay down their desires, will, passions, and wants. By choosing to live according to their own will, wants, and desires, they are rejecting God's will for their lives, thus placing themselves in active rebellion against Him. This rebellion, God must and will deal with.

But carefully note what 1 Corinthians 3 was telling us; there are persons who will be at the Judgment Seat of Christ that will

receive rewards and there will be those that will *suffer loss*. Loss of what? Their inheritance (rewards, which we'll focus on this topic later as well).

Try telling a fellow believer at your church that they will undergo judgment for their works and see what type of responses you get. You may get those who actually say, "I know and I'm striving." That is the not the norm. More than likely, you will hear something like, "You have no idea what you are talking about. We as believers can never be punished." It is a sad testament to the immaturity of the body because of the watered-down milk that has been preached from the pulpits and taught in the Sunday school rooms.

You see, there is a thought among today's Christian circles that says that since we are saved, nothing negative will ever happen to us. Besides, the Bible says,

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

This of course is true! There is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! But it doesn't say *anything* about discipline and punishment. Before anybody jumps ship here, let's take a moment and take a deep breath. Think about this: to be *condemned* by God is to be *eternally* separated from Him. This does not mean that He cannot or will not discipline His own people for a time.

TWO DIFFERENT JUDGMENTS

I would like to make a distinction and a clarification if I may regarding the Great White Throne Judgment and the Judgment Seat of Christ. There are those that believe that the two are the same event. However, with a close examination of the word of God we will see that they are in fact two separate events separated by a one-thousand-year period. We have already seen that the Judgment Seat

of Christ is only for believers. This judgment identifies which believers obtain their inheritance and rewards, and which will suffer the loss of those rewards, and remember that again, those who do lose their rewards will be saved at a later time!

When we speak of the Great White Throne Judgment, some of the confusion comes when Christians read that there are those who are cast into Hades and those that are not. It sounds a lot like the Judgment Seat of Christ, yet there are stark contrasts. Let's look at the Scripture in Revelation:

And I saw a Great White Throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the eternal lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

(Revelation 20:11-15)

There are a couple of very distinct points that help us to see that this judgment has nothing to do with the Judgment Seat of Christ. Whereas in 1 Corinthians 3:15, those who suffer loss will be

saved at a future time, the same cannot be said for these people. They are cast into the lake of fire for eternity.

Another distinction comes from understanding the timing. In Revelation 20:4-6, we see a description of those Christians who receive their rewards (v. 4). Part of their reward is to rule and reign with Christ for one thousand years (v. 6). The distinction comes in verse 7, where the Bible says, “And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison.” Now, during the millennial reign of Christ, Satan will be bound, but the LORD will allow him to be released for a time and he will gather an army to fight against Christ, but he will be quickly defeated (vv. 8-9). Satan’s end will be to be thrown in the eternal lake of fire (v. 10). Now, ***after this event***, the Great White Throne Judgment takes place. It happens one thousand years **after** the beginning of the millennial (1,000) reign of Christ!

Part of the misunderstanding comes from that term “the second death.” When we as Christians see that we automatically assume that if it has anything to do with “death” it’s not for us. We must learn to delineate between what Scripture says and what it does not say. When we see the second death listed in Revelation 20:6, this second death has nothing to do with the second death in Revelation 20:14.

How do we know that? First, they happen one thousand years apart from one another. Second, the second death listed in Revelation 20:6 is something for *believers* and there is no mention of being cast into the eternal lake of fire. As a matter of fact, the description states that these Christians will endure punishment “until the thousand years were completed.” This connects with what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3:15 that those Christians will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” So, does this mean that God is going to throw the Christian into the eternal lake of fire? No. Absolutely not! The key is to understand the symbolism of what “fire” represents. All throughout Scripture, fire represents judgment or refinement. One would need to look no further than

Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-26). Fire is not always associated with Hades. As we saw at the Judgment Seat of Christ, our works will be tested with fire. This connects with what John the Baptist was foretelling:

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove his sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
(Matthew 3:11)

There are those that believe that this means that you must receive the Holy Spirit and then you must speak in tongues to be completely saved. Again, if that is the case, that means I must do something (even if it is speaking in tongues) to prove that I am saved. And guess what, that ain't right. What John the Baptist was alluding to was that when Jesus came, He would baptize or immerse Christians into the Holy Spirit. We see a clear indication of this in Ephesians 1:13:

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.

The baptism by fire was John the Baptist's way of telling us that as believers in Christ we will all undergo a judgment from the Lord. He would immerse us into the Holy Spirit (hence we are sealed) and at a later time we would be immersed in fire (a type for judgment).

Some of the thoughts swirling in your mind may be saying, "This guy has lost his marbles." Can I tell you, that is exactly what the enemy wants you to think! This leads me to the next section of this book because you see; when I was first studying these truths, I

had a go to saying, “Where is that in the Bible?” Remember, if the Bible doesn’t say it and confirm it, it isn’t true. Period.

So, the question now stands: does God in fact punish His own people (believers)?

Is there any biblical proof of God punishing His own people?

And if so, where are those instances in Scripture?

The answer to those questions is “yes.” Come with me and see.

THE EPI-WHAT-EVER

There is another important detail we need to know before going forward. It is in reference to one word that is often overlooked in the Word of God. It’s the word “knowledge.” In the Greek, when you read the word “knowledge” I want you to begin to stop and ask yourself this question: Which knowledge? The reason being is because there is one Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis* (γνῶσις) [1108] and another Greek word for knowledge, *epignosis* (ἐπίγνωσις) [1922].

In my early days in the ministry, I met a deacon who I was having a conversation with and the talk turned to deeper spiritual things. We began to talk about the difference between a Christian who obtains the prize, as opposed to a person who receives the free gift of salvation. I saw an opening, and of course, I could not resist, so I began to explain the difference between *gnosis* and *epignosis* knowledge. That was when I saw the deer in the headlight look. I realized that I had bit off more than he could chew (yep said that right), and he wasn’t getting it. That was when he said to me (in a strong southern drawl), “Well I don’t know about all that epi-what-ever, but I do know about the blood of Christ!” When I tried to explain it further, I got the sign for, “please stop talking any more about this” with a raised right hand. I knew it would do no good to continue.

The one issue with our English translations is that when we see the word “knowledge” we think of what we know: ideas, concepts, and things learned. But the two Greek words listed above have an immensely different meaning!

The Greek word *gnosis* can be found in passages like:

*But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the **knowledge** of Him in every place. (2 Corinthians 2:14) (Emphasis mine).*

*For God, who said, “Let light shine out of the darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the **knowledge** of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6) (Emphasis mine).*

*...but grown in the grace and **knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18) (Emphasis mine).*

In each of these instances, we are seeing an attachment of the *gnosis* to that of our initial salvation (the salvation of our spirit). We can identify this with 2 Corinthians 4:6 which is alluding to the fact that we were once in darkness, and separated from God, but by His *Word*, we can have light. In John 1:4 we see Who that Light is—Jesus! So, by believing in Him, we have life.

So then, what about this other Greek word for knowledge, this *epi*-what-ever. You will notice that the two words are identical at their root, however, for this word, there is a prefix; in this case “*epi*.” *Epi* in Greek means above, or higher. So, this word for knowledge means a *higher* or *above* knowledge. It is more intensive than *gnosis* knowledge because it is calling the reader to see that there is something more, something deeper, something higher. But

when you read an English translation of the Bible you will see the word appears the same as the gnosis knowledge:

*...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the **knowledge** of the truth.*

(Ephesians 1:17) (Emphasis mine).

*...that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true **knowledge** of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself. (Colossians 2:2) (Emphasis mine).*

*For if we go on sinning after receiving the **knowledge** of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.*

(Hebrews 10:26) (Emphasis mine).

For each of these verses, the word *appears* to be the same, however, it isn't! That is why is it so very important to go back into the original languages which the Bible was written in to identify words and phrases as to what they mean. Case in point, ANY time you see the word knowledge, and the Greek word is epignosis, the Bible is pointing to something higher or above your initial salvation! The Word of God is revealing to us that there is a deeper (or higher) meaning: it is ALWAYS associated to the salvation of your *soul*. That's why it would *appear* that the person the author of Hebrews is writing about is losing their salvation (eternal). But that is not what the Word of God is saying at all. This person has the gnosis knowledge (associated with initial salvation), and they also received the epignosis knowledge (associated with the salvation of your soul, the Judgment Seat of Christ which leads to rewards and inheritance).

What the Word is alluding to is that this person who turns away from the epignosis knowledge, he is in danger of having his soul disciplined by God (Hebrews 10:27-31).

There is a great example that helps us to see the difference in gnosis knowledge (associated with eternal salvation) and epignosis knowledge (associated with a higher knowledge) and it's found in the book of Proverbs.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of
knowledge;*
(Proverbs 1:7) (Emphasis mine).

Here we see that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. The word for knowledge here is the Hebrew word *yada* יָדָה [3045] which means “to know.” It is one of the most common words found in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Bible. This is the understanding of an unbeliever that without Christ he is eternally separated and has no chance of rectifying that gap on his own. The impending doom of eternal punishment is too much to bear and the LORD softly and lovingly draws the person in, who must make the decision to believe that God has paid the penalty for their sin. There is another word associated with the fear of the LORD:

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of
wisdom;*
(Proverbs 9:10) (Emphasis mine).

This is obviously not the same word *yada* that we saw previously. In fact, it is the Hebrew word *chokmah* חֹכְמָה [2451] meaning: to have wisdom. Yet, we see a different connection here; this fear of the LORD cannot be toward eternal salvation. We know this because of the truth about wisdom.

Wisdom is when a person takes *knowledge* and puts it into *practice*. If I tell you, “the stove is hot, please don’t touch,” you have a choice, you can believe me that the stove is hot (knowledge) and

not touch it (wisdom). But if you do not believe me, and decide to touch the hot stove, you will be in for a bit of a disciplining moment, now won't you? That is what we are seeing here in Proverbs 9:10. The knowledge that we obtain from reading the Word of God should guide our lives in how we live. We have a choice to either believe it, or not. That is our choice.

But what is the fear of the LORD here? Much like the fear of the LORD for the unbeliever that he will be eternally separated from God, the fear of the LORD here is the understanding that at some point in the near future we as believers must give an account of what we have done in our Christian lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ (which we just saw). The believer understands that there is the possibility of obtaining rewards or suffering the loss of those rewards for 1,000 years! This causes the believer to live a life pleasing to God, which can only be based on faith.

STOP!! IN THE NAME OF LOVE

I feel the need to stop for a moment here, because this is normally when legalism enters the building. When a Christian starts to hear that they will be held accountable and that what they do in their life matters, our minds tend to go into overdrive. We start thinking of ways that we can serve God so that He will be happy with our *performance*. I once spoke with a man and his wife who were talking about going down to work at the homeless shelter. Their reasoning was that they were doing something good, and of course God would be happy with them helping the poor. But that's so off point! It isn't what *we* decide to do for God; it's what God wants to do through us.

On the other end of the spectrum, however, are those who sit around and wait for God to tell them to do something and when He does, they reason away that it wasn't really Him! There's danger on both sides. What is the answer? Love.

If you have an intimate, growing, love relationship with the Father you will learn what His will is and know when and where He is moving. There is a wonderful book called *Experiencing God*, by Henry Blackaby that focuses on this very type of relationship which God longs to have with all of His children.

But someone may say, “When I want my spouse, or girlfriend to know that I love her, I send her flowers or do something nice for her; or I take her out to dinner and a movie.” And I can see that point, but (hopefully) you are not doing those things to show them you love them; you are doing those things because you love them. There’s a big difference. One is trying to prove to the other person you love them; the other is an outpouring of the fact that you love them! If you try to prove to a woman that you love her by doing things for her, you are missing the mark. Loving someone is not serving someone to *prove* you love them, loving someone is serving someone *because* you love them.

The point I want to make in this last section is this: legalism is a killer. It is a relationship killer, it is an emotional killer, it can be a physical killer, and it can be a spiritual killer. Legalism is tied to religion. And religion is NOT what we have as followers of Christ. We have a relationship. But if you do not know anything about the one that you love because you do not take the time to get to know them and spend time with them, your relationship suffers. Think about your spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, child, grandchild, friend or anyone you have a relationship with; now what would it be like if you didn’t take the time to talk to them or even share things in your life with them. That wouldn’t be much of a relationship, now would it? If it was, it would be extremely shallow. And we all know what happens to relationships that are shallow, and the winds of life come blowing through—a downed tree!

This can happen in your relationship with God! That is why I want to take the time here to stress that even though the things in this book may seem harsh, severe, or even extreme, there is a way to

avoid it! The answer is simply spending time with God and choosing to accept His love relationship with you. What an awesome gift!

CHAPTER 7: ISRAEL AS OUR EXAMPLE

Now, these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

When we look at this verse at first, it doesn't seem as severe as we may think. But there are a few pillars here that we need to take note of. One, whatever is being talked about before these verses are an example. Two, who are these examples for? According to the verses, these examples are for us; you and I as believers. So now it behooves us to see what did take place; what lesson are we being taught here?

As we go back to the beginning of 1 Corinthians chapter 10, you will notice that in verses 1-4, we have the identity of the Israelites in the wilderness. What transpires from verses 5-10, is a sobering remembrance and one which is written for us to learn from. Watch:

Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.

“But wait! Those people weren’t really saved.” Some may say.

Well, let’s look at that. We need to solidify if the Israelites were believers or not. Whether or not the Israelites were saved makes an enormous difference to understanding the verses we have looked at in 1 Corinthians 10. If they were not saved believers, then the punishment we will study has no bearing for us. But, if they were saved believers, we need to sit up and take notice.

Therefore, this leads to a question: what does it take to be saved? Actually, we’ve already answered that question previously in Ephesians 2:8-9. Also, you may look at John 3:16. The common thread is the word “believe.” It really is that simple. If a person believes that Jesus Christ died on the cross for their sins, was buried, and rose again, that person places their trust in Christ’s substitutionary death on their behalf.

Another question normally arises here. It goes like this: we are saved by what Christ did on the cross, but did the Israelites need to be saved a separate way? The answer of course, is “no.” Let’s make it simple for a minute. What does it take for us to be saved? *To believe*. Believe what? *That Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for our sins*. Now, what is Jesus according to John 1:1? *The Word*. So, we are saved, effectively, by believing God’s *Word*. Is there an example of a person in the Old Testament that fits this criterion? Yes, his name was Abraham.

*Then he, (Abraham) believed in the LORD; and
He reckoned it to him as righteousness.
(Genesis 15:6)*

What did Abraham believe? *God’s Word*. So now, let’s fast forward to the Israelites. If believing God’s word saves a person, then what do these verses tell us:

Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. So, the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped. (Exodus 4:29-31)

What follows this instance is the increased labor on the Israelites from Pharaoh. Why? God's people believed! Satan will always attack those who belong to God. Also, Satan knew that the Messiah was going to come from out of these people, so he was attempting to wipe them off the face of the earth, which would eliminate the threat of the Messiah. After the increased labor the Ten Plagues commence from God's wrath, which God unleashes on the land and people of Egypt. Following the last plague, the death of the firstborn, the Israelites finally exit Egypt as a nation.

It is here that we can clearly see by the truth of God's Word that all of those who fled out of Egypt in Exodus 12:33-41 were saved believers.

How can we know that? They believed God's Word! At this point, someone may refute, "But what about the Ten Commandments and the Law? Those things didn't come until later. Isn't keeping the Ten Commandments and doing the sacrifices how the Israelites proved they were saved?" I can answer that, unequivocally, *no*. As we look carefully at the Israelites leaving Egypt, those who left were saved and *then* God gave them the Law to follow. That Law was to teach them how to live as God's people. Therefore Galatians 2:16 says,

...a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus.... since

by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.

Also, if the only way they could be saved is by keeping the Law and doing sacrifices, those things would be works, and Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly states that no amount of works can save a person.

With this truth now in hand, that all of those who left Egypt were believers, let us look at Israel's history, which we are called to take notice of and *learn* from, regarding some instances where God's own people were punished.

THE PROMISED LAND

For our first example, we will turn to Numbers 14, where we see the story of the people of Israel, *the very same that believed God and were guaranteed eternal life*, rebelling against Moses and God (v. 1-4). This reaction comes because of the story of the 12 spies that go to the Promised Land and only 2 (Caleb and Joshua) give the report that they should go and conquer the land as God commanded.

So that we have the story correct in its context, in Numbers 13:1-24, God commands Moses to send spies into the Promised Land, one person from each tribe of Israel. Moses instructions are for the twelve men:

And see what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many. And how is the land, in which they live, is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they live, are they like open camps or with fortifications? And how is the land, is it fat or lean? Are there trees in it or not? Make an effort then to get some of the fruit of the land. (Numbers 13:18-20)

The twelve spies go up, and lo and behold, it is exactly how God said it would be—*go figure* (Exodus 3:8; Numbers 13:27). Then, there is this word that the spies use. It is the word “nevertheless.” From here, ten of the twelve spies point to the negative aspects of the land (v. 28-29). The initial (and most important) problem with this is found back in Numbers 13:1-2:

*Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, “Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am **going to give** to the sons of Israel; (Emphasis mine).*

In this description we see that God had already promised the land to Israel. This promise goes back to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). The problem with the spies is first, they did not remember the promise God had made to their forefathers, and second, they forgot Who they were spying out the land for! The twelve spies focused on the problem with the land and not the One who called them to go and conquer it!

At this point, Caleb (one of the two spies who trusted that God would help them overcome the enemies of the land) attempts to reason with the people, that God’s Word is true, and the land is precisely like He said it would be; but his counsel falls on deaf ears. And so, *nevertheless*, the other ten spies give a bad report and what transpires is nothing short of heartbreaking.

The people believe the negative report from the ten spies, so much so, they want to appoint another leader to take them back to Egypt (Numbers 14:4)! Once more, the spiritual leaders of the people, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb attempt to convince the people to change their way of thinking and to repent from the path they are about to take (v. 5-9). The people refuse once again, yet this time they decide to kill them; then in steps the LORD (v.10).

At this point, the LORD initiates a punishment to completely remove Israel and start over again, but Moses intercedes on their

behalf and the LORD relents (v. 11-20). And, ready, *nevertheless*, God will not let them go unpunished. The people's defiance of God's command and His servants must be dealt with. Why? God is just.

Also, think about this for just a moment: imagine you have a child who is unruly and refuses to do what you say. He (or she) receives instruction from you, but they spurn your authority. What happens if you allow them to continue to disrespect you? Of course, they will learn that they do not need to listen to you, and they can make their own choices, thus implying that your authority is meaningless to them. Your response? Discipline. This is the action which God will unleash upon the Israelites who refuted God's Word. He does this to teach them that He is the ultimate Authority, and He must be obeyed; not because He has some complex, but because what God says is right and perfect for them!

Now, Numbers 14:31-37 states:

*“Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey—I will bring them in, and they will know the land **which you have rejected**. But as for you, your corpses shall fall in this wilderness. Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will **suffer for your unfaithfulness**, until your corpses lie in the wilderness. According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you will know My opposition. I, the LORD, have spoken, surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die.”* As for the men whom Moses

sent to spy out the land and who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing out a bad report concerning the land, even those men who brought out the very bad report of the land died by a plague before the LORD. (Emphasis mine).

The reason for God's punishment is found in verse 33. They are suffering for their ***unfaithfulness***. They did not trust God. This does not however remove their already given gift of eternal life, it cannot. The consequence for the disobedience of the people was to suffer the loss of the Promised Land. The next generation would then wander in the desert for 40 years until the present generation died off. Only those who believed God was true to His word regarding the Promised Land would enter.

KORAH'S REBELLION

A second example arises from the Bible in the story of Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16:1-40. One thing that has always amazed me about this story is the timing. The Bible says that Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On formulate a plan to overthrow Aaron and Moses (v. 1-3). You would think that they would have learned their lesson from the previous encounter back in Numbers 14! But such as it is, these men formulate a committee (for lack of a better word) to overthrow the leaders of Israel, Moses and Aaron.

I wonder if this should be addressed in our meeting with the committee on committees?

Before we go any further, I want to show a deeper meaning to this story. The fact that this man and his friends incited a rebellion against God's chosen leaders shows disrespect, *not necessarily for Moses and Aaron*, but for the God who called them to lead the Israelites!

Once again, Korah and the band of people involved in this incident are still the *same people* who believed God and left Egypt

when Moses offered them freedom from the bondage of the Egyptians. Remember, this simple belief guaranteed them eternal life in heaven. The most influential verse connecting their salvation is found in Numbers 16:3. The Bible says,

“They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?’”

God must punish rebellion. And this is exactly what He does in verse 31-33. This punishment of His own people gets the attention of the rest of the congregation of Israel that God is to be feared and obeyed. But how quickly they would forget.

THE PLAGUE

But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD’s people.”
(Numbers 16:41)

In Numbers 16:41, ***the day after*** Korah’s rebellion had been dealt with, the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron. What is interesting to note here is that the people point to what happened to Korah and try to blame Moses and Aaron. In effect, this is what we do as believers when we see judgment. The first thing we do is take it personal. Once we’ve done that, now we need to place the blame on somebody. In effect they’re saying, *“It isn’t right that they had to die! Way to go Moses and Aaron! Trying to thin the herd are ya?”*

Once again, God must deal with the rebellion and unfaithfulness, for again, they are not rebelling against Moses and

Aaron, but they are rebelling against God. God's punishment or judgment on the people is to send a plague upon His *own people*. The first thing that happens is that God shows up at the entrance to the tent of meeting. As Moses and Aaron approach, God says something—well—disturbing. He basically tells them, “Get out of the way, I’m going to wipe them all out.” Moses, knowing the nature of God and understanding that what the people had done was wrong and it called for justice, made quick action for the people. The wrath of God had begun, and Moses and Aaron now needed to intercede for the people. To do this Moses tells Aaron to take fire from the altar and put incense on it and then to make atonement for the people so they were not completely wiped out from a plague. Once he did, the plague was checked. The outcome of this incident was the death of 14,700 people.

Again, were these believers or unbelievers? Our instinct is to say that they were unbelievers because they died in the plague. But you must go back to Egypt. This is the same group that came out of Egypt. This is the same group that believed God's Word. These were the same people who passed through the Red Sea. They were in fact believers. The connection now, is that believers should not disregard the LORD's direction and question His plan. To do so is to say that His will is not enough. So why is it that when we are defiant and disobedient to the LORD that we are not prey to a plague? Why is it that when I rebel, I don't catch a debilitating disease? One word—The Word—Jesus. Jesus came to take all the wrath of God upon Himself so that we could live our lives by grace. But there is coming a day when we will be held accountable for what we have done. And if we are found lacking, we'll have to pay a price, a “just recompense” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

THE FIERY SERPENTS

Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. And the people spoke against God and Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.” And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. So, the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.”
(Numbers 21:4-7)

Here we see the story of the people of Israel once again grumbling against Moses and God. Notice however, that at this point, Miriam and Aaron have died (Numbers 20). God’s reaction to this disobedience was to send fiery serpents that bite the people and the people died. Once again, these are the same people that believed God’s Word in Exodus 4:31 and came out of the bondage of Egypt. Yet God, being perfectly just, needed to deal with the people’s disobedience.

There is another underlying truth to this story that can be missed if we don’t take the time to study it properly. Not only was it the people’s disobedience, it was also their unbelief. The people of Israel did not believe that God’s plan was right to take them around Edom. They had already showed that they did not believe God’s plan in the story of the 12 spies! In our previous studies, we saw that the

people did not believe God's appointed spokesmen, Moses and Aaron.

Therefore, we see what the author of Hebrews meant when he wrote:

*For who provoked Him when they had heard?
Indeed, did not all those who came out of
Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He
angry for forty years? Was it not with those
who sinned, whose bodies fell in the
wilderness? And to whom did He swear that
they should not enter His rest, but to those
who were disobedient? And so, we see that
they were not able to enter because of their
unbelief. (Hebrews 3:16-19)*

MOSES

One of the most profound examples we find in the Bible regarding God punishing His own people can be found in the story of Moses at the end of his life. Moses was chosen by God to lead the people into the Promised Land. Yet, Moses was never allowed to step one foot into the Promised Land. In Deuteronomy 32:48-52, after Moses has spoken to the people of Israel, he was told by God that he would not go in with the people. He would see it from a distance, but he would not be able to enter. The reason? Moses' disobedience:

*Because you broke faith with Me in the midst
of the sons of Israel at the waters of Meribath-
kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, because you
did not treat Me as holy in the midst of the
sons of Israel. For you shall see the land at a
distance, but you shall not go there, into the*

land which I am giving the sons of Israel.
(Deuteronomy 32:51-52)

As we see from the recounting of the Promised Land, only two of the millions of people were able to enter the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb. No other persons made it in; not even Moses. This is a most interesting point. Moses was faithful for the 120 years of his life, but the LORD would not allow him entrance into the Promised Land because of one incident at Meribath-kadesh.

Here is an interesting point of debate. Many Bible scholars would take the Promised Land and make it a type or foreshadow for heaven, or eternal life. However, if we were to see the Promised Land as a type for heaven, then out of the millions that left Egypt and believed God, they didn't believe *good enough* to enter heaven. This also means that Moses must have lost his salvation because he wasn't completely faithful all his life.

Now, if this train of thinking is true, that the Promised Land is a type for heaven, and Moses lost his salvation and did not get into heaven, why would we read this in Matthew 17:1-3 regarding the Mount of Transfiguration?

*And He was transfigured before them; and
His face shown like the sun, and His garments
became as white as light. And behold, Moses
and Elijah appeared to them, talking with
Him.*

So, either God has a twisted sense of humor, or there is a lesson for us to learn. If the Promised Land is not a type for eternity in heaven, then what could it be a type for? God's Word shows us that the Promised Land is a type of **reward** for the **faithful** believer. That reward manifests itself, among other things, as ruling and reigning with Christ in His millennial reign for 1,000 years. Only those believers who persevere and live a faithful life until the end will inherit the rule and reign of the Kingdom of Heaven. For those

who fall away, they must remain “outside” the Kingdom for the duration, which is 1,000 years. This discipline for believers—yes believers—we will cover in the section of the book regarding negative consequences. At this point, I would remind you that at the Judgment Seat of Christ there will be rewards for those who are faithful and those believers who are not faithful and will suffer the loss of their rewards.

As a side note, this discipline of Moses is a warning and a type for those that the LORD has placed in charge of His children. For those that refuse to be led by God and disobey His call with regard to the direction He has for the body of Christ, they will be in jeopardy of suffering the same fate as Moses; being left outside the Kingdom of Heaven.

As we look back to the beginning of this chapter remember that we are reviewing the things that happened to Israel as an example for us to follow and be aware of (1 Corinthians 10:11). When we saw Israel being disobedient and unfaithful, God punished them, when they were obedient and faithful, God blessed them. This is the underlying message of God’s relationship with Israel. It is also an underlying message to us.

Earlier, I mentioned that God punished Israel and only two out of the millions entered the Promised Land. There is one more example that we need to draw from to show that even though God does punish His people, His punishment on them is not forever.

THE EXILE OF ISRAEL

Out of the many different passages of Scripture that speak of Israel (and Judah) being taken into exile because of their disobedience, the one passage I would like to address is found in Jeremiah 6:16-21.

Thus, says the LORD, “Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you shall find

rest for you souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' "And I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.' "Therefore, here O nations, and know O congregation, what is among them. "Hear O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their plans, because they have not listened to My words, and as for My law, they have rejected it also. "For what purpose does frankincense come to me from Sheba and the sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, and your sacrifices are not pleasing to Me. Therefore, thus says the LORD, "Behold I am laying stumbling blocks before this people, and they will stumble against them, fathers and sons together; neighbor and friend will perish.

Here we see God speaking to His people to stand, see, ask, and walk in the good way, which is His way. We understand that *only* a believer can do these things. If an unsaved person could *do* these things to be saved, they would be accomplishing a work. Interestingly enough, God tells the people that they will find rest for their *souls*. This is in direct connection to Matthew 11:28-29, which Christ recited to the Israelites again. Remember from our previous discussion that in verse 28, that Jesus He will *give* rest. This is a passive action. This, as we have seen, is in connection with the salvation of the spirit, or first tense salvation; it is the gift of God. Again, we see in verse 29, that Jesus says we will *find* rest. Finding something takes an action. This is salvation that must be done by allowing God to work through the believer. This verse is in connection with the salvation of a believer's soul or second tense

salvation. This is the salvation that the believer must lay their life down and put to death their will and replace it with God's will.

In Jeremiah 6:16-17, we see the Lord telling the people that although they were saved, they were refusing to walk in His ways. They were rebelling against what God had called them to. Due to their unfaithfulness and disobedience, God was going to pass judgment and chastise them (verses 18-21). What is important regarding the punishment of the nation of Israel in exile was that their exile did not last forever. After God has disciplined them **as He saw fit**, for the amount of time **He saw fit**, their exile ended. This type is in direct connection to the amount of time an unfaithful believer will endure the disciplining punishment after the Judgment Seat of Christ.

CONCLUSION

We have looked at several instances of Israel's unfaithfulness, defiance, and disobedience which should draw a picture for us. If God disciplined and punished His people, the nation of Israel, what makes us think He will not do the same thing to modern day believers (those saved in the church age, i.e. after the cross)?

This is also a bone of contention among many teachers and preachers today. They rationalize that God does not treat us the same as He did with Israel. With them, God's punishment was swift, just, and often seemed harsh. They argue that God does not treat the body of Christ this way. And they would be—exactly right—for now. The connection comes from the cross of Christ. After His death, the body of Christ entered a time called the "Dispensation of Grace." This means that we live by grace as Christ intercedes on our behalf at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Romans 8:34).

Therefore, as we read at the beginning of this section, the verse from 1 Corinthians 10, that the things that happened to Israel (some of what we have seen here), are an example for us to avoid.

We must trust and rest in the provision and leading of God as He is the One who would have us to obtain our inheritance and rewards.

CHAPTER 8: PAYBACK TIME

JUST LIKE KIDS

Let me begin with a story: A man has two sons who are the same age. One son is a faithful son. He does what his father instructs him to do and tries to honor his father with his decisions. He doesn't always make the best decisions in his life, but when he makes a wrong choice and his father corrects him, he listens and tries the next time to do better.

The second son is a recluse. When his father gives him instructions, he goes his own way and does his own thing. He very rarely listens to his father unless it can benefit him. Many times, he takes from his father and decides that his father should care for him and give him what he needs to survive. He is disrespectful, dishonorable, and defiant to his father's requests.

The time comes for the two boys to attend their high school senior prom. In the father's garage is a vintage 1965 Ford Mustang that is in pristine condition. Both of the boys inquire to the father to ask him if they can use the car that night to take their dates to the prom.

Now, place yourself in the father's position for a moment. Standing in front of you are the two boys. In your hands are the keys. You obviously cannot give the car to them both; you must choose. Which son would you give the keys to?

Without thinking we would say that we would give the keys to the faithful son, the one who respects his father and his father's possessions. The chances of the disobedient son bringing the car back in the same condition would be borderline iffy.

We instinctively answer that we would give the keys to the faithful son because he has a track record of being obedient and honoring his father.

I wanted to use this illustration to introduce the next section of the book. This will be the hardest part for you as a Christian to

read. For far too long, believers have been fooled into thinking that how they live their lives does not matter and that everyone gets a share of rewards (if there are any). That is one of the reasons the LORD led me to write this book.

There is a side to the Christian life that clearly shows us that God has expectations on how we are to live, which would be obedience to the LORD and honoring His direction. There are times, just like the good son listed above, that we make mistakes. But when we listen to the Father's correction and leading, He is all too ready to bring us back into a close relationship with Him. There are those Christians also, who, like the disobedient son, want to live their lives for themselves and to only take from the Father and ask Him for things so that they can advance their agendas. When it comes time at the Judgment Seat of Christ for our LORD to hand out rewards, He will do so based on how faithful and obedient we have been with what we have been given (2 Peter 1:3).

The question for us to ask at this point is: does my life reflect that of the first son or the second son. If it's the first son, there are rewards that are waiting for you (we'll discuss that in the next section). If our Christian life resembles the second son there will be discipline and negative consequences. What are they? Let's take a look at what the Bible says...

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

When I was about ten years old (eons ago), I was outside playing one day. The rest of my friends were doing other things and I was alone and bored. Now, if you know anything about boys, those two words together can be dangerous. Although I'm not quite sure what led up to it, I found myself standing under a light pole with a rock in my hand. The casing for the light was one of those thick tempered glass coverings that looked indestructible. So, I decided to test the theory. I picked up the rock and threw it as hard as I could at the glass covering.

Have you ever done something and then the moment you do it you realize, this is not a good idea—at all. That’s exactly what happened. That rock shattered that glass covering and destroyed the bulb. The sound it made was loud for two reasons. One was because of the breaking glass; two was due to the exploding bulb. If that wasn’t bad enough, some of the maintenance workers were standing about a hundred yards away. I was caught dead to rights. Just like Adam, I took off. My intention was to not go back home. Ever. But eventually, it got dark and I had to go home for dinner. I was hoping that maybe the guys didn’t say anything, or maybe it would all blow over. Needless to say, when I walked in the door, I found out how dashed my hopes were. I was met with a rather upset (that’s saying it lightly—*very* lightly) mother. The first question that she asked me was, “What in the world possessed you to do that?” And I honestly had no reply. I knew I was in trouble, but the only explanation I could muster was, “I was bored.” The next statement she made cut me to the core. She said, “I’m so disappointed in you.” The look on her face was one I will never forget.

I would love to tell you that I walked away scot free from that situation, but because of my rock throwing prowess, my mother was forced to pay for a new cover and bulb. Which I had to pay for. But I didn’t have any money. So, I paid in other ways (*if you get my drift*).

For a believer who has trusted Christ as savior, that chooses to live their life under their own terms and to shun the conviction of the Holy Spirit in their lives, the expectation may be that the Father will forget all about their disobedient behavior, or He will brush it under the rug; but they will face the same type of shame and disappointment when they reach the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Bible clearly teaches that there is a place of discipline and punishment for those believers who choose not to allow Christ to rule over their lives. In other words, they failed to have their souls saved by the time they reach the Judgment Seat of Christ. That place of punishment that they will be sent to is a place called the “outer

darkness.” The outer darkness is located in a place which the Bible calls Gehenna. Within this place called Gehenna are two separate areas; one called the “outer darkness” and another called the “blackness of darkness.” These are places of obscurity outside the Kingdom of Heaven. We will look at them individually, beginning with the outer darkness.

Contrary to what many of today’s professors, scholars, pastors, and preachers teach, the outer darkness is not hell (Hades). It is a place of punishment where the *believer* will suffer the loss of the rewards of inheritance for 1,000 years. Why 1,000 years? That is how long the Millennial Reign of Christ will last (Revelation 20:5). This discipline into the outer darkness or the blackness of darkness is also labeled as the “second death” (Revelation 20:6) which we must look at and study in detail.

Why would God have this place? It is here that God must have the disobedient Christian dealt with because He is perfectly righteous, holy, and just. There are three places in the New Testament that speak of this outer darkness (Matthew 8:12, Matthew 22:13, Matthew 25:30) and there is one place which speaks of the blackness of darkness (Jude 13). We will first study the outer darkness and then the blackness of darkness and then study the instances that the Bible discussed Gehenna.

SECOND DEATH

The term “second death” is used in the book of Revelation four times (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; and 21:8). Most understand the second death as the eternal punishment in the eternal lake of fire. But for a moment, let’s ask this question: if that is the second death, what is the first death? The first death is your physical (for everyone must die physically). We see this in Hebrews 9:27:

*And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die
once and after this comes judgment.*
(Hebrews 9:27)

Every human must first die physically, this we see is the first death. The second death deals with a different type of death or rather punishment. When we take the time to study the Word of God, we will see that the second death does NOT only apply to the unbeliever. In other words, *it is possible* for a *believer* to take part in the second death (punishment). This is contrary to what many theologians and pastors teach and preach. The idea that a believer can undergo punishment seems odd at first, but as we have seen from the example of Israel, God can, and will, punish His own people if they do not repent. Let's take a look at what the Bible says with regard to both the believer and the unbeliever's second death.

Revelation 20:14 and 21:8 are the two verses which the Bible shows us the punishment for the unbeliever.

*And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the **second death**, the lake of fire. —Revelation 20:14 (Emphasis mine).*

*But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the **second death**. (Revelation 21:8) (Emphasis mine).*

It isn't hard to see that the punishment here is the eternal lake of fire (that would be a fire that burns—you know—forever). Those who undergo this second death are those who have rejected Christ as savior. At this point they stand in judgment (John 3:18) because they are rejecting Christ's free offering of eternal life. I've heard it asked to me many times, "If God is a loving God, why would He make unbelievers go into the eternal lake of fire?" The answer is that God is not choosing that for them, they are choosing it for themselves. The unbelievers are the ones who are rejecting God's free gift. God has done all that He needs to do (which is more than what He should

have done) to redeem man and have an eternal relationship with him. But now let's take a look at the second death for the believer.

Revelation 2:11 and 20:6 are the two verses which the Bible shows us the punishment for the believer.

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt of the **second death**.*

(Revelation 2:11) (Emphasis mine).

*Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection, over these the **second death** has no power,*

(Revelation 20:6) (Emphasis mine).

These verses are speaking of a punishment on the **believer's** soul. How can we know that for sure? The context tells us. You cannot group these people in with those we previously mentioned. The issue here, is for those that refuse to have their souls saved (live life on their own terms and spurn God's leading as followers of Christ), at the Judgment Seat of Christ, they must undergo punishment so that their disobedience can finally be dealt with. This is what Jesus meant in Luke 9:24, when He said, "For whoever wishes to save his life (soul) shall lose it, but whoever loses his life (soul) for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

There are a few things that the Bible shows us (if we look close enough) which help us to understand who these verses are implying. First, take a look again at Revelation 2:11. By now you know that salvation into eternity is by grace, through faith without works. If in this verse, the second death means the eternal lake of fire, the only way to get out of it is to "overcome." To overcome is a verb, which in the Greek text is in the present tense which calls for continuous *action*.

In Revelation 20:6 we see the outcome from what is described in Revelation 20:4-6. It is important to understand what is

being discussed here if we are going to properly handle the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

In Revelation 20:4 we read:

And I saw thrones, and they that sat upon them, and judgment was given to them.

These people, whom John sees are those who are found faithful at the Judgment Seat of Christ and obtain their reward. One of the rewards of the inheritance for the faithful believer is to rule and reign with Christ (Revelation 3:20).

Next, we read in verse four:

And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus Christ and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received the mark upon their foreheads and upon their hands; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Again, with spiritual understanding we will see that these are a separate group of people. We know, for instance that they are believers, because of the fact that they reign with Christ. However, they cannot be the same group of people that we saw at the beginning of verse four, because that group was already on their thrones. This group consists of those that are saved during the Great Tribulation. We can understand this because of the description that is given about them (they did not accept the mark of the beast, which takes place during the Great Tribulation). This also identifies that believers (those saved after the cross of Christ) will not be in the Great Tribulation, they cannot be for they will be sitting on their thrones (those who are faithful) when the Tribulation saints receive their rewards. Now we continue to verse five:

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

Now, who are these folks (the rest of the dead)? They are those that were found unfaithful at the Judgment Seat of Christ and had to undergo punishment in the outer darkness for 1,000 years. Notice, the Bible does not say that they were brought to life to be thrown into the eternal lake of fire. This is because their punishment had come to fruition, for God's punishments are always just and they do not last forever *for His people*. Another connection that we see is that these who were dead were not in the Kingdom of Heaven. If they were, they would have been listed with those on the thrones. This now brings us to the closing verse of this section, verse six:

Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection (those found faithful at the Judgment Seat of Christ); over these the second death (for the believer) has no power (because they will receive their rewards and will not need to undergo punishment), but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.
(Emphasis mine).

As hard as it is to digest, the truth remains the same. There is a second death for believers, however, this second death is not eternal but rather millennial (1,000 years). Now we can understand completely why the Word of God says in 1 Corinthians 3:15 regarding those believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ:

If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer (punishment in the outer darkness) loss (of his rewards); but he himself shall be saved, yet so

as through fire (judgment, discipline).
(Emphasis mine).

Now that we have seen that there is indeed a possible punishment for the believer, we need to do a little more study on the place of punishment called the outer darkness. In the next section we will dive in to see two separate places of punishment that reside in one place. The two places are the outer darkness and the blackness of darkness, both of which are located in a place called Gehenna. Gehenna is (or will be) located outside the Kingdom of Heaven.

You still with me?

Good.

This next part is rather intense, but necessary.

THE OUTER DARKNESS

It is not my intention at this point to scare you. One of the worst things I believe that we can do to believers is to try to make them feel less than what they really are. The truth of the matter is that every single believer has the ability to obtain to their inheritance, and it is my prayer that more and more and more and even more believers will begin to see the wonderful potentiality to what the LORD would want them to have. Although the truth of Gehenna is very real for believers, it is more important to focus on the other side. Yet, we cannot *not* study the truth of Gehenna. If we do not, we do ourselves a disservice that can be eternally lasting.

Imagine receiving a letter in the mail. After reading the letter, you find out that you just inherited \$50 billion. The letter states that the only thing you need to do is go down to the bank, show the letter and proof of identity, and the money is yours. \$50 billion is a lot of money! The letter also stipulates that if you do not come to collect the money it will transfer to the next person on the list. What would you do? You'd probably make a beeline for the bank! You'd want to be there as soon as possible. Now, imagine getting the letter and saying, "Ah, this is just a scam, I don't believe it," and throwing the

letter in the trash. Guess what happens? The next person in line just got your inheritance! You just squandered it away!

So, let's flip the tables a moment. Imagine that you are the one who owns the \$50 billion and you are going to give it to your next of kin that is in line for it. You send the letter thinking this will be a wonderful blessing for them. But you find out that when they received the letter, they didn't believe you and just threw away your inheritance. How would that make you feel? Angry? Frustrated? Slighted? This is essentially what we do to the LORD when we refuse to accept His inheritance that he wants us to have! So, what does He do? According to Scripture, He gives the inheritance to those that will want it and cherish it. For those that slight Him, He will deal with their defiance and disobedience. Now, don't get caught up in the fact that this is a punishment. When we see God as a mean and angry God, it taints our view of Him. This punishment is not initiated by God, but it comes as a result of *our* own unbelief and unfaithfulness toward a God who has done everything, we need to obtain it.

Let's first define what the outer darkness is. In the original Greek it is the words, τὸ σκότος τὸ ἑξώτερον which literally means, the darkness, the outer. According to Greek scholars, the emphasis of this phrase is on the second word. A better translation would be, "the darkness, outside of the light." That light is the Light of the world, Christ Jesus as He rules in His Kingdom for 1,000 years.

The difficulty with understanding this idea of discipline for the believer stems from the idea that nothing bad or negative can happen to a believer. But as we have already seen, this is not the case. In the same way that God needed to deal with an obstinate and disobedient people, Israel, before the cross of Christ, He will also need to deal with obstinate and disobedient believers after the cross of Christ. Let us look at our first biblical example of the outer darkness.

Matthew 8:11-12

And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Within the context of this verse we see Jesus marveling at the faith of the centurion with regard to the healing of his paralyzed servant. Jesus' response to the crowd around Him and His disciples was that He had not seen such faith in *Israel*, implying the people. Up to this point, Israel would not adhere to their Messiah's call to repent so that the Kingdom of Heaven would be ushered in. Jesus being God, knew the heart of Israel that they would continue to reject Him, thus he makes the statement in verse 11 that those from the "east and west," meaning those other than Jews, would be at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which is connected to the wedding feast of the Lamb in the (literal) Kingdom of Heaven (Revelation 19:14). Contrary to this, those who had no faith and were being rebellious and refused to repent would be thrown out of the Kingdom and be placed in the outer darkness. In this place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, which is a sign of great *loss*. Here is one of the best distinctions for us to see that the outer darkness has nothing to do with eternal damnation. Any time that you read "weeping and gnashing of teeth," it is always in connection to a believer. Those who weep and gnash their teeth do so because they not only know what they lost (their inheritance), but they will understand why as well.

An illustration would be good right about now. There is a story I once heard of a man who talked about the best discipline he had ever received. The man tells the story of a time when he was

growing up and a carnival had come to his town. He and his two brothers were excited to go. His father bought four tickets for them to go. The only issue was this young man was not the best well-behaved kid. He was routinely defiant and disobedient to his parents and his teachers. When he was scolded that if he did not make better choices or there would be consequences, the youngster paid no mind. Besides, he thought, his dad has purchased the tickets already and he wasn't going to let them go to waste, so he paid no mind to his father's warning. Eventually, the day of the carnival came and the young man, his brothers, and his father all piled into the family station wagon and drove into the carnival parking lot. The four got out and walked up to the gate. That is when the young man had an "outer darkness" experience. At the entrance to the carnival, his father pointed to the bench located just outside the front gate and instructed the young man to sit there until he and his brothers were through in the carnival. His father and brothers went into the carnival while he was forced to sit outside and watch them as they rode rides, played games, ate funnel cake, and had fun. Fun he was missing out on.

Although that may sound like a harsh punishment in today's society, it was nevertheless extremely effective, and it is also an incredible illustration. The person who the punishment was due received the discipline.

Now, why do you think that this father did that to the young man? Because he hated his son? No. He did that to teach him a lesson. And this is the type of lesson we as believers need to learn. Just because we are saved does not give us the right to act however, we want to or we may be sitting on the outside looking in wishing we would have changed our actions.

Let's look at the next passage that describes the outer darkness.

Matthew 22:13

The parable of the wedding feast, which was previously alluded to in Matthew 8:12, is a parable that clearly shows the reward of ruling and reigning with Christ for 1,000 years for the obedient believer, or the suffering of the loss of that reward in the outer darkness for that same time frame.

Within the context of the parable we see in the previous chapter that Jesus had just informed the leaders of Israel that they have lost the kingdom (their chance to rule and reign, *not* their eternal salvation). We see that Jesus was talking to the leaders of *Israel* (Matthew 21:23). Following that verse, in 33-40, Jesus gave the leaders a parable of what happened when God sent Jesus to them. After years of offering the Kingdom and the ability to rule and reign, God's patience with Israel now had its end. In Matthew 21:42 we see that the chief cornerstone is Jesus. In verse 43, Jesus tells the nation of Israel that the Kingdom of God, which is Christ's millennial reign, would be taken away from them.

The nation that the kingdom will be given to is the church, which now is made up of both Jew and Gentile. Notice, the kingdom was not to be given only to those who were saved, but to those who were saved **and** brought forth fruit. Although many believe that in order to be saved one must produce fruit, this is not the case. The fruit can only come from what God does through the believer. In Matthew 21:45-46, the leaders of Israel understand that Jesus was talking about them. Once finished with that parable, Jesus now begins a new parable describing what had just taken place.

This parable in Matthew 22:2-14 is in regard to the Kingdom of Heaven (see verse 2). This has nothing to do with first tense or eternal salvation; it has to do with gaining one's inheritance and the reward of ruling and reigning with Christ. This parable of the Wedding Feast reveals how the chosen will be called out of the called at the Judgment Seat of Christ. In Matthew 22:2, the king represents God, the wedding feast represents the kingdom of Heaven (God), and the son represents Jesus. In Matthew 22:3, the "slaves"

represent the prophets before the cross, and those who “had been invited” represent Israel. In verses 4-6, the “other slaves” represent the apostles. Verse 5 represents the Jews only wanting physical things, for they did not care about the spiritual. Verse 6 represents that each of the apostles would be killed, which of course, they were. Verse 7 shows us that as a result, God became angry and sent His armies to destroy the murderers and burn their city. The city represents Jerusalem. This event represents 70 AD, when the city of Jerusalem was burned by the Romans, which is historical fact. The result of the destruction of the city was that the nation of Israel was scattered throughout the world. In verse 8, these “slaves” represent the mature in the Word of today. Notice the prophets are gone (v. 3) and the apostles are already dead (v. 6). Verse 9 speaks of the “main highways” which represents the places of the Gentiles. The term “main highways” was used to represent the Gentiles in the first century. This is due to the fact that the Romans (Gentiles) built roads that connected different cities throughout the then known world.

Contrary to what is taught by most teachers today, entering into the wedding feast is not salvation into eternity, but the reward of ruling with Christ in His Millennial Kingdom. We understand this when we see that those in verse 9, are saved because they accepted the invitation to come. Lost people have not accepted an invitation to come, they have indeed rejected the invitation. This is in direct correlation to Matthew 11:28. In verse 10, we begin to see what happens at the Judgment Seat of Christ as the wedding hall represents the Judgment Seat. Verse 11 states that the king (Jesus) came in to “look over” (judge) the guests. The term: “all they found” represents all those who are saved. The term “gathered together” represents the rapture of the body of Christ to the Judgment Seat. The evil and good represents good works or bad works which we saw in 2 Corinthians 5:10. In verse 2, the king was God, but here in verse 11, the king is Jesus. This is due to God giving Christ all authority to rule as seen in Revelation 5:11-12. God promised the ultimate rule of the literal Kingdom to Jesus (Psalm 110).

Now we come to verse 11. Here we see a guest without the wedding clothes. This guest represents a believer without righteous works. Remember, no unsaved person can even be in the wedding hall (the Judgment Seat) if they do not have the foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). This garment was one that is produced by the continuing faith of the believer *after* he/she is saved. To understand this, we must understand a little about the Jewish culture as it relates to weddings.

The Jewish wedding feast had two invitations for its guests. The first was a general (preliminary) invitation given as much as a month in advance. Within this month the guests were to make themselves ready and make a wedding garment to wear at the ceremony. The second was given, sometimes, as little as an hour before the feast. Thus, the guests were to begin preparing themselves at the first invitation, which included making their own wedding garment, and then they were to wait expectantly for the second invitation to come.

When they arrived at the feast, properly attired, they were ushered into their place at the table according to rank. Those who were closer to the bridegroom sat closer to him, with his bride at the head of the table. Those who were not as close were given places at the table according to how well he/she knew them. This is a picture or type of what Jesus was speaking of in Luke 14:8-10 when He said, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give *your* place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you.”

In verse 12 of Matthew 22, we see the guest’s reaction, he is speechless. He is speechless because he knows he has no good

works. He's just like the young man who is sitting outside the carnival while his father and brothers are inside! He knows he has lived a self-centered life. Verse 13, we see that the man that was in the wedding feast was saved (he accepted [through faith] the invitation [salvation]) and his punishment is to be cast into the outer darkness. If the outer darkness was the same as Hades, then according to this parable, a believer (guest) can lose their salvation. This of course is not possible (John 10:28).

One of the most misunderstood verses of Scripture is Matthew 22:14. Whereas many preachers and teachers believe that the called represent the world and the chosen to represent the saved, a careful study of the original Greek will show this to be in error. The called (Greek "kaleo") are those who are saved. In several places in the Bible we see that the called represent the saved. The chosen (Greek ekkletos: meaning called out of the called) speaks to those who are chosen by God out of the body of Christ to rule and reign with Him. We see this same word in Matthew 24:22, which in that passage is translated as the "elect." The elect is of the same group as those who are chosen. They are not elected (chosen) out of the world to be saved as some of our brothers and sisters in Christ misunderstand, they are elected (chosen) out of the body of Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive their inheritance, rule and reign with Christ, and receive their rewards. The correct interpretation of Matthew 22:14 would be that many are called (many are saved), but few are chosen (or called out of the called). These represent the faithful.

Matthew 25:30

And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This parable, the parable of the talents, is an eye-opening parable, once again pertaining to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew

25:14). Contrary to some, this parable has nothing to do with money usage. It is also contrasting, and not comparable to the parable of the pounds (minas) found in Luke 19:11-27. There are various distinctions between the two parables and the Holy Spirit has placed those specific distinctions there for a reason. To just say that the two parables are the same is a grievous misunderstanding of seeking out the Word of God. As a point of reference, when the diligent studier of the Scriptures takes the time to understand the value of a pound (mina) and the value of a talent, they will clearly see there is another message the Holy Spirit is revealing (the parable of the talent is more precious). As you continue to study you will see that the parable of the talent has to do with the epignosis or the meat of the Word of God regarding rewards, the prize, and our inheritance. Let's go through parable and see that truth.

As we said earlier, this parable is about the Kingdom of Heaven. It has nothing to do with getting into heaven; it has everything to do with obtaining your inheritance into the Kingdom of Heaven (Christ's 1,000-year reign). However, the reward is greater for those typified in this parable as we can see by the talent. A talent represents around 100 day's wages. That was a considerable amount in the first century. Within the parable, there is a man who is about to go on a journey. The man is typified as Christ, and His journey is to go back to heaven until he receives the Kingdom for Himself (Revelation 5:11-12). But before he goes, he gives talents (his priceless possessions) to *his own slaves* (v. 14). This is key! The only people that are involved in this parable are believers! We know this because they are the man's (Jesus) own slaves. No unbeliever could ever be a slave to Christ because they have rejected Him. Their master is Satan.

At the end of verse fourteen, we see that the man entrusted his possessions to them, and those possessions are typified by the talents. His possessions typify Jesus own personal property. The man then gives five talents to one man, two to another man and one to another man (v. 15). Notice, also, in verse fifteen what the first slave

did with his talent; he traded with them. This is a picture of a believer who is giving more of his life to Christ; he is trading his own desires for the desires of the Father. This also gives us another clue that this parable cannot be about eternal salvation because you cannot work in order to get it!

As Jesus tells the parable; the first man with five talents goes and gains five more (v. 16). The second slave with the two talents did the same and made two more (v.17). However, the last slave took his talent and buried it in the ground (v. 18). So, we see the first two slaves did what they were called to do, and they received a reward for it. Just what that reward will be we find in verses twenty-one and twenty-three:

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things enter into the joy of your master.'

What is this reward? It is the inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is taking part in the millennial reign with Christ. Notice that they are placed in charge of “many” things. This is an allusion to God’s original plan to have man have dominion over His creation (Genesis 1:26)!

We can determine this from the use of the word “joy.” Whenever you read the word joy in Scripture it is pointing you to the possibility of your inheritance. It is the same word used for what Jesus was looking forward to when the author of Hebrews wrote:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross,

despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. —Hebrews 12:1-2 (Emphasis mine).

What was the joy set before Christ? His ruling and reigning the Kingdom of Heaven!

THE BLACKNESS OF DARKNESS

The blackness of darkness is a more severe punishment for the Christian. This place will be occupied by those Christians who, not only failed to have their souls saved at the Judgment Seat of Christ, but also fell away from the (epignosis) truth of the Word of God while in this life. These believers are called apostate (one who falls away) Christians. Their description can be found in 2 Peter 2:17 and Jude 11-13.

Let's begin with 2 Peter 2:17:

These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved.

Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever. (Jude 11-13)

At first glance these verses seem to be talking about an unbeliever, don't they? But they aren't. When we take a step back and look at the connections between the verses of 2 Peter 2 and Jude, we see an incredibly shocking truth. These are believers who have been shown the *epignosis* of the truth of the Word of God but have decided to chase after selfish gain. When we take a deeper biblical look at Jude 11-13, we will see why they are described the way they are.

First, "they have gone the way of Cain." What the Bible is alluding to is that these apostate teachers (believers) are those who teach that you can come to God with works and not a blood sacrifice.

So, it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So, Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.
(Genesis 4:3-5)

These types of apostate Christians lead the people of God astray by telling them that they must do works in order to be saved into eternity. They negate the blood sacrifice of Christ and his atonement and instead lead people to believe that you must prove or work for your salvation. These are not merely those who belong to congregations who preach works salvation, they also consist of those of the idea that if you don't *act* a certain way, or *produce* enough or good enough fruit, you are not saved. This, as we have previously seen, is incorrect and is a way of controlling the congregations they are over to get them to do their will and not the LORD's.

The next part of the verse states, "For pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam." These apostate Christians are

those that sell their ministry for monetary gain. When you take the time to read the story of Balaam in Numbers 22:15-17, you see that Balaam is offered money to place a curse on the people of God by Balak. At first, he refuses, but in Numbers 22:20-21 Balaam is warned by God that if the men come to him, he is to go with them. However, Balaam decided to go on his own and shunned the counsel of God. This causes the famous donkey incident in verses 22-30. Balaam then counsels Israel that in effect, they are God's people and nothing bad can happen to them (Numbers 23-24). Then in Numbers 25:1-3, we see that the result of Balaam's counsel was Israel's sin, thus they were led astray by his false teachings because Balak offered to pay Balaam (Numbers 31:16). It was the idea of the money that kept Balaam going (as it is stated in Jude 11). If Balaam were a faithful prophet of God, he would have never entertained the idea of going along with Balak.

In the same way, teachers and preachers who have been given a flock to teach, preach, and lead but decide to gain monetary and emotional control over their congregations have in effect been insolent against Christ. We see that their punishment will be more severe. Why? They were entrusted with people (the sheep of the flock) and they purposefully led them astray and fleeced them.

The next characteristic we see regarding the apostate Christians in Jude 11, is that their end would be to perish as "in the rebellion of Korah." These Christians will end up judged as Korah was for rebelling against the LORD. If you will recall, Korah's rebellion took place because he and his cronies decided that they did not want Moses and Aaron to be in charge of them any longer. We saw that it was not Moses and Aaron that they were being defiant toward, but rather God Himself. Therefore, those that will perish in the rebellion of Korah will undergo discipline and punishment in the blackness of darkness for doing what he did, refuting and rebuffing the authority of God.

The last piece to this is to understand how long this punishment must last. We have seen that it lasts 1,000 years. But in

Jude 13, at the end of the verse, the Word of God says that these people will endure the blackness of darkness “forever.” It appears that this must mean that these people have to be unbelievers and their punishment will last forever (meaning an eternity). However, when you stop and study what the original word is in the Greek language for “forever” you will see that it is the word *aion* (αἰών) [165] meaning: an age, or an era. This is not the same Greek word *aionios* (αἰώνιος) [166] meaning: a duration of time, eternal, as in John 3:16. The aionian age would be the 1,000-year age lasting discipline and punishment outside of the Kingdom of Heaven.

To clarify: the outer darkness will be filled with disinherited believers just outside the light of the Kingdom. The blackness of darkness will be filled with apostate believers in a region far beyond the light of the Kingdom.

Now, as is the custom so far in this book, we want to ask the question—is there Scripture that speaks of this second death? Yes, indeed there is. We find the answer when we turn to Psalm 88.

Rather than list the entire Psalm, which is lengthy, I would entrust for you to look into Scripture and see a few very interesting points.

First, when we look at verse 1, we find, “O LORD, the God of *my* salvation.” Here we are seeing the pleas of a believer. The psalmist is identifying God as His savior. An unbeliever does not see the LORD in that way.

Second, as we turn to verse 3, we see the description, “my soul has had enough troubles, and my life has drawn *near* to Sheol.” Notice, the psalmist says *near*, not *in*! That is because he is in a place that is a place of punishment.

Third, as we see verse 6, we read, “You have put me in the lowest pit, in dark places in the depths.” Again, this believer is in “dark places.” Here is one of the most undeniable statements when it comes to the difference between the outer darkness and Hades (which is cast into the eternal lake of fire). One is *dark*, the other is *fire*!

Fourth, in verse 9, we read, “My eye has wasted away.” This is an indication of crying! And what is it that those people do who are in the outer darkness, they *weep* and gnash their teeth (e.g. Matthew 25:30). An emotion of great loss!

Fifth, in verse 12, we read once again, “will Your wonders be made known in the *darkness*?”

Sixth, in verse 13, look what the psalmist says, “But I, O Lord, have cried out to You for help, and in the morning my prayer comes before You.” Now look at this one more time. If you are in the dark (of night), and the morning comes, you have light! This is now a picture of the fact that those who are in the outer darkness do not remain there forever! The outer darkness will last 1,000 years (the amount of time of Christ’s Millennial Reign over the earth). Just as we saw in the definition of the word “forever” in Jude 13.

Seventh, when we look to verse 15, we read, “I was afflicted and about to die from my youth on; I suffer Your terrors; I am overcome.” There are two significant movements to this verse. For one, we see this person suffers. This connects us back to 1 Corinthians 3:15, which states that those whose works are burned up will, “*suffer* loss.” The next distinction is from the words, “I am overcome.” Here we see a direct correlation to the fact that Jesus Himself tells us to overcome (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). In other words, you either overcome by the power and authority which are yours in Christ, or you will *be* overcome.

Eighth, in verse 16, we read, “Your terrors have destroyed me.” This is a connection to what we read in Luke 19:17, which we read, “But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence.”

This parable is regarding ten of the nobleman’s (Jesus) slaves (Luke 19:12). Note how many slaves there are (10). When you continue to read the parable, you see that three of the ten slaves utilize the Mina (pound) which they receive. The other seven make a statement that they do not want the nobleman (Christ) to rule over them (Luke 19:14). In other words, they do not want Christ to be

Lord of their lives. Due to their defiance, their punishment is to be “slain” is His presence.

Now, this may sound harsh at first and some may say that this is not believers but unbelievers. There are a few things that discount that theory. One, they belong to the nobleman and they are *his* slaves. Two, the same place that the nobleman (Jesus) gives out his rewards, is the same place that He deals with His disobedient citizens!

Finally, the last connection we see can be found in verse 18, “my acquaintances are in darkness.” Here we see the unfortunate truth that there will be other Christians who will be in the outer darkness.

HELL VS. HADES

The first question you may be asking when you read these words is: aren’t these the same place? You would think so, however, they are not! Shocked? I thought you would be. Again, we must take the time to thoroughly study the Word of God.

There is much we can learn when we study the words that the Holy Spirit chose to use. We need to know right at the outset that there is an incredible difference between the two words. One will correspond with the unbeliever and the other will correspond with the believer. Now, I know this sounds almost heretical, but if you will only take the time to read and look into these definitions, you will see an interesting and chilling truth emerge. Let’s begin with an easy one: Hades.

The Greek word for Hades is used ten times in the New Testament (Matt. 11:23; 16:18, Lk. 10:15; 16:23 [the story of the rich man and Lazarus 16:19-31], Acts 2:27, 31 [the retelling of Ps. 16:8-11], and Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14). It is identified as the place of torment for the unbeliever. The Greek word for “Hades” is (ᾍδης) [86] meaning: a region of departed souls of the unsaved. The Bible makes it clear that those who have rejected Christ already stand in judgment (John 3:18), and when they die, before the return of Christ,

their destination is this place of punishment, Hades. I write Hades and not hell, because of what we will study in the upcoming section. For the purposes of understanding, those who have rejected Christ and then die will be sent to Hades. Hades is also the place that the unsaved souls go during the millennial reign of Christ. But after that point, they, along with Hades will be thrown into the eternal lake of fire:

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, ever one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were cast into the eternal lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.
(Revelation 20:11-15)

Note again that the Great White Throne Judgment takes place 1,000 years later, or after the millennial reign of Christ (see Revelation 20:7). To clarify the point, Hades is a place **only** for the unbeliever. No believer could ever end up in Hades (John 10:28), yet not so with “hell” (Gehenna)—let’s look.

A terrible disservice has been done in the translating of the Greek word that we read as “hell” in our English Bibles. Each of the times that this Greek word appears, *Gehenna* (γέεννα) [1067], the teaching from days gone by automatically focuses on the same place

of punishment as Hades. Yet it is not. As a matter of fact, each time that the word “hell” (Gehenna) is used, it is in direct relation to a believer and his (or her) disobedience. We find this word used twelve times in the New Testament (Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33, Mark 9:43, 45, 47, Luke 12:5, and James 3:6). We will look deeper into the various verses of Scripture references regarding this, but at this point it behooves us to understand what Gehenna is.

Gehenna is a place of punishment for the *believer*. Yes, you read that right—the believer. The misconception that Gehenna (hell) is the same as the hell (Hades) that burns with fire, which all unbelievers will be subsequently thrown into the eternal lake of fire, comes from two sources. The first, as we have seen is a mistranslation of the word “hell.” Believers automatically connect it with only those who are unsaved (for only the unsaved go to *hell*).

The second misunderstanding stems from the misconception that no believer can ever undergo anything negative and anything in the Bible which appears to be negative is for the unsaved only (yet, we’ve already seen that this is not the case).

Let’s take a look at a couple of the uses of the word in the New Testament:

But I say to you that that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, ‘Raca,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell (Gehenna). (Matthew 5:22)
(Emphasis mine).

And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish,

than for your whole body to be thrown into hell (Gehenna). And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you, for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell (Gehenna). (Matthew 5:29-30)
(Emphasis mine)

Notice with these two sets of passages, that first, Jesus is speaking to His disciples (Matthew 5:2). Why in the world would Jesus tell His own disciples that if their eye, hand, or anger makes them sin they could go to hell (Hades)? That makes it sound like they could lose their salvation! But that cannot be the case! We have seen extensively that the salvation of the spirit is a certainty. Note that Jesus is instructing his disciples to *do* something, which places the connection with the salvation of the soul!

One more example that Gehenna is for the believer is found in Matthew 10:28

And do not fear those that kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both the soul and body in hell (Gehenna). (Emphasis mine)

At first glance, it appears that Jesus is speaking about those who can go to Hades, yet we must stop and ask the pivotal question: who is Jesus talking to? We find our answer in Matthew 10:5. Before Christ sent out His disciples He was giving them instructions—go to the lost sheep only (and now we know who they are...SHEEP!!!), heal, do not take a money bag, etc. Then we see the instruction in the verse above. In context, Jesus is telling His disciples to not fear what man can do to them, but what God will do to them if they walk away from their calling!

Again, this is NOT Jesus telling the disciples that they could lose their salvation if they don't do good enough while they are out

and about with the instructions, He gave them. If they had to do good things in order to keep from going to Hades, that makes their salvation based on works, and guess what, that is not and cannot be the case!

As you go back and study each of the passages listed above that mention “hell” (Gehenna), again, you will see that each and every time the word is used it is Jesus speaking to or about a believer. Let’s look at one more example from James 3:6:

And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

Look again at what James says about the tongue, it “sets on fire the course of *our* life.” James has included himself in the message, and it is Gehenna, the place of punishment that sets our soul ablaze!

Now that we have seen these verses, let’s understand why Gehenna is a place of punishment for the believer. What does this word mean? Does it mean a place of eternal fire and torment? Is there any other place in the Scriptures that teach us about Gehenna? When you look at the definition of the Greek word Gehenna it literally means, “valley of Hinnom.”

Well what in the world, or rather, where in the world is that?

The valley of Hinnom was a *literal* place that was located outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Its history is tainted by the actions of a rebellious nation who did unspeakable things to their children. That nation—Israel. The unspeakable things—just watch:

He also defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire for Molech. (2 Kings 23:10)

The valley of Hinnom was a place to the south of Jerusalem (outside the city walls—did you catch that—*outside*) where a place called Topheth (hill) was located. Here, the people of Israel sacrificed their sons and daughters in fire for a false god named Molech. This was a practice where the people would bring their first-born children (boy or girl) and cast them into fire so that the god, Molech, would provide for them rain for the harvest and an abundant crop for the upcoming (and sometimes during) the year of harvest.

Instead of trusting God, they decided to place their trust in something that was no god at all. As horrific as this practice seems to us, look at what the LORD said about it:

*And they built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-Hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them, nor **had it entered My mind** that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. (Jeremiah 32:35) (Emphasis mine).*

Now, because of this “abomination” God punished *His own people* on that spot:

“For the sons of Judah have done what is evil in My sight,” declares the LORD, “they have set their detestable things in the house, which is called by My name, to defile it. And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire,

which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind. Therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place. And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky, and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away. Then I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land will become a ruin. (Jeremiah 7:30-34)

Thus, says the LORD, “Go and buy a potter’s earthenware jar, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests with you. Then go out to the valley of Ben-Hinnom, which is by the entrance to the potsherd gate; and proclaim there the words that I shall tell you, and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place, at which the ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent and have built

the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind; therefore behold, days are coming," declares the LORD , "when this place will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-Hinnom, but rather the valley of Slaughter. And I shall make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I shall cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their life; and I shall give over their carcasses as food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth. (Jeremiah 19:1-8)

It is painfully clear here that God, just like He punished the Israelites in the wilderness for their unfaithfulness and disobedience, did the same thing to the people living within the Promised Land. Their reckless behavior to not seek the LORD had dire consequences. It is known that by the time of Christ in the first century, that the valley of Hinnom had become a dump where people would throw their garbage and waste. It is this place that our Lord Jesus uses as an *example* or *type* for those believers who decide that they will chase after their own selfish desires, must be dealt with.

If we take just a moment to think about the ramifications of Christ's warning, one can see that if we remain faithful to the Lord, and allow His Spirit to live through us, we cannot go wrong. There is no temptation that can overtake us (1 Corinthians 10:13) and even if we do fall or fail (which we will do, and God already knows it), then He has given us a way of reconciliation through confession (1 John 1:9). We further can know that the Holy Spirit of God Himself resides within each one of us as believers (Ephesians 1:13).

To put this all in a neat little nutshell: HE'S DONE IT ALL! He's covered our sin and freed us from the penalty of sin which is

death; He has given us Himself, so that we can live a righteous life and inherit the incredible rewards of our inheritance that are ours as believers!

CHAPTER 9: REWARDS!

...but just as it is written, “Things which eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him. (1 Corinthians 2:9)

This is the fun part of the book! I must tell you that I had an internal debate as to whether or not to place the negative consequences for the unfaithful believer first, or after this chapter. I decided that we would end the book on a positive note, much as is the case when we look at the Old Testament prophets. From Isaiah to Malachi, many of the prophets proclaim a gloom and doom message for the majority of their letters, but then at the end, there is always this ray of light, a glimmer of hope. And that is the form I want to end this book on.

As we look at rewards, there will be two major areas we will delve into. One will be the reward for the overcomer, and the second will be the issuing of crown(s). Although these are two categories, I want you to reread that verse at the beginning of this chapter. It basically says that we have no idea what is in store for us, nor could we even imagine it!

As we come to our first area of rewards, the rewards for the overcomer, it would behoove us to do a little investigating as to what the Bible labels as an overcomer. Who is it? Who is it not? Can I become one? If so, how? What does it mean to be an overcomer? What is in store if I am an overcomer?

Ready?

Set?

Here we go...

THE OVERCOMER

Seven separate times in the book of Revelation we see Jesus make this type of statement, “He who overcomes,” After each of these statements He gives a description of some type of positive outcome. It should be of no surprise to us that these positive outcomes have to do with a reward for a believer. But let’s take a step back and ask a question that has been asked of me plenty of times: isn’t the overcomer a non-believer who gets saved? The answer must be “no.” And here is why.

The Greek word for overcomer is nikao (νικάω) [3528], meaning: a contest or conflict ending in victory. Here we see a clear connection to receiving a reward for *doing* something. Let’s put it this way: You can’t go through a contest or conflict in order to be saved, can you? No, that would make your salvation into eternity a work you accomplish. Remember, salvation is a gift from God.

Another reason that this must be a believer is found in the tense of the Greek word. For each of the seven listed occurrences of the word “overcomes,” there are given in the present tense. If you will recall, the present tense in Greek calls for continuous action. Therefore, when Jesus says, “to him who overcomes,” He is truly saying, “to the person who continually has victory over the conflicts in their life.”

Who can be an overcomer? First, as we have seen, it can *only* be a believer. But unfortunately, not all believers will be overcomers. An overcomer is a Christian who continually yields their life to Christ on a daily basis. The believer is one who overcomes the things of this world, the desires of the flesh, and the temptations of Satan by allowing God’s Word to manifest in his or her life by believing and living the Word of God.

When it comes to being an overcomer, there are rewards with reference to our inheritance. Some of the major rewards are the items listed in the book of Revelation. The other major rewards are the receiving of crown(s). We will take each of these rewards and

unpack them, but before we do, I want you to stop for just a moment and think about the gravity of these rewards.

The Bible says that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). That alone should cause us to stop and reflect. God didn't have to come to the earth and die the most horrible death ever imagined at the hands of a nation who was trained in torture. He could have just wiped us all out and He would have been justified in doing so! Now, our Great God, who loves us with a love we cannot comprehend, wants to give us rewards for living an obedient life which is actually a life He has already provided for us (2 Peter 1:3)! That's crazy!

When I think of the choices I have made in my life I would rather hang my head in shame, yet He tells me that if I will trust in Him and let Him live through me, He will reward me for my obedience and faithfulness.

That's off the charts crazy! So, as we begin to look in depth at these two types of rewards, which in themselves will (or should) blow your doors off, remember that we do not deserve any of this.

THE OVERCOMER'S REWARDS

Even though the following list is available to us regarding the rewards of our inheritance, the Bible states that this is not an exhaustive list as we read earlier from 1 Corinthians 2:9. There are things that God has prepared for those who overcome that we cannot comprehend. And I think that if He were to tell us, we wouldn't be able to wrap our minds around it anyway! Besides, what you are about to read will leave you breathless!

The first reward that we see in the book of Revelation comes from Revelation 2:7, "To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God."

There are a few indications of what this reward means, but we can understand it this way: this reward allows the overcomer to immediately obtain *immortality*. But this immortality is in connection to their rewards, therefore, what we are seeing is that the

rewards that God grants to those that overcome will NEVER END. You may be saying, *“I have seen the ‘tree of life’ before.”* Yes, you probably have.

In the book of Genesis, after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the LORD had to remove them from the Garden of Eden. Why? The answer is found in Genesis 3:22-23, where the Bible says, Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden.

The Tree of Life is a literal tree that when eaten from gives the person immediate immortality. If Adam had eaten from the tree of life after eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would have remained in his sinful state for all eternity. God, by His grace and mercy would not allow that to happen, therefore He banned Adam and Eve from the garden to protect them (*that’ll preach*).

Now, according to what Christ tells us, the Tree of Life, at this time, is located in a place called Paradise. How do we know this? Scripture. When Jesus was on the cross, in Luke 23:43, He spoke to the thief and said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise.” Now, notice that Jesus did not say to him, “Today you will be with Me in the kingdom of Heaven.” Nor did He say, “You will be with Me in heaven.” He specifically said “Paradise.” The reason was due to what Paradise was and where it was located. Paradise is also another name synonymous for “Abraham’s bosom.”

Before Christ died and ascended to heaven, Paradise was located in Sheol, which was in the heart of the earth. (Luke 16:22-26)

When Christ died, he descended into Sheol and took Paradise and all those who were in it up to the third heaven (Ephesians 4:8-9). We say the “third” heaven because of the remarks which Paul uses to

describe that very same place which he was allowed to view. Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 12:2:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

When we read the words “the third heaven” it may seem a little out of sorts for us. To understand what Paul was describing, we have to understand the Hebrew view the heaven(s). To the Hebrew, when they look up into the sky they see the first heaven, this is the place where the birds fly and the clouds form. The second heaven is beyond the sky, meaning outer space where the planets, galaxies, and the rest of the universe are located. Beyond the universe, according to this view, is the third heaven, a place where no man can go. The third heaven is where God resides. Therefore, when Paul stated he went to the third heaven, he was stating that he went to heaven (Paradise), the place where God resides. Interestingly enough, when Paul attempted to describe the third heaven—he couldn’t! Here is where the connection comes in. Paul states that the third heaven is Paradise!

And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.
(2 Corinthians 12:3-4)

So right now, if I were to die, I would go to Paradise which is located in the third Heaven (thus why we call it heaven). This is where all of our relatives and loved ones, who have trusted Christ are at this very moment. Therefore, we can see that at the Judgment

Seat of Christ, if found to be faithful, as overcomers we will receive this reward of immediate immortality.

The next reward for the overcomer is found in Revelation 2:11. Jesus says, “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” This second death is the discipline and punishment that we studied in the previous chapter for unfaithful Christians. Remember that if Jesus was stating that this second death meant Hades and the eternal lake of fire, we would need to “overcome” in order to get out of it. That overcoming, as we have seen is a work. Therefore, any time you see the word *overcome* in Revelation, it is specifically meant for a believer in Christ. As we stated earlier, this second death is the punishment of the believer in the outer darkness (or blackness of darkness) in Gehenna. That punishment lasts for 1,000 years. So, what we are seeing here is that at the Judgment Seat of Christ, if you (or I) are overcomers, we will not have to go to Gehenna for punishment for that timeframe. We will immediately enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Next, we find a reward in Revelation 2:17, where Jesus says, “To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”

Once more, this is like the tree of life in that we see the original manna in Exodus 16, that was given on the basis of nutrition for the physical body. This manna is a spiritual nutrition for the future experiences, such as passing judgments and rulings. We see a small picture of this in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3:

Or do you now know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more matters of this life?

The connection with the hidden manna and the ability to make wise decisions is connected to the next part of the reward in verse 17, the white stone. The Greek translation of white stone is: white – *leukos* (λευκός) [3022] stone – *psephos* (ψηφός) [5586], meaning a bright (dazzling) smooth pebble. In the first century when voting was done to offer an opinion each person had a white stone with a name on it. If you were involved in the voting you could cast your lot, or stone, to be for or against a matter. The white stone was only given to those with special privileges. Furthermore, with reference to receiving a new name, this concept is not new. God gave new names to Abram (Abraham), Jacob (Israel), and Simon (Peter) just to name a few.

As a little testimony for you, the LORD actually changed my name! Before I moved to Florida and I lived in New York, my friends and family knew me as Jerry. But an interesting thing happened when I moved to Florida. The first job I got at a telephone company made placards on the cubicles for each of the employees. I came in one day to see that I had a placard hung on my cubicle. The name said ‘Gerald Kirby.’ Now, previously, I despised the name Gerald. I thought it was too corny and so “not me.” But the more I realized who Jerry was and how he lived (see I even talk about that name in the past tense); I recognized that I was not that man anymore. He made many selfish mistakes to enhance his own agenda. But that man is gone. If someone from my youth contacts me and calls me by that name it literally makes me cringe. I associated “Jerry” with my flesh and “Gerald” with my new self! So, going forward, my name is, and has been Gerald. God changed my name!

In concluding this reward, what we see is that the overcomer will be given the special privilege to cast a vote and voice their opinion on Kingdom matters. This means that they will be in a position of authority.

The next reward we see comes from Revelation 2:26 when Jesus says,

“And he who overcomes and he who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father.”

A portion of this reward comes from Psalm 2:8-9. In that passage of Scripture, we see that the Psalmist is speaking about the coming Messiah, however, there is another meaning which Jesus attaches to it. Here He plainly states that this reward is for the overcomer. Look once more at how the overcomer obtains this reward, he must, “keep my deeds until the end.” Again, this shows us that the overcomer must *do* something; therefore, it cannot be in conjunction with his eternal gift, but rather, his eternal reward.

This reward is that the overcomer will be in a position of authority (as we saw in the last reward) and in this position of authority places the overcomer in such a position that he will judge and rule (which we saw before, and we will see again).

I want you to stop and think about what Jesus is telling you here. He wants *you* to rule with Him. He wants to give *you* these rewards. Why? Because He loves you. It was also His original plan from the beginning. Remember in the Garden of Eden that God called Adam in Genesis 1:26 to “rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” This plan has not changed and God’s will, cannot be thwarted!

Also, as part of this reward we see in verse 28 that Jesus, “will give him the morning star.” In the Bible, Jesus is known as the bright morning star and the son of righteousness (Revelation 22:16). If you look at the morning sky, just before it gets light and you look to the east as the sun is rising, you will notice a bright star in the sky, one that should not be there. This is called the morning star. This speaks of Christ’s rapture of the Church and also what Christ has for

those at the rapture. Later the sun comes out and shines in all of its glory and with great power. This speaks of Christ's second coming when He will rule in His Kingdom. So to be given the bright morning star is to be given everything that Christ has (as a co-heir who has gained their inheritance)

The next reward is found in Revelation 3:5 when Jesus says, "he who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments;" Let me ask a question: what do you think of when you think of a white garment? Most would think of a wedding gown. The color white is the color of purity, meaning that the person who dons the garment will be pure. We will discuss in detail the wedding garment, the Bride of Christ, and associated topics in the section about the Bride of Christ, but for now, we will see that this shows a person who is found to be pure at the Judgment Seat of Christ because of the deeds they have done and their remaining faithful until the end.

The next portion of this reward from Jesus states, "And I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels."

To understand what Jesus is telling us here we first must be very careful. The first thing to know is that there is more than one book of life. We will look at each one so that we can understand the passage. The error comes when well-meaning preachers and teachers confuse this issue and think that there is only one book of life and if your name is not in it you cannot gain entrance into heaven. However, the Bible teaches that there are at least 3 books of life that are associated with the Christian. Let's take a look at each of them and see the correlation.

The first of the three books is called, "The book of the living." This is the book that your name was written in the day you were conceived. Yes conceived, not born. You were a living being at the moment of conception (but that's a topic for another day). Within this book is listed the name of every person that has ever lived because it references our *physical* body.

For you formed my inward parts; you weaved me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are your works and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them. (Psalm 139:13-16)

Now, when a person dies (regardless of whether they are believers or not), their name is blotted out, or erased from this book. Why? Because they are no longer living. Their physical form has died. This is what David meant when he wrote in Psalm 69:28, “May they be blotted out of the book of life, and may they not be recorded with the righteous.”

The next book of life can be found and referenced in Revelation 20:15. This book, also known as the Lamb's book of life, has nothing to do with the physical *body*; it has to do with a person's *spirit*. The verse states, “And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” This cannot be the same book which David spoke of in Psalm 139, as every person's name is in that book. But for this book, one's name had to be found in it, meaning it was written into it. We know, through Scripture that those who have rejected Christ stand in judgment already (John 3:18). Therefore, this book, the Lamb's book of life, identifies all of those who have accepted Christ as savior and are a part of the body of Christ. There is a very important distinction here that we would do well to comprehend, once you trust Christ, your name **cannot** be erased out of this book! Yet that is not the case with the last book.

The last book of life we will discuss is the book listed in Revelation 3:5, where Jesus identifies that a person will not be erased from this book. As the first book of life that we looked at has a connection to your *body*, the second has a connection to your *spirit*; this final book has a connection with your *soul*. Therefore, this book of life deals with reward and inheritance.

Take careful note here: this book of life is not the physical book of life. If it were, then one would need to overcome to remain in it. It is not the book of life connected to your initial salvation because no one can lose their salvation (John 10:28-29). However, as we have seen, it is possible for a believer to lose their inheritance and their reward. This connects to a very important distinction here. At the moment a person is saved, their name is written into two books: The Lamb's book of life (spirit) and the book of life (soul) for their inheritance.

So, wait! Are you saying that our inheritance is already ours and it's up to us to keep it? Yes! That is exactly right! Consider this verse from Romans 8:

*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (**born again believers**), and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **if** indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. (Emphasis mine).*

(Romans 8:16-17)

Here we see the progression. First, we are children of God, meaning we are born again believers into the family of God. But at that time, we also become co-heirs with Christ! But please carefully see how the Holy Spirit had this verse written, we are fellow heirs **IF** we suffer with Him. To suffer is to die daily to your flesh's wants and desires (1 Corinthians 15:31). If however a believer chooses not to suffer, thereby living for their flesh and gaining the things of this

life (Matthew 16:24-27), they will endure punishment and thus have their names erased from the book of life regarding their *inheritance*. Remember what we have studied previously that it is *possible* for a person to lose their inheritance, much like Reuben and Esau did!

The next reward is found in Revelation 3:12 and Jesus says,

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

This reward has much significance to it. There is a comparison Scripture that goes along with this regarding the pillar in the temple. Let's look at 1 Kings 7:21:

Thus, he set up the pillars at the porch of the nave; and he set up the right pillar and named it Jachin, and he set up the left pillar and named it Boaz.

As you may or may not know, Hebrew names carry much significance to them. A person's name was associated with their character (case in point: Jacob means deceiver). There are two names listed here: one is Jachin and the other Boaz. What Christ is revealing to us is the Christian who overcomes will be like Jachin and Boaz. So, what do those names mean? Jachin is the Hebrew word meaning *established*. Boaz is the Hebrew word meaning *strength*. The overcomer, therefore, will be *established* in the Kingdom of Heaven in the *strength* of Almighty God because he overcame his fleshly nature by allowing God to live through him!

The final reward listed in the book of Revelation is a culmination of what we have seen previously, however Jesus makes an emphatic statement. It is this reward that throws many believers. It seems too good to be true (I know it did when I first read it). Jesus says in Revelation 3:21, “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” As we take all of the rewards as a culmination, we see this last statement from Christ places the proverbial nail in the coffin. He *wants* us to rule with Him in His kingdom. But in order to do that we must overcome. Again, remember, overcoming is NOT something we can do under our own strength! Overcoming is obtained by surrendering more and more of your life to the will of the Father and allowing Him to work through you.

CROWNS

Another great misconception being taught today is that believers, when they enter heaven, will take their crowns (cause we’ll all get one you know), and cast them down at Jesus feet. Unfortunately, that is completely unbiblical. We’ll take a look at why some believe this concept, see what the Bible says, and then look into each of the crowns which a believer can obtain to. Besides, if you are going to rule and reign on a throne, you’ll have a crown...

*And when the living creatures give
glory and honor and thanks to Him
who sits on the throne, to Him who
lives forever and ever, the twenty-four
elders will fall down before Him who
sit on the throne, and will worship
Him who lives forever and ever, and
will cast their crowns before the
throne, saying, “Worthy are You our
Lord and out God, to receive glory and*

honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created. (Revelation 4:9-11)

The question that must be raised is: who are these twenty-four elders? There are those that think that they represent the body of Christ in type form. So, let's follow that concept for a moment. If it is true that these twenty-four elders are the body of Christ, then who are they talking about at the end of verse nine when they say, "And because of Your will **they** existed, and were created."

These twenty-four elders represent the ruling angelic authorities in the heavens right now. They are casting their crowns at the feet of Jesus to show that they are transferring their authority to Him for He is worthy to receive glory, honor, and praise as He begins His rule.

Where in the world do you get that idea from?

We see the truth when we look at the beginning of chapter four. We need to remember that the book of Revelation is a book that reveals the coming kingdom of Christ and the book is given in and "communicated (Greek word meaning signified, i.e. given in signs or symbols) by His angel to His bondservant John" (Revelation 1:1). So, when we get to chapter four in the book of Revelation, we are seeing something that literally happened, yet it is also a type or a sign for us. Let's take a look and break it down:

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things." Immediately I was in the spirit and behold a throne was

*standing in heaven, and One sitting on
the throne. (Revelation 4:1-2)*

There are a couple things to take note of. First, are the words, “after these things.” After what things? After the things that take place from Revelation 2-3. When we diligently study the beginning of the book of Revelation, we see that not only were they seven literal churches that existed, but they are also types or symbols for different eras in church history. We see the history of the church from the beginning at Pentecost (Ephesus) to the last church period just before the rapture (Laodicea). So, when we see John (who represents the body of Christ) being told to, “Come up here,” we are actually seeing a picture of the body of Christ being raptured to the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Another point of reference with regard to receiving rewards can be found when you look at the description of the seven churches. For each reward that we listed above, notice that Jesus said, “I will,” or “shall” implying that it is something that would take place at a later point; that later point would be at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:14-15).

As a closing thought to this section we see that the twenty-four elders cannot be the body of Christ if at the same time, John is a symbol of the body of Christ, is being raptured. How could the body of Christ be raptured and then see the body of Christ already in heaven? That’s because the twenty-four elders are not the body of Christ and they are actually speaking and referencing the body of Christ at the end of Revelation 4:11. So, then, are there crowns of reward for believers? The answer is yes.

There are five crowns listed that a believer may obtain to. Although the Bible doesn’t describe exactly what the crowns look like, they will be given to those who are overcomers, those who gain their inheritance and reward, part of which is to rule and reign with Christ, hence, the crowns.

The first crown we will look into is what we will call the Crown of Rejoicing.

For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation: Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our joy and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. (Philippians 4:1)

This crown is given on the basis of soul winning. Again, contrary to popular belief, soul winning has nothing to do with introducing an unsaved person to Jesus Christ for salvation. Soul winning is introducing a believer to the truths of the Kingdom of Heaven. This involves the meat of the word, not the milk. Notice that I said introduced. Just like you cannot save an unsaved person, you cannot make a believer understand the truth of the kingdom. God may place you in a position to share the kingdom truths with them, but it is up to the individual believer to decide whether they will accept or reject the truth. Again, this has nothing to do with a person's initial salvation and obtaining eternal life. The truth of the kingdom is connected to the believer's inheritance, reward, and prize. Let's take a look at a companion Scripture:

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls. (Proverbs 11:30)

Look at the connection. Fruit (something produced through the believer) is a tree of life (a reward of immortality). And again, he who is "wise" wins "souls." We must understand that in order to be

wise, one must take knowledge and apply it to their lives. This is how a believer becomes mature (Hebrews 5:14). This wisdom is in connection to the epignosis of the Word of God. If you will recall, gnosis knowledge is milk knowledge, that knowledge that comes from understanding that Jesus came and died for your sins and by believing you now have eternal salvation (Hebrews 6:1-2). Epignosis knowledge is that higher knowledge which comes from the meat of the Word of God. The epignosis is one thing that can lead one to the salvation of a believer's *soul*.

Notice that the word used by the Holy Spirit is not spirit, but rather soul; this is because no man can win a person's spirit, that is the Lord's doing. Likewise, no one can save another person's soul; however, God can use them to point them to the deeper truths of the Word of God which may lead them to being found faithful at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Therefore, for those Christians who know the truth of the kingdom and share it and see souls saved will receive the Crown of Rejoicing. Why rejoicing? Because of the joy that comes when a believer sees the truth of the kingdom and then responds to it. There is no feeling like that in the whole world.

The second crown is called the Crown of Righteousness. The description of this crown is found in 2 Timothy 4:7-8:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

This crown, as you can imagine, is given on the basis of finishing the Christian race that is set before each one of us. The only way to win the race is to look forward to the prize at the end.

Much like a runner in a race headed toward the finish line. By running the race, this produces a love for Christ's appearing as the Christian is steadily looking forward to His coming kingdom. Therefore, this appearing is not the rapture of the church but rather Christ's appearing or His second coming to set up His kingdom over the earth. So then, those Christians who love His appearing are those who have the epignosis of the coming kingdom and have lived their lives in such a way that they may be a part of it.

The third crown we will study is a specific crown for a certain group of people. This is called the Crown of Glory.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
(1 Peter 5:1-4)

This crown is given to those called to feed the flock of God willingly, readily, and as an example. This feeding is not preaching salvation to the unsaved, but rather it is feeding those who are already saved and helping them to mature in the Word of God. This feeding is a steady diet of the milk and meat of the Word and can only be given to those who are called to preach and teach the whole gospel (from the cradle to the cross to the crown).

In today's society, believers have been taught that the church building is the place where you bring an unsaved person to hear how to be saved by the preaching of the minister. But this is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. We see the example in Acts 2:37-47, that once there was salvation, then the people came together to learn, grow, and fellowship. I think that the idea of bringing the unsaved into the church to be saved is laziness on the part of the body of Christ. They don't want to take the time to invest in what it takes to be used by God that they would rather have someone "qualified" to do it.

In the first century the building was a place that the saved came to be fed from the Word. They would in turn go out into the world as witnesses to the unsaved, leading them to the Lord, bringing them back to the church building for baptism, fellowship and to be fed on the Word of God. Let us ask the Lord to help us to move toward this character.

The fourth crown of reward is called the Incorruptible Crown.

And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore, I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.
(1 Corinthians 9:25-27)

This crown is given on the basis of winning the spiritual race which is marked out by God for every believer. We see from the above Scriptures that in order to win, the believer must discipline his

body. This means the body must be kept in subjection to the Holy Spirit so that He may use it to the glory of God. The main focus of the body is the mind. When the mind focuses on ungodly things, then the believer will act in ungodly ways; on the contrary, if a believer focuses on godly things (Philippians 4:8), they will act in godly ways. I want you to notice Paul's sincerity when he tells us that there is a possibility that after he has run the race that he could end up "disqualified" (being disapproved at the Judgment Seat of Christ) in 1 Corinthians 9:27.

The fifth and final crown we will discuss is the Crown of Life. We see this crown listed in two different places in Scripture:

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

This final crown is given on the basis of enduring temptation and tribulation that comes into every Christian's life. In order to receive this crown, the Christian must remain faithful and endure to the end. Notice what the Lord states in Revelation 2:10, that temptation and tribulation are used by God to test the faith of a believer. We must realize, comprehend, and believe that we have a way out of every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13) and we are not helpless against the enemy. This is why it is so very important to carefully understand what the Word of God says in James 4:7,

“Submit therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.” You cannot eliminate or attempt to do the latter without the prior.

As believers, in order to overcome the wiles of the enemy, we must submit ourselves to God first; this means to lay down our wants and desires and do what the Lord leads us to do. When we do, we will find that we become more and more in tune with how the Father would have us respond and we will begin to instinctively know what the right course to take is. The outcome of this? A Crown of Life.

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

The last part to this chapter will discuss a major misunderstanding when it comes to seeing the Christian’s inheritance and reward. You have probably heard it said that we (the body of Christ) are the Bride of Christ. While only believers can be a part of the body of Christ, not *all* believers will be a part of the Bride of Christ (saving the best for last here). If you have made it this far in this book, stay with me for one more section. And as you can probably guess, we are going to look at biblical proof as to whom the Bride of Christ is, and who the Bride of Christ is not.

We’ll begin with a connection to something we have already looked at; that the Bride of Christ is composed of those who must *do* something.

*“Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has **made herself ready.**” And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine lined, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous **acts** of the saints.*
(Revelation 19:7-8) (Emphasis mine).

Notice that the bride of the Lamb, *made herself ready*. In other words, she had to do something for herself. So, what and how

did she do that? By doing righteous acts. So, here is a pop quiz for you, how does a Christian do righteous acts? By abiding in Christ (John 15:4). Again, notice that these are righteous acts—plural.

To understand what the Bible is revealing to us regarding the Bride of Christ, we need to look at the type or symbol which is given to us in Scripture.

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.

(1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

Here we see that Adam is like Christ in the fact that through him death entered the world, yet through Christ, there is now resurrection from the dead for those who are in Christ. Now, see the connection here, *all* of mankind came from Adam and all would die without a redeemer. And all those who are in Christ are one body as well for all that trust in Christ as savior are members of His body (1 Corinthians 12:27). Going a step further we see:

So also, it is written, "The first man Adam became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly. And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we

*shall also bear the image of the
heavenly. (1 Corinthians 15:45-49)*

So, now we are looking a connection as we stated above. All humankind is connected to Adam and all believers are connected to Christ. The correlation is clear, that Christ is the second Adam!

What in the world does this have to do with the Bride of Christ?

Plenty. Watch.

*So, the Lord God caused a deep sleep
to fall upon the man, and he slept; then
He took one of his ribs and closed up
the flesh at that place. And the Lord
God fashioned into a woman the rib
which He had taken from the man and
brought her to the man.
(Genesis 2:21-22)*

Here's an easy one for you: where did Eve (Adam's bride) come from?

Adam's side.

How much of Adam was used to make Eve?

A rib...weren't you reading?

So, what we can agree on is that a piece of Adam was used to make his bride Eve, yes?

Um...yes.

Alright. Then if there is a connection between Adam and Jesus the connection is this: as Adam's bride came out of the side of Adam and came from a piece of him (you said!), then the Bride of Christ will come out of a part (not the whole) of Christ! In other words, God didn't pick up Adam, clone him and call it woman. The type is clear; the Bride of Christ will be a part (a small part for that matter) of the body of Christ!

Wow.

I know; God's awesome, isn't He?!

Let's just clarify it biblically so we can have a good understanding. There are a couple of places we need to go so hang on.

*And I also say to you that you are
Peter, and upon this rock I will build
my church; and the gates of Hades
shall not overpower it.
(Matthew 16:18)*

There are a couple words I want you to focus on in the above passage. The first is the word "build." Jesus said He would build His church, much like He did when He built Eve. He would take a portion of the body and make it a new part. Connected, yet separate.

The second word I want you to look at is the word "church." Here is where many get confused. They believe that the body of Christ is the "church." But that is NOT the case. Like the Bride of Christ, all the members of the church will be believers, yet not all believers will be a part of the church. Now hang on, because this is the place that we really need to set aside our preconceived ideas.

For the modern-day Christian, when you say the word *church*, two things come to mind: one, a building, and two a group of people (i.e. all believers). But we have to do a study of the word church to see what it means.

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία) [1577] which is actually a compound word from the Greek word *ek* (ἐκ) [1537] meaning "out of" and *kaleo* (καλέω) [2564] meaning "the called." By this biblical description, the church is the "called out of the called!" Therefore, we need to identify who the called are. Aren't they all of those unbelievers that were *called* to be saved but then they rejected? Nope. Not even close. Take a look at who the Bible labels as the "called."

*...among whom you also are the **called**
of Jesus Christ
(Romans 1:6 (Emphasis mine)).*

*...to the church of God which is at
Corinth, to those who have been
sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by
calling, with all who in every place
call upon the name of our Lord Jesus
Christ, their Lord and ours.
(1 Corinthians 1:2 (Emphasis mine)).*

*Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ,
and brother of James to those who are
the **called**, beloved in God the Father,
and kept for Jesus Christ. (Jude 1)
(Emphasis mine).*

*These will wage war against the Lamb,
and the Lamb will overcome them,
because He is Lord of lords and King
of kings, and those who are with Him
are the **called** and chosen and faithful.
(Revelation 17:14) (Emphasis mine).*

Clearly, the called are *believers*. No unbeliever would be with Christ as is pictured in Revelation 17:14, would they? No. Now, seeing as how the *called* are believers, then when we look at the picture of the Bride of Christ, that she comes from out of the body (as Eve came out of Adam and the Bride of Christ comes *out of* the body of Christ), it does us good to look at Scripture to see if there are any connections to this idea. And indeed, there are.

One passage to look at is Matthew 22:14, “Many are *called*, and few are *chosen*.” Now, the word called here is a companion of the word we saw above; this word has the connotation of being

invited or appointed. It is the Greek word *kletos* (κλητός) [2822]. Therefore, the called are believers, who have been invited. To heaven? No. To the wedding feast (see Matthew 22:1-14 in Chapter 8).

At the end of the parable, Jesus is in effect saying that there are many who are called (saved) but only a few of them are chosen (called out of the called). We can understand this when we study the various Greek words in this passage. The Greek word for “chosen” is *eklektos* (ἐκλεκτός) [1588], which has the same root word, *kletos* (called). But it also has a prefix (*ek*), on the front of it. That prefix as you will remember is *out of*. So, Jesus is saying that there are many who are called (believers) to come and be guests at the wedding feast, but only a few that will actually accept the invitation and prepare themselves to be guests at the wedding feast (those who are called out of the called).

So that means that the wedding feast has something to do with the Bride of Christ?

Yes, it does. It is what we call the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:14).

Does that mean that all of those in this parable who are the chosen are a part of the Bride of Christ?

No. Look again at that parable. What are these people (the chosen) a part of? The wedding *guests*. Let me explain:

A friend of mine got married and I was invited to his wedding. When I went to the reception and walked in the door, I got my little nametag and was shown where my seat was. I went, sat down, and watched the bride and groom dance. When it came time for the meal, I went back to my table. At the head of the auditorium was a long table decorated with beautiful flowers and adornments. At that table sat the Bride, Groom, family, and those who were in the wedding ceremony. I was a guest of the wedding. I was not the bride (well—obviously—that would just be weird). This is exactly what Jesus is describing here! In this parable there will be those who will be guests at the marriage supper that will not be the Bride of Christ!

Does that mean they aren't saved? Absolutely not! They are still *in* the marriage feast! The marriage feast is a picture of the Kingdom of Heaven. There will be the bridegroom (Christ), the Bride (believers who are called, chosen, and faithful—Revelation 17:14), and then the wedding guests (the chosen).

But wait. What about the called? Where are they?

Here is the connection to the outer darkness. Those who are called (invited to the kingdom) but refuse to prepare themselves, will not be allowed in the Kingdom of Heaven. They will be outside the kingdom, i.e. in the outer darkness (a place outside the light).

Why will they be outside?

Because they refused the invitation meaning they refused to have their souls saved and decided to chase after the things of this world. The Bible is clear that when the rapture happens, we will, “always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Yet for those who refuse His lordship in their lives now they will be placed outside the kingdom so that the Lord may deal with their refusal to obey.

Invariably, the question is asked: how can I be a part of the Bride? The description is actually found in a verse we've previously looked at but will revisit:

*These will wage war against the Lamb,
and the Lamb will overcome them,
because He is Lord of lords and King
of kings, and those who are with Him
are the **called** and **chosen** and
faithful. (Revelation 17:14) (Emphasis
mine).*

There are three criteria here that the Bible shows is the character of the Bride of Christ. A person, in order to be called a part of the Bride, must meet all three criteria. First, they must be saved (*called*), then they must be chosen (*called out of the called* by being

obedient), finally, they must be faithful (have the epignosis of the Word of God and live according to it).

But what happens if you are an obedient believer, yet you do not know the truth of the Kingdom of Heaven?

It means that you are called and chosen and will receive your inheritance! You will be like one of the wedding guests!

But I want to be a part of the Bride!

That's why you have this book in your hands!!!

CHAPTER 10: STIRRING THE POT

So, let's end off with a little bit of fun shall we! Hopefully by now, you have had your eyes and heart opened by the Holy Spirit as He has revealed to you some wonderful truths. Maybe now, we can understand a little bit why God's Word is so focused on Him blessing and teaching the humble (Proverbs 29:23). In this final section, I wanted to address a passage which many teachers and preachers will tell you is a parable about the peril of not being good enough or faithful enough in your life, and that if you are not careful, you can lose your eternal salvation.

They teach this lesson based on the misunderstanding that if they do not come to the time of judgment with the proper "things," the person will have, one, shown they were never saved to begin with, or, two, lose their eternal salvation which they already had.

DID JESUS HAVE AMNESIA?

One Scripture that folks have used with regard to a person being able to lose their salvation is Matthew 25:10-13:

"And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came, saying 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

This is the parable of the ten virgins. The first thing that is interesting in this parable is the way that teachers and preachers attempt to associate the five prudent virgins with those who are

saved and the five foolish virgins as those who were unsaved and didn't quite make it. But here's a question for you (which normally opens the eyes): when you think of a virgin, what do you think of? You would think of a woman that is pure, innocent, and untouched by another man. So, in this parable, we see ten virgins. Now, how could an unsaved person be a virgin (someone pure)? They can't because they aren't! The virgins (because it's a parable) represent someone. That someone is a Christian.

There are other distinctions in this parable that reveal to us that Jesus is not speaking of the difference between an unsaved person and a saved person. The first is the number of virgins (10). When you research numbers in the Bible you will find that the number ten (10) means, completion or all. When we put this together with the fact that these are virgins and that the virgins represent believers, then we see there are ten virgins are a picture of all (10) believers. Therefore, this is not a parable about those who are saved or unsaved, but rather those who are faithful or unfaithful.

Another distinction comes from the advice given by the wise to the foolish. In order to enter the wedding feast (which is a picture of the Kingdom of Heaven) the wise tell the foolish in verse nine, "...go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." If the wise (who were representing the saved) were telling the foolish (who represent the unsaved) how to gain entrance into the wedding feast (heaven), then the foolish (unsaved) would need to go and *trade* for it! And that my friend is a work! And we already know that salvation is by grace through faith.

As a further indication that these ten virgins are believers, let's look at verses one and three. In verse one, all of the virgins have a lamp. Now remember, this is a parable, so everything represents, or it is pointing to something else. So, the obvious question next would be, what does a lamp represent in Scripture? To find the answer, we can turn to Psalm 119:105 where the Bible says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And here we see that a lamp represents the Word of God in a believer's life which

causes him to be a witness to the world. Within each lamp is a portion of oil. And as we study Scripture, we see that oil is representative of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 23:5). So, if you have an unbeliever with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, you have a problem now, don't you?

The last connection is the amnesia of Jesus.

What?

Yes. If we say that the five wise are saved, and the five foolish are unsaved then this means that they are all God's creation. So, then why in verse 12, does Jesus say, "I do not know you." Did Jesus get a touch of amnesia? Well of course He didn't! So, what is He saying here?

When he says that He does not know them, it isn't that He has no recollection of their identity; rather, He is saying that He does not know them, as believers, in an intimate way. We can understand this because the same Greek word is used in the Septuagint in Genesis 4:1 when the Bible says that Adam "had relations" (or *knew*) his wife Eve. This "knowing" is not a cognitive knowing, it is an intimate knowing. In other words, Jesus is telling the five foolish virgins (or those selfish believers) that He does not have an intimate relationship with them.

So, thank goodness, Jesus didn't have amnesia!

NOW WHAT?

In our time together in this book we have merely scratched the surface of what we call "The Kingdom Truths." There is so much more to study and to learn. But here is a trap which I have found to be true in my life. Too much knowledge can be a *bad* thing. What do I mean by that? It's one thing to see the Kingdom Truths and understand what they mean and to see wonderful things appear that were never there before in Scripture. Yet it is quite something else to take what you have learned and to apply it to your life.

There is a subtle temptation to get “heady” about what we see and then become prideful and say that now that we know these Truths, we are somehow wiser, more mature, and better than other believers. We may be wiser. We may be more mature. But we are for sure no better than anyone else, including non-believers!

We must never forget that we have been saved by the grace and mercy of God and it is only because of *His* choosing that we even see the Kingdom Truths (see Hebrews 6:3). He was not obligated to show them to us. For that matter, God was not obligated to save us! So, what do we do now? Do we go out and thump our brothers and sisters in Christ over the head with these truths and force them to listen. Let me just tell you by experience, *that won't work*. Then how do we tell them? We wait.

We what?

We wait.

But these truths are so essential, so vital to the body of Christ!

I understand that, but if we try to force the truths onto people, then what we are doing is attempting to manufacture something under *our* own power.

When we try to go out and do God's job, it never—and I say never—ends well. We must wait and patiently look. The urge of the believer is to get everyone to know these truths, but we must understand that not all believers will see these truths. Some will be like the foolish virgins. Other Christians will be like the different soils in Matthew 13:18-23. When you read that parable, you are looking at four different kinds of Christians! Just look what the seed represented in verse nineteen: “the word of the Kingdom.”

It is our duty to the LORD to wait and watch.

Let me give you an example.

There was this young man in college, who struck up a conversation one day with a classmate of his about spiritual things. The things of the Bible always fascinated him, but he felt as though the Word of God was so massive and so profound that it would be

impossible for him to understand. But that didn't keep him from trying! Needless to say, the classmate invited him to his home to just talk about Scripture. During the course of the conversation the young man told his classmate, "I know that there is so much more here, I just wish I could see it." It was then that his classmate got a glazed look that came across his face. There was an almost saddening smile of relief and joy. That's when the classmate said to him, "I have something for you." He reached down into a box and pulled out a book and handed it to the young man. As he looked at the cover, he could hardly believe what he was reading, *Shock and Surprise: Beyond the Rapture*.

The young man asked what this was, and the classmate told him it was a tool and only a tool. It was something that the LORD would use to help Him see the deeper things of His Word. The young man was so excited that he went home that very night and began to study and what he found—rather what I found—changed my life.

That was the story of how the LORD God used my mentor, Pastor Eber Overly to introduce me to the Kingdom Truths. The story goes much deeper than that, and I pray that one day the LORD will allow me to write about it, but for now, the thing I will never forget was that look that Eber gave me, and I'll remember it for as long as I live. I say that, because I myself have been blessed of God to hear those words and make that face!

He later shared with me that when God is working in someone's life, He will place them in your path and they will say something like, "I know that there is more," "Isn't there more than just get saved?" or "I'm just looking to dig deeper into the Word of God."

That's how you know.

That's when you share.

That's when you teach.

That's when you pick up a book about an Accountable Christian.

MY PRAYER FOR YOU...

This book has been a labor of love and time. I did not write this book to become rich or to be popular, I wrote this book because the LORD God instructed me to do so. I did not write this book for myself; I wrote it for you.

I want *you* to go deeper into the Word of God.

I want *you* to study and grow and mature.

I want *you* to see the Kingdom Truths and understand that the LORD has so ***much*** more in store for us on the other side of this life and that we are merely in a dress rehearsal for the Millennial Reign of Christ.

My prayer is that you will take seriously the things that have been offered to you in this book. This is just the tip of the preverbal iceberg. There are so many authors out there to explore that will help you gather information to grow and mature, but none of them compare to the Holy Spirit of God. I pray you will continue to...

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Matthew 6:33