



New Wine for the End Times

by Philip B. Brown

**The application of Old Testament Jewish
eschatology to the New Testament Church
solves seven major problems of Scripture,
which have divided the Church over the
centuries.**

The New Wine System

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Seven major problems are solved by applying Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church:

1. Calvinism vs. Arminianism (election vs. free-will). Solving this major Church divider without the use of paradoxes, or two sides of the same coin.
2. Salvation is a free gift. But inheriting the Kingdom requires lots of work. Solving the friction between grace and holiness verses.
3. Does salvation require fruits of the Spirit? Solving the friction between Lordship Salvation and Free Grace Theology.
4. The millennium as a free-grace alternative to purgatory. Solving the differences in salvation verses between Catholicism and Protestantism.
5. Would a loving God have a merciful plan for our loved ones who have died having never heard or understood about Jesus Christ?
6. Jewish eschatology provides Scriptural evidence that children who die young do not go to hell.
7. Amillennialism vs. Premillennialism. Scriptural evidence for the purpose of Christ's Messianic reign. The millennium is the climax of God's plan for all generations.

The application of Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church solves these seven major problems of Scripture, which have divided the Church over the centuries. Most of the New Testament was written by Jews. The New Wine System literally interprets Scripture along the same lines as the Jewish eschatology system of that day. The Jewish New Testament authors applied Old Testament prophecies about Israel to the New Testament Church. If we do the same, then these seven major problems of Scripture are solved. In addition, many verses of other topics that have been hard to understand start fitting the system and become easily understood.

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For my parents, Brevard and Doris Brown,
who have been so supportive of
me in the writing of this book.

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Introduction

All New Testament doctrine comes from five Jewish sources: Jesus, John, James, Peter, and Paul. We must strive to interpret their words in a manner that ancient Jewish readers would have understood, and in the context of the Jewish culture as seen in the Old Testament.

When the term “ancient Jewish eschatology” is used, it is meant to represent a literal interpretation of Old Testament Scripture. Why should ancient Jewish eschatology be applied? The answer is simple, and lies in the authority of Old Testament Scripture. This is not to say that we should incorporate aspects of their beliefs aside from those found in Scripture itself. There are two traditional approaches to Old Testament prophecy:

1. *Preterists* would say, correctly, that the Church is Israel. The New Testament Church is simply a continuation of God's chosen people, under a New Covenant. However, Preterists views hold that Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel were completely fulfilled in Christ's first coming. This requires massive and confusing allegorical and symbolic techniques of interpretation. Many Preterists admit that the Jewish writers themselves would never have interpreted the prophecies in this way.
2. *Dispensationalists* interpret Old Testament prophecies much more literally and naturally, following ancient Jewish tradition. But they believe the Church is a "parenthesis" between two dispensations of Israel, completely separating Old Testament prophecies from the Church. These prophecies apply to a separate group of God's people they consider to be Israel.

My approach is to interpret Old Testament prophecies literally and naturally, as ancient Jews would have done, and to apply these principles directly to the Church. Gentile believers have been grafted into Israel. The prophecies are literally fulfilled in the Israel, or those who are in Christ. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile. There is one body, one faith, one baptism. If one is in Christ, then they are a part of the true Israel. During the first half of the great tribulation, the Jewish part of Israel will be unhardened and will accept Jesus as the Messiah. But not all Jews are a part of the true Israel (Romans 9:6-7). Only those who mature in Christ are the true Israel.

This is not to say the Church replaces Israel. It's not "Replacement Theology." Gentiles are grafted into the vine, which is Israel. There are two kingdoms in Israel.

Gentiles who are in Christ can be understood to be the northern kingdom. Jews, when they are grafted back in, are all from the southern kingdom. When Christ returns, these two kingdoms (sticks) of Israel will be reunited, as promised in Ezekiel 37:15-28.

This changes the entire focus of the New Testament from a Greek emphasis to one that is considerably more Jewish. While it is true that the New Testament was written to Greeks, much of it consists of letters written to churches addressing problems within these churches. Paul had already started these churches, taught them, and naturally taught doctrine consistent with his beliefs. Unless God revealed to Paul an error in his teaching, Paul would have taught from a Jewish perspective because of his background as a Jewish Pharisee.

The specific things God disclosed to Paul as being errant were that Gentiles could be a part of Israel, and that the Messiah had to die for sins and then come back a second time to reign. Other than these, we can assume Old Testament Jewish culture as the context for interpreting the New Testament. The Old Testament cannot be interpreted based on traditional Greek understanding of the New Testament. Instead, the New Testament must be interpreted in the context of the Old Testament, in a manner similar to that of ancient Jews.

Traditional belief states that when someone dies, he or she goes directly to heaven or hell. Their eternal destiny is decided at that point, based on their actions or beliefs during their lifetimes. This has been ingrained into our belief system so strongly that every New Testament verse is interpreted on this basis.

The story of Jesus telling the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in Paradise," is commonly interpreted under a filter of pre-existing traditions. When we read what Paul said about being absent from the body is being present with the Lord, we interpret it under the filter of our pre-existing traditional beliefs. When we read the parable of Lazarus, with the rich man talking to Abraham in Hades, we interpret it under the filter of our pre-existing traditional beliefs. So these interpretations of these verses reinforce our pre-existing beliefs.

Ancient Jews did not believe that death led immediately to heaven or hell. Under their belief system, both the just and the unjust were asleep in Hades awaiting the resurrection on the Day of the Lord. The resurrection marks the beginning of the Messianic reign to come, a period when Israel will rule the world. This is what ancient Jewish children were taught from their youth. Reading the New Testament with their system of beliefs in mind can produce vastly different interpretations than those common today. These New Testament verses should

not challenge the ancient Jewish belief system. Instead, we should challenge the belief that heaven or hell comes immediately after death.

This is not to say that people aren't eventually destined for heaven or hell. But the final judgment is not until after the Messianic reign. In other words, the Great White Throne Judgment will take place a thousand years after the resurrection of both the just and the unjust. At that time, those not written in the Lamb's Book of Life are thrown eternally into the lake of fire, which is hell-fire.

After the first century of the early Jewish disciples, the next generation of early church fathers had Greek backgrounds. Unlike Jewish culture, Greek culture taught that punishment or bliss came immediately after death. The Greeks did not believe in a resurrection. Consequently, the Greeks who read the New Testament misinterpreted it in exactly the same way believers do today. Yes, they added a belief in the resurrection. But it was a resurrection after you are already in heaven. Today, the Christian focus at funerals is on heaven or hell immediately after death. The Jewish focus was on the resurrection. Our incorrect traditional beliefs heavily distort the way we understand the New Testament.

For example, Jesus said, "I am the [road], the truth, and the life. No man [journeys] to the Father except by me." (The Greek word used here for 'way' means 'road'.) If we have been taught from childhood that an eternal destiny of heaven or hell is decided at the time of death, then this verse is naturally interpreted as saying that those who don't receive Christ before death are destined for hell. But for the ancient Jew, this verse simply says that Jesus is the Messiah. In the age to come, the Messiah will be the only way that anyone will be able to ascend to the Father. Nobody is left out by this verse under ancient Jewish interpretations because both the just and the unjust are both resurrected prior to the Messianic age to come. Death is not the end of the journey of righteousness.

When Old Testament Jewish eschatology is applied to the New Testament Church, seven major problems that have divided the churches over the centuries are resolved. (1) It solves Calvinism vs. Arminianism (election vs. free-will). (2) It solves issues about the dichotomy of free-grace verses vs. holiness verses. (3) It solves Lordship Salvation vs. Free Grace Theology. (4) For the Catholics, it gives a free-grace alternative to purgatory. (5) And, since death is not the end of the journey, it solves this problem of people who die having never heard about Christ. (6) It gives Scriptural evidence that children who die young do not go to hell. (7) And it gives Scriptural evidence for the purpose of the millennial reign. Many other Scriptural problems are solved as well.

0.1) Was the Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45-46) really a free gift?

The merchant in this passage sold everything he owned to buy the Pearl of Great Price. Was he ripped off because he bought something that was given freely to everybody else?

What about the man who found a treasure hidden in the field? (Matthew 13:44) He sold everything he had to buy that piece of land. The treasure within represents the kingdom of heaven.

Salvation is a free gift (Romans 3:24, 5:15-17, 6:23), but these men sold everything they had to inherit the kingdom. Does this mean that inheriting the kingdom is different from salvation? “The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it” (Matthew 11:12 NIV).

To those who are saved by his blood, Christ gives a directive to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. You can't seek something that is already yours. Salvation is a free gift, but inheriting the kingdom requires lots of work.

This would make sense to the ancient Jew, who focused on the resurrection instead of immediate transportation to heaven or hell upon death. They focused on being a part of Israel and ruling with Christ as priests and kings in the age to come after the resurrection. The resurrection, which is to be saved from the grave, is a free gift. But ruling over the nations is only for those who overcome sin (Revelation 2:26-27). The resurrection does not guarantee inheritance of the kingdom. Those who don't overcome sin, despite possessing faith in Christ, will be included with the nations at the resurrection, but will not reign with Christ.

0.2) The Prodigal Son

The difference between simple salvation and inheriting the kingdom can be seen in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The word “prodigal” means extravagantly wasteful. The younger son received his inheritance in full, and wasted it. The older son spent his life working for his father. The younger son's return filled his father with joy, and he celebrates the return of his son. The younger son would have been happy to simply work as one of the father's servants, but instead he is forgiven, restored, and given a celebration.

One thing is often overlooked in this parable. The father tells his older son “Everything I have is yours.” The older son still has his inheritance. However, the younger son receives his life back. He has received salvation as a free gift, but he has still lost his inheritance.

Those who seek the kingdom of the Father and His righteousness in this age will inherit the kingdom in the age to come. The older son represents those who will rule over the nations with Christ. But the Father still loves the younger son. Those who repent in the age to come will be welcomed back as sons. They will be given life again, but will not inherit the kingdom. They will not be the priests and kings who reign with Christ during the millennium.

0.3) Election and Free-Will in the New Wine System

What about those who have lived and died in cultures, generations, and times where it would have been simply impossible to learn about the saving blood of Jesus Christ? Would a loving, caring, and merciful God create souls and place them in hell until they repent? And if that was the case, wouldn't everyone repent under torture only to find out later that he or she falls back into sin? And how does that count as coming to the Father through faith in Jesus Christ?

Both the traditional Calvinist and Arminian systems tend to have uneasy solutions for those who die having never heard about Christ. Even Christian Universalists say they will be punished in hell, even if it is temporary.

Calvinism tells us that God has chosen, before they were even born, those who will go to heaven and those who will go to hell. God chooses who He will draw to Himself so that we will ask for Christ's forgiveness and salvation. This indicates that God creates souls knowing that they have no chance for salvation, and will spend eternity in hell. From a merciful point of view, it would have been better for these souls to never have been created. For many, this simply does not fit the character of a loving, caring, and merciful God.

Arminians tell us that we have free will to accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, and thus can individually choose heaven or hell by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. This would seem to be more aligned with the character of a loving God. But many still have problems with this view. What about those who have lived and died in times and cultures where hearing about Jesus Christ would have been impossible? Do they really have a free-will choice to accept Jesus as Savior?

The New Wine System, on the other hand, says God chooses who will inherit the kingdom, but does not choose those who will eventually place their faith in Jesus Christ. Those who inherit the kingdom will rule over the nations, but those in the nations are still on the road of righteousness, towards complete holiness, and will still have the opportunity to receive eternal life through a personal (discipleship) relationship with Jesus Christ, after the resurrection, during the age to come.

Let's take a look at various types of special provisions which have been developed to address this problem.

1. Pluralism and Unitarian Universalism state that all religions lead to salvation.
2. Annihilationism groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses state that souls who do not believe in Jesus Christ are destroyed, and that there is no hell.
3. Christian Universalists affirm there is some form of punishment after death for those who do not believe in Christ, but this punishment is not eternal. Eventually, all will be saved.
4. Inclusivism or Extended Mercy states that all who have faith in God will be saved by the blood of Christ, whether or not their belief includes faith in Jesus Christ.
5. The view of Postmortem Evangelism says that everyone receives the opportunity to believe in Jesus after death. Presumably, God judges whether or not the person would have accepted Christ, had they been given the opportunity. Others say that it is an issue of election, in which God elects those who are to be saved after death.
6. Some say God gives every person an opportunity to receive Christ soon before death. This can be through visions, dreams, or angels. Others say this occurs at the moment of death via middle knowledge.

There are many problems with these views. Some are assumptions made without sound Scriptural evidence. Others require distortions of the natural meaning of Scripture. All of these systems either deny hell's existence, or they simply disregard Scripture's requirement for a meaningful and personal (discipleship) relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to overcome sinful habits.

Most of these systems, including traditional Calvinism and Arminianism, are based on a presupposition that is not taught by Scripture. They assume that after death people go immediately to heaven or hell, thus making death the end of our journey. This teaching is indoctrinated into our culture. At funerals, the preacher tells us our loved one is in a better place (hopefully). What does Scripture say? What did the ancient Jews believe? When Martha was grieving over the death of her brother Lazarus, did she seek comfort in knowing Lazarus was in heaven? Or did she seek comfort in knowing he would be raised on the last day (John 11:24)?

0.4) A Summary of the New Wine System

In Old Testament times, the Jews believed everyone goes to Sheol (Hades in the Greek) when they die. In New Testament times, the Jews may have understood there to be different regions in Hades for different types of people. But everyone, both righteous and the unrighteous, still went to Hades when they died, where they awaited the resurrection. For the Greeks, Hades was only the place for the wicked. The word 'Hades' in the Bible began to be translated as hell. However, a more correct approach would be for only the Greek word Gehenna to be translated as hell. This is not to say that there is no hell. But people do not go to the lake of fire as soon as they die. It's only after they are judged. And the final Great White Throne Judgment is not until a thousand years after the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.

The New Wine System interprets Scripture in a manner much more closely resembling the ancient Jewish hope in the resurrection and the Messianic age. The focus of Scripture is on the resurrection. But the modern-day Church seems to remember the resurrection only on Easter. Every other day of the year we focus on going to heaven when you die. The resurrection becomes very anti-climactic since one is assumed to already be in heaven at the time of the resurrection. People say we will be spirits in heaven but will get our "spiritual bodies" at the resurrection. Where in Scripture does it say we will be spirits in heaven? Just as in Scripture, the New Wine System puts the focus back on the resurrection.

The blood of Christ was the atonement for everybody's sins. God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (NIV Matthew 5:45). The New Wine System recognizes Paul's teaching in Romans 5:10-21, and 1 Corinthians 15:22, as saying that just as sin came into the world for all men through Adam, reconciliation came into the world for all men through Jesus Christ. We are all reconciled by the blood of Christ. Everyone has been reconciled to God and can thus be resurrected, which is to be saved from death. Adam brought death for everyone. And likewise, the second Adam brought "justification to life" for everyone. But we must still have justification by faith and a completion of sanctification through faith before we can receive eternal life.

All men were reconciled to God at the cross. We are justified by faith when we become believers. This is the start of our journey of sanctification, which leads to the glorification of our bodies when Christ returns. Those who don't complete their journey can continue their journey after the resurrection. Thus, salvation has four parts: reconciliation, justification, sanctification, and finally glorification.

This is true for people of all ages, generations, and cultures. Every human being, beginning with Adam, has been given the opportunity to live their life for Christ. Our journey might or might not include an encounter with Jesus Christ during this lifetime. Death does not end this journey. Almost everyone will be resurrected. When Christ returns to reign as King of Kings, almost everyone will have the opportunity to put their faith in Christ and to continue their journey.

Those who have completed the journey with Jesus Christ in this lifetime will be resurrected with spiritual bodies and will reign with Christ when He returns. They are represented biblically as the Bride of Christ. People from every nation, tribe, people, and language will be a part of this wedding banquet as the Bride of Christ. But this is just the tip of the iceberg compared to the total number of people from all past generations who will complete their journey of righteousness during the millennial Messianic age to come.

There is no requirement for infant baptism, nor is there a need for an age of accountability for children. An age of accountability for children is not found in Scripture. Christ has died for the sins of all children. If the child dies, he or she will simply continue his or her journey of righteousness after the resurrection.

Likewise the mentally ill, who mature physically but never develop the mental capacity to understand Christ's gospel, are covered under His salvation. They will simply be resurrected, free of their mental illness, and will then have the opportunity to learn about Jesus Christ.

Paul said that Jesus is "the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe" (ESV 1 Timothy 4:10b).

Because of the cross, all people were born as already reconciled to God. All people can be resurrected. Jesus said, "When I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all people to myself" (ESV John 12:32). In other words, the Holy Spirit will reveal Christ to everybody. Everyone's name has been written in the Lamb's Book of Life from the foundation of the world. However, as Old Testament Scripture shows, those who harden their hearts and no longer hear Christ's voice (Hebrews 3:7, 15, 4:7) will forfeit their salvation. This is called the unpardonable sin.

The unpardonable sin is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. This was seen in the days of Moses, when the Israelites worshiped the golden calf after witnessing the miracles of Moses (Exodus 32:32-33). It's also described in Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-31, which is an intentional rejection of Christ after having received the knowledge of the truth. During the great tribulation, the unpardonable sin is taking the mark of the beast. And after the millennium, when Satan is released, those who

march against Jerusalem will be committing the unpardonable sin. All of these are examples of the hardening one's heart to the point of no longer being capable of hearing Christ's voice.

Everybody continues on their journey of salvation unless he or she commits this unpardonable sin. This does not include sins that occur in moments of weakness. This is talking about a perpetually hardened heart for which even the miracles of the Holy Spirit have no effect. This sin cannot be forgiven, in this age or in the age to come (Matthew 23:32, Mark 3:28-29, Luke 12:10), because it's sin for which there is no longer a sacrifice (Hebrews 10:26-31 and would require Christ to be crucified again (Hebrews 6:4-6). The unpardonable sin is a decision that men can make out of their own free will, just like Adam. Even believers have this free-will to reject their salvation. And it has the same consequence as Adam's sin for the same reason. Adam had the knowledge of the truth about God. But Christ died for this first sin that separated us from God. Christ's death on the cross brought reconciliation. But Christ will not be crucified a second time.

God does not show favoritism (Romans 2:11). The New Wine System is the only system that has no favoritism for specific generations, cultures or nationalities. The New Wine System is the only system that truly reflects the character of a loving, merciful, and caring God, while at the same time giving all men of all generations, cultures, and nationalities the true free-will ability and opportunity to accept or reject Jesus Christ and to mature in that relationship.

The New Wine System is the simple application of Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church. When the Messiah comes, Israel will rule the world and salvation will be brought to all the nations through that rule. Likewise, when Christ returns, the Church (which is Israel) will rule the world with Christ. The Church is the firstfruits (Jeremiah 2:3, Romans 8:23, James 1:18) of the harvest. We are the Bride who gets into the wedding banquet. We are the priests and kings who will lead the nations to eternal salvation during the millennium.

We are told to seek first the kingdom of heaven and His righteousness. Those who, in Christ, seek the righteousness of the kingdom will find it. Those who don't seek the kingdom will not find or inherit the kingdom. We have been taught that to inherit the kingdom has the same meaning as salvation. However, "Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (NIV 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Yet all of these sins have been atoned for by the blood of Christ, especially for believers.

We confuse inheriting the kingdom with “getting saved” because we incorrectly assume our journey of righteousness ends with death. Those who complete this journey before they die are the elect. But the elect are not the only ones who will receive salvation. Because all men have been reconciled, both the just and the unjust still have the hope of the resurrection (Acts 24:15). Then, the unjust will still have the opportunity to continue their journey of salvation.

The elect are those who are totally on fire for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They find God’s purpose for them as individuals, and develop enthusiasm about fulfilling that purpose. Nothing else matters, even if it costs them their lives. They help others as the Father brings people into their paths. In doing so, sin is completely overcome and they find Christ’s righteousness. Others see Christ in them and would not hesitate to want them to hold positions of authority in the government. They walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), which is to walk without sin. In other words, as they do the good works the Father has for them, all their sinful habits just naturally disappear from their lives.

Those who confuse “getting saved” with election have a tendency to water down the gospel’s requirements of what is necessary to inherit the kingdom. But the narrow gate that few find is that of election. The narrow gate is for the elect. It’s the prize for which Paul ran the race. This leads to inheriting spiritual bodies at the time of the resurrection. The wide gate, in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, is about the destruction of money when we build our houses on the sand. The foolish try to serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money. We store treasures in heaven as we do good works for the Father. If we serve money, we go through the wide gate that leads to the destruction of both the money and the worldly possessions that money buys.

These and many other Scriptural problems are solved by one simple application of Jewish eschatology to the Church. The people of Israel are a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own purposes” (1 Peter 2:9, Exodus 19:5-6). This means that the people of Israel are the elect. The Gentile believers are grafted into Israel. To be chosen does not simply mean you are saved. The people of the nations can be saved and still not be the chosen nation that will rule the world. New Testament Jewish writers such as Peter quoted Old Testament verses such as Exodus 19:5-6. They applied Old Testament prophecies about Israel to the Church. If we do likewise, then the Old Testament prophecies about Israel must be literally fulfilled in the Church as well as in Israel. Therefore, according to Bible prophecy, the Church/Israel will rule the nations with Christ during the millennium (Revelation 2:26-27, 5:10, 20:6).

0.5) Bridging the Doctrine of Catholics and Protestants

The more liberal Christians today, both Catholic and Protestant, believe that salvation can be achieved through other religions. However, traditional Catholics would say that salvation is available only to those who are baptized in the Catholic Church. Anyone who is not baptized as an infant (or at conversion) in the Catholic Church is destined for hell when they die. Infant baptism is said to remove Adam's original sin because Christ is the second Adam.

After baptism, Catholics believe a journey begins that leads to holiness. This journey involves overcoming sin. Confessed sins are forgiven by grace and by the blood of Jesus Christ. Merits are also rewarded for good deeds performed during this journey. A combination of grace and merits results in eternal life.

Those who reach a certain level of holiness through grace and merits, prior to death, are considered saints. The saints go directly to heaven when they die. Others in the Catholic Church must first spend some time in purgatory and be cleansed by fire for whatever shortcomings they have regarding holiness. Time in purgatory can be very long, but is still temporary. Eventually, those in purgatory are released to go to heaven.

As a Catholic, Martin Luther was terrified of God. He perceived God as unjust and impossible to please. The Protestant system he founded eliminated the beliefs of purgatory and merits. Under the Reformed system, no one becomes perfect. Everyone continues to sin. Perfection comes only upon reaching heaven. All believers are considered to be saints. According to Protestant teachings, good deeds do not earn merits that contribute to one's salvation.

Under the Reformed Protestant system, salvation becomes simply a matter of making a decision to believe in and to follow Jesus Christ. The gospel is that anyone can put their faith in Christ and go to heaven when they die. One is imputed with justification by the blood of Jesus upon making a decision for Christ. Thus, salvation is not a journey. Or it can be considered a journey that does not require completion. It's a decision that occurs at a specific time. The Reformed Protestant believes he was saved (past tense) on a specific date when he first asked Jesus to come into his life.

The advantage of the Protestant system over the Catholic is that one's relationship with Jesus Christ and the Father is much more personal. Salvation doesn't feel like a long journey that will never end in this lifetime before reaching the Father. The Father doesn't have to be sought through saints and priests. There is no fear of punishment in purgatory for lack of holiness or merits.

The disadvantage of the Protestant system is that one can lose the sense of the importance of holiness. The claim is nobody is perfectly holy, so sinful habits that have taken hold can be excused as irrelevant to salvation. The Protestant is still going to heaven, even if the sinful habits are never overcome. Evangelism and missions can be seen as the only important function of the church. After all, it is reasoned, one only needs to “get saved” in order to go to heaven.

Under the New Wine System, the good news of Jesus Christ combines the best from both the Catholic and Protestant doctrines. In this system salvation is a journey and not a past-tense decision. Salvation involves becoming holy, like Jesus Christ is holy. Complete sanctification, or perfect holiness, can be found on this side of the grave. Only those who reach this perfect holiness are considered saints, or “Holy Ones.” Death does not make one perfect.

Under the Catholic system, Adam’s sin is removed with infant baptism. Romans 5:10-21, and 1 Corinthians 15:22 talk about Christ being the second Adam. But these passages do not mention baptism. Everyone is reconciled to God (Romans 5:10) because everyone starts out as an enemy of God. Adam’s sin was removed for everyone by the blood of Christ. Adam’s penalty for eating the fruit was death. Everyone continues to sin. And the wages of sin is death. But now that Adam’s sin has been removed for everyone, everyone can be resurrected.

Good deeds do not contribute to salvation. We are justified by faith. Our sins are forgiven entirely by the blood of Jesus Christ when we become believers. We should not feel guilty, except to know that our sinful habits must be overcome. Believers are on the journey of righteousness toward complete sanctification. Good deeds are a mechanism for overcoming sinful habits and reaching complete sanctification, but are not involved in the forgiveness of sin. That has already been accomplished through the blood of Jesus Christ alone.

As believers, since our sins are already forgiven, we can have a relationship with Jesus Christ and Father that leads to righteousness. There is no need to pray to the saints. Only through a personal (discipleship) relationship with Jesus Christ can we even hope to become like Him and overcome all our sinful habits.

If we do not reach holiness before we die, there is no fear of punishment. Death is not the end of the journey. The good news is that sinful habits can be completely overcome by faith. It’s a faith that involves works. But for those who don’t have this faith, even death is not the end of the journey of righteousness. This is the true good news about Christ’s sacrifice. This is the true gospel, which will be preached to all nations. Then the end will come.

Part One

The Road to Being Born Again

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The Greek word used here for “way” means road. Salvation is a journey of righteousness to complete sanctification. It’s a path that we must take. But this journey does not end when we die. The journey can continue throughout the millennium.

Paul says we must “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). But God does the greater work in us (verse 13).

What is the definition of salvation? We are saved as long as we are on the road that leads to complete sanctification. We will be given eternal life at the end of the journey. However, if we were to harden our hearts so that we no longer hear Christ’s voice (Heb. 3:7, 15, 4:7), then we would forfeit salvation and no longer be saved.

We were saved (reconciled) at the cross because Jesus paid the price for our salvation. Christ was a ransom for everyone. Christ’s atonement is unlimited. Everyone became Christ’s sheep at the cross because Christ died for everyone. But most of Christ’s sheep are still lost. We are all Christ’s sheep, even those who are still lost, unless we harden our hearts to the point of not hearing Christ’s voice. We must have faith in God, and salvation is credited to us as righteousness. This is a gradual process as faith in God grows.

Everyone must eventually put their faith in Jesus Christ in order to be forgiven of their sins and to begin their journey of righteousness. The important point to remember is that the road towards holiness does not end at death, but can continue through the millennium. Death is not the end of the journey. The final judgment is not until a thousand years after the resurrection.

Chapter 1

The New Wine System in a Nutshell

Traditional conservative mainstream Christian teaching states that if one dies without making a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, an eternity in hell awaits. For many, this teaching brings up a series of difficult questions. What about the people who have died without hearing about Jesus? Will they spend eternity in hell? I agree with all the theologians who say Jesus Christ is necessary in order to be saved. But few have offered a good solution to this very puzzling dilemma.

Calvinists tell us that God makes the decision. God determines who will hear about Christ, and who will believe the gospel and accept Christ as Savior. This basically puts the responsibility for those who have never heard on God. Calvinists say that God has the right to choose who will be saved and who will not be saved. Arminians, on the other hand, say this makes God the author of sin. God creates souls and places them into situations, times, and cultures where there is absolutely no possibility of hearing about Christ in their lifetimes. For example, what about all the Native Americans who lived before Columbus discovered America? Are they all currently burning in hell?

There are many convincing verses on both sides of this issue. This issue has divided the Church for centuries. Can the Bible be this difficult to properly interpret? Most theologians tend to evaluate verses on one side of an issue and then list verses on the other side of the argument, juxtaposing the two. They try to see which side, in their opinion, has the greater weight of Scripture. No matter what system of interpretation you choose, there seems to be a number of hard questions, and quite a few verses that are difficult to understand.

Could it be possible to have one simple system of interpretation that clearly explains all the traditionally difficult verses in the Bible? Most theologians would say no. Yet that is exactly what is found in the New Wine System. This system clearly and simply resolves the difficulties between Calvinism and Arminianism, and also explains all other difficult verses of Scripture. I have not encountered a single verse that is not easily understood using the New Wine System.

Yet this system does not involve the use of symbolism or difficult allegories that deny the literal meaning. The New Wine System is the simple application of Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church. What does this mean? Simply stated, in this system the Church's purpose when Christ returns is

interpreted in the same way that the Jews interpreted Israel's purpose at the Messiah's coming.

Old Testament prophecy is interpreted as literally fulfilled in the Church. According to this view, the Church is Israel. This is not to say the Church replaces Israel. Gentile believers are grafted into the vine, which is Israel. There are two kingdoms in Israel. Gentiles who are in Christ can be understood to be the northern kingdom. Jews, when they are grafted back in, are all from the southern kingdom. When Christ returns, these two kingdoms (sticks) of Israel will be reunited, as is promised in Ezekiel 37:15-28.

We are grafted into Israel and inherit all the very same promises and prophecies of Israel, interpreted in the same literal way as an ancient Jew would have read Scripture. It's amazing how many problems this solves, and how simple the solution really is. But it requires adapting the mindset of a Jew, not a Greek. There will be more about that later.

What about the verses that Christian Universalists use to say everyone will be saved? They use some very convincing verses. Yet we know there are other verses which would seem to teach eternal punishment. The New Wine System clearly and intuitively explains the verses used by Christian Universalists.

What about infants who die? Will they spend eternity in hell? Many Catholics believe in a place called limbo, which is neither heaven nor hell, for infants who have not been baptized. This is a long-standing Catholic tradition. But Protestants want Scriptural evidence for all doctrines.

Infants are born with Adam's sinful state (Rom. 5:12-21, 1 Cor. 15:22). All parents know that their infant child will rebel and become disobedient at some point as they begin to grow. This becomes a dilemma for theologians. How can infants go to heaven given their sinful state? The doctrine of infant baptism was developed early in church history to allow for the salvation of infants. Many believe that infant baptism removes Adam's sinful state. Yet there is no Scripture to directly support this claim. Many believe that a merciful God will not condemn infants to hell, but they offer very little Scriptural evidence.

If God is merciful to infants, then He is also merciful to young children, right? Is there some age of accountability that a child reaches, after which they are immediately condemned to hell should they die without Christ? What if the child dies a day or two after he is able to understand? Can young children go to heaven without overcoming Adam's sinful state? Even young children have already sinned.

These are very difficult questions for theologians. And of course these questions are answered easily by the New Wine System.

Will the mentally ill be condemned to hell? If not, where does God draw the line? How mentally ill does one have to be in order to get an exemption? If God allows the mentally ill to go to heaven without a profession of faith in Christ, then what does that do to the verse that says no man comes to the Father except through Christ?

Some people turn to the doctrine of election to answer these questions. The argument is that all infants who die were already elected for salvation. Spurgeon believed that only those elected for salvation are allowed to die in infancy. Perhaps all people with mental illness are also elected, and thus saved. Others argue that infants are not held responsible for Adam's sin, and have no sins of their own. It's very complicated, but it's simple in the New Wine System.

What about infants who died in ancient times, in areas of the world that would not hear about Christ for centuries to come? Under the argument of election, does this mean that God simply arranges for all his elect to die when they are infants, in order that they might be saved? Does this really sound like God's plan for his chosen?

Many people find the doctrine of election difficult to believe in relation to a merciful God. Does God really choose some to be predestined to hell before they are born? Does God condemn people who die without hearing about Christ? If not, then what about people who have heard, but the missionary did a poor job of delivering Christ's message? Does God take into account Satan's deceptions? What if the missionary failed to identify a cultural barrier that causes the person not to understand? Could the missionary's failed attempt at witness actually cause the person to lose his possibility of salvation?

In this book, I hope to show that the many millions of pagans of the ancient world, and the many millions of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, New Agers, Christians, and Jews of the modern world who have died in their sins will have the opportunity to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ during the millennium. Children who die young will mature in Christ during the millennium. People who are mentally ill and cannot understand about Christ will mature in Christ during the millennium. People who have heard about Christ but die suddenly before making a decision will be able to mature in Christ during the millennium. And believers who continue in their sins will have the opportunity to mature in Christ during the millennium. The elect are those who mature in Christ during this age.

1.1) A Quick Introduction to the New Wine System

"Through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life" (Rom. 5:18). "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

"We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10). Jesus said, "I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (John 12:32). Paul said Jesus Christ is the, "Savior of all people, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). See 1 Cor. 15:22, 1 John 2:2, Rom. 11:32, 1 Tim. 2:3-6, 1 John 2:2, Heb. 2:9, John 6:33, Titus 2:11, 2 Cor. 5:14-15, and Rom. 5:18-19. Reconciliation has nothing to do with what we might do, say, or believe. We were all reconciled. But those who reject Christ lose their reconciliation.

Reconciliation is not justification by faith. New believers are justified and receive the Holy Spirit. Justification by faith is the start of sanctification, when we are credited with righteousness. Later, after completing our journey of sanctification, making good on that credit, we will be glorified with immortal bodies at the resurrection. But we must complete that journey.

Jesus said, "I am the [road], the truth, and the life. No one [journeys] to the Father, except through me" (John 14:6). (The Greek word used here for "way" means road.) Salvation includes a journey of faith. Paul said, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

Paul said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10). We are not saved by works. Christ did that on the cross.

Even sanctification is a free gift by grace alone since the Holy Spirit changes us on the inside as we do the works. But without works there is no sanctification and thus no eternal life. Paul said, "But now, being made free from sin, and having become servants of God, you have your fruit of sanctification, and the result of eternal life" (Rom. 6:22). Again, Paul says the fruit of good works is sanctification and the result of sanctification is eternal life. So without works there is no sanctification and thus no eternal life. Paul also said, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). Therefore, we must complete our journey of sanctification in order to journey to the Father and to the glorification of our bodies.

We are saved by faith and through grace. But faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 2:26). Our belief and faith are not one-time events. Salvation by faith is a journey. By faith and belief we are sanctified as we do the works of the Father. "He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). God's grace is more powerful even than death. "Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

John 3:16, 18 For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ... He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

Belief and faith are a journey. Those who willfully refuse Christ's journey are judged already, which means they've lost their reconciliation. Those who complete their journey to overcome sin will be given eternal life. Those who fall short in this age will be able to continue their journey after the resurrection in the age to come. But you can lose your reconciliation if you willfully turn away from God and keep on sinning.

Hebrews 10:26-27 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which will devour the adversaries.

All are reconciled because Christ is the second Adam. "Through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life" (Rom. 5:18). "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). This is in the context of Paul's resurrection chapter.

Because Christ is the second Adam, all men were "justified to life." Those who remain reconciled are Christ's sheep and still hear his voice. Being "justified to life," Christ's lost sheep still hear his voice and remain reconciled with God, even if they die. Being "justified to life," they can be resurrected. There are two types of bodies at the resurrection: glorified (celestial) bodies and mortal (terrestrial) bodies. If you die before completing your journey, Christ will simply raise you up at the resurrection. You can complete your journey in the age to come. But you will still be under Judgment with a mortal body. Those who reject Christ no longer hear his voice. They have lost their reconciliation and will not be resurrected.

John 5:25 Most certainly, I tell you, the hour comes, and now is, when the dead will hear the Son of God's voice; and those who hear will live.

John 5:28-29 Don't marvel at this, for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice, and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

The gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Mat. 24:14). The gospel (good news) of the kingdom is that anyone can choose to completely overcome sin (all sinful habits), which is to be completely sanctified (1 Thess. 5:23), through a personal (discipleship) relationship with Jesus Christ. No one who abides in Christ keeps on sinning (1 John 3:6), because in Christ there is no sin. No one born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God (1 John 3:9).

But what about the people who fall short of this goal? What about people who die before they have overcome every sinful habit? Does death change us and remove all sin? No verse of Scripture says this.

Traditional Christian doctrine is based on the two-type system of everyone going to either heaven or hell immediately after death. This is Greek thinking. Children are taught this, and every verse of the New Testament is interpreted in this context. The resurrection becomes simply a time when the righteous get better bodies and the wicked are judged. It's not when they become alive again.

The ancient Jews, however, did not believe this. The Old Testament teaches that both the righteous and the wicked sleep in Sheol (the grave) until the resurrection, at which time they become alive again (Isaiah 26:14, Daniel 12:2, John 11:11-14, 1 Corinthians 15:51). This allows for more than two types of people to be in the grave. Ancient Jews believed in three types: (1) The chosen people of Israel, (2) righteous Gentiles, (3) and the wicked. The New Wine System interprets the New Testament based on this Old Testament context. The New Wine System applies Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church.

Salvation is a journey of righteousness, by faith in Jesus Christ, who is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe (1 Tim. 4:10). For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Cor. 15:22). Therefore, everyone is reconciled by Christ's death on the cross, even if they are not Christian. But without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Be perfect, therefore, as your

heavenly Father is perfect (Mat. 5:48). Jesus is the road, the truth, and the life. No one journeys all the way to the Father except through a relationship with Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Death, however, is not the end of the journey.

The wise (Dan. 12:3, 12:10, Mat. 7:24, 25:2) complete their journey in this age (1 Thess. 5:23). They are the saints, which means holy ones. They are the elect in both Old Testament and New. They are the Bride of Christ. They are the firstfruits of the harvest (2 Thess. 2:13, James 1:18). They will be resurrected with immortal bodies (1 Cor. 15:50), and will inherit the kingdom, when Christ returns. The saints will no longer be under judgment (John 5:24). They will reign as kings and priests over the nations (Rev. 2:26, 5:10, 20:6), here on earth (Mat. 5:5), leading the nations to righteousness (Dan 12:3).

The foolish, (Mat. 7:26, 25:2) still have sinful habits when they die. This includes believers as well as lost sheep. But all of Christ's sheep, both the just and the unjust (Acts 24:15), hear his voice (John 10:16, 27). They will hear Christ's voice from the tombs and be resurrected with mortal bodies to continue their journey of righteousness (John 5:28-29). They will still be under judgment (John 5:28-29). They are saved, but they will not inherit the kingdom (1 Co. 6:9, Gal 5:21). During the millennial reign of Christ's kingdom, some will be led to righteousness (Dan. 12:3) and will receive eternal life. But others will become wicked (Rev 20:7-9), and will die the second death (Rev. 2:11, 20:6, 20:14, 21:8).

The wicked (Dan. 12:10, Mat. 24:48, 25:26) are those who harden their hearts and can no longer hear the voice of Christ (Heb. 3:7, 15, 4:7), as in taking the mark of the beast (Rev. 14:9-11). They forfeit their reconciliation (Mat. 12:31, Heb. 6:4-6). They will not be resurrected. Today, the dead are asleep (John 11:11, Acts 7:60, 13:36, 1 Cor. 15:6) in Hades. But after the millennial reign of Christ, the wicked will come to life and be thrown in to the lake of fire (Rev. 20:5, 14), which is hell-fire (Gehenna). The smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they will have no rest, day or night (Rev. 14:11).

If you want to be invited to the wedding banquet, if you want Jesus to say he knows you when he returns (Mat. 25:12, 7:23), if you want to be in the Bride of Christ, if you want to be a part of the true Israel that will have authority over the nations when Christ returns (Rev. 2:26), then you must repent and seek Christ's help to completely overcome all (100%) of the sinful habits in your life. Because, without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

1.2) The Resurrection Verses

In support of this quick introduction, consider the following three points of Scripture:

(1) Scripture teaches that at the Great White Throne of Judgment, everyone who is not in the Book of Life is condemned to the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). Scripture also teaches that the resurrection is a thousand years prior (Rev. 20:4).

(2) Scripture teaches that “many,” but not all, of the unjust are resurrected right after the great tribulation (Dan. 12:1-3, John 5:25, 28-29, Acts 24:15). Both the just and the unjust are resurrected at the same time. For those who would say that a thousand years is inserted between the resurrection of the just and the unjust, John 5:28 says, “For an hour is coming when all those who are in the tombs will hear his voice.” Also, the timing of Dan 12:1-3 is explicitly tied to the great tribulation.

(3) Daniel 12:1-3 teaches that even the resurrected unjust are in the Book of Life at that time. They are “delivered” or “escape” from the grave simply because their names are in the Book of Life. Since the resurrected unjust are in the Book of Life, they certainly have an opportunity for salvation. As long as their names are still in the Book of Life at the end of the millennium, they will be eternally saved.

Daniel 12:1b-3 ESV But at that time your people shall be delivered [escape], everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.

(2) And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (3) And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

The Hebrew word used for “delivered” is better translated as “escape.” Some will argue that Daniel 12:1 says those who are “delivered” or “escape” are delivered from the great tribulation. Pre-tribulation rapture advocates like to interpret this passage in this way. However, Scripture teaches that the saints are defeated during the great tribulation (Dan. 7:25, Rev. 13:5-7). These saints are also in the Book of Life.

Therefore, Daniel 12:1 cannot be saying that those in the Book of Life are all delivered from the great tribulation. Those in the Book of Life are “delivered” or “escape” from the grave. According to the verse, some who escape the grave are raised to everlasting life, while others are raised to shame and contempt. Both

groups of people, it would seem, are in the Book of Life. Both groups escape from the grave. According to the verse, “many” awake. Many is not all. Therefore, not all who are in the grave, escape. What, then, is the criterion given for being raised? Apparently the issue is not one of being just or unjust. Those who are in the Book of Life are the ones who escape from the grave, both the just and the unjust. Those not in the Book of Life do not escape.

John 5:25 Most certainly, I tell you, the hour comes, and now is, when the dead will hear the Son of God's voice; and those who hear will live.

Jesus said “my sheep hear my voice” (John 10:27). But many of Christ’s sheep are still lost (Mat. 10:6, 15:24, Luke 15:4-6). Only those who hear Christ’s voice from the grave will be raised, according to John 5:25. However, according to verses 28 and 29, those who hear Christ’s voice include both those who have done good and those who have done evil. The word “all” in this verse is qualified by verse 25. Only those who hear who will live. And only Christ’s sheep will hear his voice. Some of them have done good, and others have done evil.

John 5:28-29 Don't marvel at this, for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice, (29) and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

Jesus is addressing the Pharisees and teachers of the law who do not hear his voice. He is saying they will not be resurrected because they do not hear his voice. Remember that “many” will be resurrected, but not all. And of those “many” there are two groups: “Some [are resurrected] to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” This is the wise, the foolish, and the wicked.

In response to people who say that the unjust are not raised until after the millennium, I will point out that each of these verses say this happens at an “hour” that is to come. This hour should not be stretched into a millennium, or two different hours separated by a millennium. The unjust who hear Christ’s voice are raised at the start of the millennium along with the righteous. They then are given the opportunity to accept Christ and to mature in Him during that time. The righteous, on the other hand, will reign as kings and priests with Christ during the millennium (Rev. 1:6, 2:26-27, 5:10, 20:6).

Those who hear Christ’s voice are Christ’s sheep, and they alone will be raised from the dead. But Christ’s sheep remain in two sub-categories. Those who do good and mature in their relationship with Christ to become like Him will not be

judged. These not only hear Christ's words, but know the gospel and believe in Him. They will be resurrected to eternal life and escape judgment. To see this, look back to verse 24:

John 5:24 "Most certainly I tell you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and doesn't come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Those who believe and mature in Christ to become like Him do not come into judgment. They are raised to a resurrection of life, according to verses 28-29.

On the other hand, those who hear Christ's voice but have not yet believed and matured in Christ are raised to a resurrection of judgment. This does not mean they are raised to a resurrection of condemnation. It simply means they are still under judgment. They have not yet inherited eternal life because they have not yet matured in Christ and become holy. Death, however, is not the end of the journey. We can still continue our on our journey of righteousness even after the resurrection.

But what about the fact that "all" who are in the tombs will hear Christ's voice and come out? How does this reconcile with what Christ said just three verses earlier, that "those who hear will live?" How is it possible that only those who hear will live, and yet all who are in the tombs will hear and come out? Verse 25 can be a qualifier for the "all" in verse 28. In other words, there can be exceptions to any given usage of "all" depending on the context.

In Scripture, "all" does not have to mean a complete whole. There can be exceptions, depending on context. For example, look at Matthew 10:22, 12:23, 17:11, 2:3-4, 3:4-6, 8:24, and 9:35.

Another possibility is to view the tombs mentioned in this verse as a metaphor for those awaiting the resurrection. Could it be that those who do not hear Christ's voice are not metaphorically in their tombs? To be buried in a tomb was usually an indicator of wealth and status. The poor were cremated. This is not to say that only wealthy people will be resurrected. However, belief in the resurrection was certainly a strong reason that people who could afford burial chose to be buried in tombs. Many (but not all) in the "dust of the earth" will awake. Everyone in the metaphorical "tomb" will hear Christ's voice because they await the resurrection. Those in the metaphorical tomb are Christ's sheep. But not everyone in the "grave" (Hades) will be resurrected.

1.3) Christian Universalist Verses Solved

Christian Universalism says that all people will eventually go to heaven. Universalists have a series of verses that they interpret to mean that everyone will receive eternal life. Many theologians would simply say these are difficult verses, and would in some cases try to explain that they don't really say what they seem to be saying.

Under the New Wine System, however, there are no difficult verses in Scripture. All verses are easily understood. Peter talked about Paul's letters:

2 Peter 3:14-16 ESV Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. (15) And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, (16) as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

The verses used by Christian Universalists are easily understood once Paul is understood. These verses seem to indicate that everyone will have eternal life. A number of these verses are from Paul's letters. The key to understanding these verses is to understand Paul's teaching about Christ being the second Adam. But first, let's take a look at several of these verses.

1 Timothy 4:10 ESV For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

1 John 2:2 ESV He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 12:32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Romans 11:32 For God has shut up all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

1 Timothy 2:3-6 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; (4) who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth. (5) For there is one God, and one

mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (6) who gave himself as a ransom for all; the testimony in its own times;

Hebrews 2:9 But we see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for everyone.

Christ tasted death for everyone. This was done by the grace of God. Does not this mean that God's grace is extended to everyone?

Luke 2:10-11 The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all the people. (11) For there is born to you, this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

John 6:33 For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."

Titus 2:11 ESV For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.

The following verse shows the direct application of Christ's death for all people. Christ died for all. "Therefore all died." All of Adam's children were given Adam's death sentence. Christ took that death sentence for everyone by dying in our place. Effectively, every person has paid the price for his or her sins because Christ took the death sentence and paid the price for all of Adam's children.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. (15) He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again.

This next verse will give us a clue as to what is really going on with all these verses, and why not everyone will have eternal life:

Romans 5:18-19 So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. (19) For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous.

All men were justified to life. But not all will be made righteous. What does it mean to be “justified to life?” It means that because of Christ’s blood, everyone can be resurrected. But it does not mean that everyone will have eternal life.

Let’s take a look at this passage in more detail. This is the passage where Paul teaches that Christ is the second Adam. The key to understanding the Christian Universalist verses is to understand what Paul means by Jesus being the second Adam. Let’s back up a few verses and work our way down to where Paul says “all men were justified to life,” but that only “many will be made righteous.” Then we can understand what Paul means in saying Christ is the second Adam.

Romans 5:6-9 For while we were yet weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For one will hardly die for a righteous man. Yet perhaps for a righteous person someone would even dare to die. (8) But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him.

Everyone starts out being ungodly. Christ died for everyone. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Because of this, by faith, we can be justified. But that’s a second step. It’s “much more” than the first step of Christ’s death for everyone. So how do we distinguish the “everyone” for whom Christ died from those justified by his blood? Everyone has been reconciled. But it’s only by faith that we become justified, which is the second step. After being justified, and credited with righteousness, we can begin the third step of starting our journey of sanctification where we make good on that credit. Finally, the fourth step is the glorification of our bodies when Christ returns.

Romans 5:10-11 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life. (11) Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Again, the reconciliation occurred while we were still enemies of God. Thus, everyone has been reconciled to God. But not everyone will inherit eternal life. Next, Paul starts talking about Adam and comparing Adam’s sin with our sins.

Romans 5:12-14 Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned. (13) For until the law, sin was in the world; but

sin is not charged when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those whose sins weren't like Adam's disobedience, who is a foreshadowing of him who was to come.

Sin entered into the world through Adam. The consequence of sin is death. Death passed to all men. From an Old Testament or Jewish perspective, the resurrection is the reversal of the penalty of death that was given to Adam and all his descendants. Paul seems to be making a distinction between Adam's sin and those who lived after Adam. Adam was not already a slave to sin when he made his decision to of disobedience. Then Paul says Adam is a foreshadowing of him who was to come. Adam was a foreshadowing of Christ.

Romans 5:15-17 But the free gift isn't like the trespass. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. (16) The gift is not as through one who sinned: for the judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification. (17) For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ.

Paul is making distinctions between Adam and Christ, the second Adam. Death came to everyone because of the trespass of Adam. "Those who receive" the gift of righteousness are those who reign (live) in life through Jesus Christ. It's important to note the difference between "all" and "many." In verse 12 above, Paul says, "death passed to all men, because all sinned." But "all" do not reign in life through Christ.

Romans 5:18-21 So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. (19) For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous. (20) The law came in besides, that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly; (21) that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now we have it. “All” men were condemned because of Adam. Likewise “all” men were justified to life. But to qualify this, “many will be made righteous.” How does this happen? As we “reign” in Christ through righteousness, it will lead to eternal life. After we have completed our journey of sanctification, we can be given eternal life because of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Let’s review what we have learned. Because of Adam’s disobedience, all people sin. Because all people sin, all are condemned to death. Because of Christ’s obedience, all men have been reconciled. Thus, all are “justified to life.” This means the penalty of death, for all people, has been reversed, for all people. All people have been given the justification that allows for the resurrection. Thus, both the just and the unjust will be resurrected (Acts 24:15). But not all will inherit eternal life. Only the “many” who chose to follow Christ are justified and credited with righteousness because justification is by faith.

Jesus is the “Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.” We are saved from death. We are saved from the grave. We will be resurrected. But there are two types of resurrections. “Those who have done good, [are raised] to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, [are raised] to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29b). Sanctification is a journey that must be completed before we can be given eternal life. The wise will be raised to a resurrection of life. The foolish, who still do evil, will be resurrected but will still be under judgment. But the wicked will not be resurrected.

Because sanctification is an important step in salvation, the whole process of salvation must be viewed as a journey. Thus, we can see why Jesus is the “Savior of all people, especially those who believe.” You might want to go back and read all those Christian Universalist verses again. After understanding Paul’s teaching about Christ being the second Adam, these verses will make a lot more sense. Here is one more Christian Universalist verse that I purposefully excluded from the previous list. This verse is in Paul’s chapter on the resurrection, and should thus be interpreted in the context of the resurrection. It should also be interpreted in the context of Paul’s teaching about the second Adam.

1 Corinthians 15:22 ESV For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

This verse draws an undeniable parallelism. All who die because of Adam are made alive because of Christ. This verse does not impose any conditions upon those who are made alive. If someone has died in Adam, then they will be made alive in Christ. Since everyone died in Adam, all people are made alive in Christ.

Some have interpreted this verse to say that “All in Christ will be made alive.” That is not what the verse says. None of the translations render it this way. It says, “In Christ shall all be made alive.”

Others have said that some are made alive for judgment. Nothing in the context of the passage indicates judgment. The context of the passage is the resurrection. Paul gives hope for the resurrection using the argument of Christ’s resurrection. Because of Christ’s resurrection, “all shall be made alive.” Why would people need to be made alive “in Christ” in order to be condemned?

What do traditional theologians say when refuting the Christian Universalist use of these verse? A good example comes from Dr. Robert A. Morey. In his book, *Death and the Afterlife*, Dr. Morey has a chapter regarding Universalism. I will not go through all the different arguments Dr. Morey made, because I would agree with many since I am not a Universalist. However, I was interested in Dr. Morey’s thoughts about verses like these. On page 243, Dr. Morey writes:

Second, there are passages where the Universalist interpretation depends solely on the simplistic and naïve assumption that the biblical words “all” and “world” mean every human being who ever lived or shall ever live (John 1:29, 12:32; etc.)

What Universalists fail to observe is that biblical words should be interpreted in terms of how they are used. Once it is admitted that the words “all” and “world” are used in passages where they cannot mean all of humanity, the simplistic assumption of the Universalist must be rejected.

A few paragraphs later, Dr. Morey lists several verses that clearly show that the words “all” and “world” do not refer to every individual. The verses he lists for “world” are Luke 2:2, John 1:10, 7:4, 15:18, 17:9, 1 John 2:15, and 1 John 5:19. The verses he lists for “all” are Matt. 3:5,6, Mark 1:5, and John 3:26. The best example is found Matt. 10:22 where Jesus said that we will be hated by all men because of Him. Clearly there are some exceptions.

Do traditional theologians really try to explain these verses by simply by saying that the terms “world” and “all” do not include every last person? If this is the case, then these verses would have to mean that most people will be saved. The same theologians, when asked, say the narrow gate is salvation, and few people can find it. How can only a few find the narrow gate of salvation, and yet nearly all be saved? (The narrow gate is that of the elect.) The New Wine System provides the answers that traditional theology can only chalk up to “difficult verses.”

1.4) Putting it all Together

If we interpret John 5:24-29 in light of Daniel 12:1-3, then it all comes together. The book of life is simply a list of Christ's sheep. But most are still lost. Many of Christ's sheep were children and infants when they died. They are still Christ's sheep as long as they are in the book of life. Christ only rejects His sheep, and blots their names, if they have hardened their hearts to the point of no longer hearing His voice. Until then, he still considers them to be His sheep. They still hear his voice and will be resurrected. Death does not cause God to give up on us. Death is not an obstacle for God. The foolish will remain in the book of life into the millennium. Many, however, will reject Christ during the millennium. This is why, in Revelation 20:7-10, Satan is released after the thousand years to tempt the nations again, and multitudes march against Christ.

	The Wise	The Foolish	The Wicked
Dan 12:2	Awake to everlasting life	Awake to shame and contempt.	Not the many. Not all are raised.
John 5:24-25	Those who hear and believe	Those who hear but are still lost	Those who do not hear Christ's voice
John 5:28-29	Those who have done good	Those who have done evil	Those who do not hear Christ's voice
Acts 24:15	The Just	The Unjust	
1 John 5:16-18	Does not sin	Sin not leading to death	Sin leading to death
Rev 20:4-5	Represented by those beheaded	Those being reigned over in the millennium	The rest of the dead, who take the mark of the beast

Daniel 12:2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

John 5:24-25 "Most certainly I tell you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and doesn't come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. (25) Most certainly, I tell you, the hour comes, and now is, when the dead will hear the Son of God's voice; and those who hear will live.

John 5:28-29 Don't marvel at this, for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice, (29) and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

Acts 24:15 having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

1 John 5:16-18 ESV If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death [foolish], he shall ask, and God will give him life--to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death [wicked]; I do not say that one should pray for that. (17) All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. (18) We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning [wise], but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

1.5) The Rest of the Dead

Revelation 20:4-5 says that the souls of those beheaded for refusing to take the mark of the beast are resurrected. Nothing is said about those who die in Christ before the great tribulation. A literal interpretation would say that only those who are missing a head are resurrected at the start of the millennium, and the "rest" of the dead are resurrected at the end of the millennium. Of course, this interpretation is not in agreement with 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, which says those who are in Christ are raised before those who are still alive are gathered.

The interpretation of this verse can be difficult. Pre-millennialists usually interpret this verse to say that all those who are in Christ are resurrected at the start of the millennium, and those not in Christ are resurrected after the millennium.

Even though this verse is difficult to interpret, this interpretation is imposed on the much more simple and precise verses such as Daniel 12:1-3 and John 5:28-29. The “hour” must either be stretched into a millennium, or the hour must become two separate hours separated by a millennium.

Revelation 20:4-6 I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as didn't worship the beast nor his image, and didn't receive the mark on their forehead and on their hand. They lived, and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (5) The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. (6) Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over these, the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him one thousand years.

A much more consistent and reasonable interpretation of these verses would be that the “rest of the dead” are those who take the mark of the beast during the tribulation. This is in the context of the passage. John only sees those who refused the mark. Therefore, the “rest” are those who take the mark. They are not resurrected. They remain dead, and do not “come to life” until the Book of Life is opened and they are thrown eternally into the lake of fire. During the tribulation, those who harden their hearts and no longer hear Christ’s voice will take the mark of the beast, and thus be willfully and knowingly rejecting Christ. Their names will be blotted from the Book of Life. This happens to all the wicked, who harden their hearts and no longer hear Christ’s voice.

Amillennialists believe the just and the unjust are raised simultaneously. Premillennialists believe there is a thousand year period between the resurrection and the Great White Throne of Judgment. Both are correct. However, Amillennialists are incorrect in their belief that the Great White Throne occurs at the time of the resurrection, and Premillennialists are incorrect in saying that the unjust are not raised until after the millennium. There are correct and incorrect beliefs found in both groups. The truth hides in the middle.

1.6) A Perfect Plan of Salvation from a Perfect God

Would a perfect God come up with a perfect plan? God does not show favoritism (Romans 2:11). Would God allow His Son to die for our sins, and fail to design a way for each and every one of us to benefit from that sacrifice?

God's character includes love, justice, and impartiality. The plan of salvation presented in this book is the only one that shows no partiality, but at the same time requires us all to mature in Christ while living here on the earth before receiving eternal life. Some will receive eternal life before others, but this is simply a part of the plan. God uses the first ones saved to bring the good news to everyone else. In the scheme of eternity, the order of salvation is not important if all eventually have the opportunity to hear and believe. God elects those who will teach God's plan of righteousness to the non-elect. God's perfect plan does not neglect the majority of people who have lived - those who die without knowledge of Christ.

Given God's character of love, justice, and impartiality, is it reasonable to believe that Scripture can be literally and naturally interpreted in the way that is presented in this book, and yet be incorrect? Is it reasonable to believe an imperfect plan of salvation over a perfect plan of salvation for the sake of traditional interpretation?

Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) both include systems of salvation that do not include punishment for those who have never heard the gospel. It is my belief that this is one of the big draws for those two growing churches. Many people who know God's character and have difficulty accepting the systems of salvation presented by mainstream denominations. Mainstream salvation doctrines do not reflect God's character.

However, the systems of salvation presented by Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons are also imperfect because of favoritism. They each offer a greater level of eternal salvation for those who join their church. Everyone who was born before these churches existed would not have equal opportunity for the same type of salvation. God's true perfect plan of salvation shows no favoritism.

A very knowledgeable atheist told me that if God were to exist, then God would be his worst enemy. How many people have been deceived about God and avoided churches because of incorrect doctrinal teachings which portray God as cruel and unjust? How many read the Old Testament and say God is cruel for ordering the killing of entire cities including women and children? But these were cities which acted against God's plan for everyone. And from God's perspective, they were only put to sleep for a short while until they could later be resurrected.

1.7) The Dichotomy of Verses about Salvation

Scripture holds a potentially confusing dichotomy of verses about salvation and inheriting the kingdom of heaven. Notice that all the holiness verses are about entering or inheriting the kingdom. The salvation verses simply discuss salvation.

Salvation	Inheriting the Kingdom
Romans 10:9 – Confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in our hearts that he was raised from the dead.	Matthew 5:20 – Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
Romans 10:13, Joel 2:31-32 – Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.	Matthew 5:48 – Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.
Romans 6:23 – The wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life.	1 Corinthians 6:9-10 – Neither the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers will inherit the kingdom of God.
Ephesians 2:8-9 – By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one would boast.	Galatians 5:19-21 – Here Paul includes sexual immorality, impurity, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy as sins that prevent one from inheriting the kingdom of God.
John 3:16 – Believe on Jesus Christ and you will have eternal life.	Ephesians 5:3-5 – Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

John 1:12-13 - But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God's children, 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.	The seven letters to the seven churches each have a warning, which says that only those who overcome sin will inherit the kingdom. Each letter gives a different description of what it means to inherit the kingdom.
2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.	Revelation 21:7-8 – Only those who overcome sin will inherit the kingdom of God.
2 Corinthians 5:21 - For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.	1 John 5:18 - Anyone born of God does not continue to sin.
Acts 16:30-31 - Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.	1 John 3:6-9 - No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.
Matthew 10:32 - So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.	Matthew 7:21 - Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Also consider John 5:28-29, quoted earlier. How does this verse fit with the doctrine of salvation by grace and through faith alone? Those who have done good are raised to a resurrection of life. Those who have done evil are raised to a resurrection of judgment. If the judgment is condemnation, then how is this any different than salvation by works, or salvation by one's own merit? However, those who have done evil are still reconciled. They are not condemned, but are still under judgment. Those who have done good inherit the kingdom.

Some people have noticed this dichotomy of teaching between Paul's message of grace and Jesus' stark message of holiness, which in some places seems even stricter than that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. The Sermon on the

Mount clearly delivers the Ten Commandments on a deeper level. We are not to look at a woman in lust. Anger toward our brother is tantamount to murder. Is the message of Jesus truly a message of salvation by grace?

By reading Scripture from the viewpoint of the ancient Jews, it is possible to rectify the interpretation that causes this dichotomy of verses. It must be understood that salvation is a journey of righteousness to complete sanctification. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The Greek word used for “way” means road. Salvation is a journey of righteousness; a path that we must take. For some this journey does not end at death, but continues throughout the millennium.

The journey must be the path of Jesus Christ. Our sins were paid for before we were born, at the cross. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). Everyone was reconciled at the cross. Then, at some point, we are individually justified and credited with righteousness when we confess Jesus Christ as our Savior. When we become a believer, our sins are forgiven. But this is only the beginning of our journey towards righteousness. We must make good on the credit. The journey of righteousness should be continued as a believer, leading eventually to eternal life (1 Thess. 4:3, 5:23, 2 Thess. 2:13, 1 Peter 1:2).

Romans 6:21-23 What fruit then did you have at that time in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. (22) But now, being made free from sin, and having become servants of God, you have your fruit of sanctification, and the result of eternal life. (23) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When we become believers, we become free from sin. Does that mean we immediately stop sinning? No, but by the free gift of the Holy Spirit, we become able to overcome all our sinful habits. Over time, this is the “fruit of sanctification.” Paul said the “fruit of sanctification” results in eternal life. Only after we complete our journey and overcome all our sinful habits can we inherit eternal life. This distinguishes salvation from inheriting the kingdom. Salvation is a journey that involves the free gift of the Holy Spirit as a helper. We inherit the kingdom only after we spend time working as a “servant of God,” to do the good works of the Father. Doing so causes the Holy Spirit to fill us in order to help us with our Spiritual gifts. This is how we overcome sin, resulting in eternal life.

Through the Holy Spirit, we are being conformed into the likeness of Christ (Rom. 8:29-30, Eph. 1:5). The journey ends with the glorification of our bodies

(1 Cor. 15:50). We were saved (Rom. 8:24), are being saved (1 Cor. 1:18), and will be saved (Rom. 5:10). Salvation must include reconciliation, justification, sanctification, and finally the glorification of our bodies. Reconciliation is what Christ did on the cross for everyone. Justification means to be declared righteous (credited with righteousness), by faith. Sanctification is the journey towards that righteousness. For those of us who are mature in Christ, the glorification of our bodies will happen when Christ returns. For many, however, the glorification of their bodies must wait until they are entirely sanctified during the millennium.

The road to righteousness is the maturing process whereby we “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). But not all who profess Christ appear to take the sanctification process seriously. They have a form of godliness, but deny the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:1-5) and say it’s impossible to overcome sin. These are known as carnal Christians. The word “carnal” comes from the King James Version, especially in 1 Corinthians 3:1.

From 1 Corinthians 2:14 to 3:3, Paul outlines three types of people. In verse 2:14, Paul speaks of the natural man. In verse 3:1, Paul speaks of the fleshly, or carnal man. Thirdly, in verse 2:15, Paul speaks of the spiritual man. This is the focus of Paul’s letter to the problem-ridden church at Corinth. Paul addressed them as carnal Christians. Still, he makes it clear that they are saved (1 Cor. 1:2 9).

Just how much righteousness is required before we can reach the end of the road to receive glorified bodies? Do those who die in a carnal state reach the end of the road without traveling over it? Some would say that the initial justification is all that matters. After all, what could possibly be added to the blood of Christ?

Many Protestants of the Reformation, with emphasis on grace, will argue that while Christians should be sanctified, this is not required for salvation. They claim, “Once saved always saved.” Some will compromise and say that those who remain in a carnal state were not saved in the first place. But this is just another way of saying that sanctification is required for salvation. Scripture clearly indicates that sanctification is required for salvation in the verses preached by Wesleyans and other holiness groups. Yet Scripture also clearly indicates that salvation is given at the point of justification. There is an assurance of salvation.

One major purpose of this book is to show that both sides are true. The truth hides in the middle. If we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that Jesus rose from the dead, then we will be saved. This is true even if we continue to live carnal lives. Eventually, even carnal Christians will be given eternal life, perhaps during the millennium.

1.8) The Word “Saint”, as it’s Used in This Book

The Roman Catholic use of the word “saint” does not include all who will be saved. It is a special word given to the holiest of Christians. The concept of saints in this book is more closely aligned to the Catholic definition of the word “saint” than to the Protestant definition, which states that all who are saved become saints when they first profess faith in Jesus. Catholics believe saints are special people who become holy and sanctified in this life before they die.

The idea explored in this book is that saints are those who have achieved maturity in Christ. At the same time, there are still many other Christians who will be saved and resurrected in the millennium.

Paul often used the term “saints” to address the entire church to whom he was writing. Protestants have used this as an argument against the Catholic use of the term. In the original Greek language of the New Testament, the word used for “saint” is the same as the word for “Holy Spirit.” It means “holy ones.” It is translated “saints” when used in the plural noun form, and in a context that speaks of God’s people. The use of “holy” to refer to God’s people originates in the Old Testament, especially in Psalms and in Daniel.

Everybody in the church is referred to as Christians. But we know that within individual churches, not everyone is on fire for Christ. I believe Paul used the word “saint” in a very similar way. Not everyone in the churches will become a saint.

From a Protestant perspective, the word “saint” is similar to the term “salvation.” We were saved in the past, are being saved in the present, and will be saved in the future. We became saints, we are saints, and we will be saints when we have matured in Christ and overcome sin. Paul was hopeful that all those in his churches would mature in Christ to become saints. And yet I think Paul also realized that not everyone will do so before they die.

In this book, I prefer to use the word “saint” in a way similar to the Catholic use of the word. Saints are those who have matured in Christ and are walking as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), in a holy manner. The saints are those who mature in Christ before they die and before Christ returns. The saints are “the wise” who will reign with Christ in the millennium.

In the Catholic system, those who are not saints must spend time in Purgatory. In the New Wine System, those who are not saints will be resurrected with a mortal body and live in the nations. Thus, the New Wine System is a free-grace alternative to Purgatory.

1.9) The Saints Walk as Jesus Walked

Many Christians believe that a higher level of Christianity is attained when one is “sold out” for Christ, or follows Him completely. Some have associated this attainment with baptism of the Holy Spirit (and, for the record, it does relate to being constantly filled with the Holy Spirit.) Life must be lived for Christ, no matter the cost. Those who believe in a higher form of Christianity generally do not say it is a requirement for salvation. Those within this higher form of Christianity are the saints.

What does it mean to “walk as Jesus walked” (1 John 2:6)? The context of this verse is about living life without sinful habits and obeying Christ’s commandments. Obeying Christ’s commandments is the same as working towards God’s purpose in order to overcome sin. One can’t be present without the other. Sin has no dominion over those who walk as Jesus walked, and do so with a purpose in life to further the kingdom by doing the commandments Christ has given them.

It’s easy to get excited about walking completely in God’s purpose for our lives, yet this doesn’t seem to fit within traditional doctrines of salvation. Therefore after some time, we have a tendency to lessen its importance. The burdens of life tend to overshadow our zeal for ministry. It is a good thing, but works of ministry are not specifically required for salvation. When temptation is at its greatest it can be easy to reason that believers are destined to go to heaven, regardless of righteousness. Immature Christians might even yield to temptations of sin, thinking that God’s purposes can wait.

If God really has a purpose for each of us, and it really is God’s intention that we grow to the point of centering our lives solely around this purpose, then why would He settle for anything less? God will have His way in our lives one way or another unless we harden our hearts so that we no longer hear His voice.

In most Protestant interpretations of salvation there are two types of people: those saved and those not saved. The New Wine System, however, presents three types of people: the wise, the foolish, and the wicked. These three terms come from Jesus’ consistent use of the same. If one really believes in a higher level of Christianity, then a system of theology with three types of people would seem to be the only system that works. The wise (saints) are those who walk as Jesus walked. The wicked have hardened their hearts and no longer hear Christ’s voice. The foolish are the unbelievers and the lukewarm (Rev. 3:16) Christians.

The New Wine System	This Age	The Age to Come
The Wise Saints	Walk as Jesus walked, with [agape] love for Christ	The wise will be kings and priests, literally ruling with Christ Jesus as He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords for the entire world in a one-world system of government.
The Foolish	Still live for self. They are, however, still saved and will be resurrected.	The foolish will be taught and encouraged, by the wise, to give up living for self and to live for Christ Jesus alone. This is walking as Jesus walked.
The Wicked	Have hardened their hearts and no longer hear Christ's voice.	Some will reject this teaching, and will not be willing to walk as Jesus walked when Jesus is the King of Kings

“Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6).

What do you think about when your mind is free to wander? This is a good indicator of what your interests are. If your thoughts don't often turn to furthering the kingdom, then you are probably not walking as Jesus walked.

How do you spend most of your free time? Is it watching TV, movies, or sports? If you don't have some project to further the kingdom, then you are probably not walking as Jesus walked.

Does your prayer life include a balanced amount of time asking God what you can do for the kingdom? Do you pray for open doors to the Father's desired purpose for your own life? If not, you are probably not walking as Jesus walked.

These points are not meant to be condemning in nature. The bottom line is that Christ really must be the first and the only really important thing in your life. The importance of Christ in your life must even outshine that of your family (Matthew 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35).

1.10) Ancient Jewish Thought

Ancient Jews understood the coming of the Messiah to be the start of a new age, with Israel bringing salvation to the world as a result of their rule (Isaiah 66:16-21). Righteousness will spread throughout the nations when Israel rules over them (Zech. 14:13-19). The coming of the Messiah was not considered to be the final judgment for everyone. With the resurrection at the start of the Messianic age, as the Pharisees believed, death would not be the final judgment. The resurrection would merely be a continuation of the journey toward holiness.

Since the time of Augustine, the Catholic Church's position on this subject has been to reject millennialism. Martin Luther was an admirer of Augustine, and so the Protestants also rejected millennialism. The Anabaptists were persecuted and put to death primarily for the beliefs in water immersion and millennialism. It's not surprising that traditional doctrines of salvation have not included a millennial reign. The Day of Judgment, and consequently the end of the world, were believed to occur when Christ returns.

But this view about the coming of the Messiah does not fit ancient Jewish thought. The Messianic reign was to be a time when Israel would rule the world, and thus the gospel would go out into the entire world as a result of that reign. The kingdom of heaven, interpreted in the manner of the New Testament Jews, is the same as the Messianic reign. The kingdom of heaven (or of God) primarily comes from Daniel and is an earthly reign. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, (Daniel 2:35, 44) the kingdom that will never be destroyed is depicted as a mountain that fills the whole earth. What the Jews didn't understand was that Christ was to come twice. The current Messianic reign in our hearts is only a partial fulfillment.

This delay in the literal kingdom does not change its purpose. It is still a time for the Messiah to reign so that God's salvation can be spread across the entire world, even after the resurrection. During the literal reign of Christ, this gospel-spreading purpose of the kingdom is fulfilled to a much greater extent than it is currently during its partial fulfillment.

The ancient Jews did not understand the need for the Messiah to die as the ultimate sacrifice for their sins. They thought the kingdom of God was going to appear at once (Luke 19:11-27). Secondly, they did not realize that Gentiles would be included in Israel (Acts 10:45), or that being a descendant of Abraham did not guarantee citizenship in the true Israel that will rule the nations (Rom 9:7-8). Sin must first be overcome to obtain holiness, through sanctification by the Holy Spirit, before one can rule the nations with Christ (Rev 2:26-27).

1.11) Righteous Gentiles

Ancient Jews believed that they were God's chosen people, and that they alone had the covenant relationship with God that made Israel a chosen nation. Does this mean that ancient Jews considered all Gentiles to be predestined for God's wrath simply because they were born as Gentiles? Perhaps some Jews believed this. But many first-century Jews believed that Gentiles could achieve righteousness before God without converting to Judaism.

In the *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* by Craig S. Keener, page 544, in the section about Eph. 2:11-13, Keener writes:

In ancient Jewish beliefs, non-Jews could never participate in the fullness of the covenant without circumcision, although they could be saved by keeping some basic commandments. To be circumcised was to be grafted into the community of Israel, to become part of God's covenant people.

In his book *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional Word*, (pages 68-69), Terence L. Donaldson writes:

Third, one can cite the stance taken by Ananias in the process leading to the conversion of King Izates of Adiabene, as recounted by Josephus in *Ant.* 20.34-48. What is of interest here is the argument put forward by Ananias in an attempt to dissuade Izates from undergoing circumcision: ... It is better to conclude that Ananias is counseling Izates to remain in the state he was prior to his awareness of his mother's conversion, namely, as one who worshiped God ... but had not yet become a "confirmed Jew" ... through full circumcision...

Other pieces of evidence could be adduced in support: the acceptance of sacrifices by and for Gentiles at the temple; the recognition of the legitimacy of Gentile altars to God apart from the temple; the reference to the salvation of the "righteous from among the nations" in *T. Naph.* 8.3; texts describing Israel as a priest among the nations (priests occupying a distinct status and bound by more stringent legislation than the remainder of the people). But what has been presented is sufficient, I believe, to establish the point: in the first century there were segments of Judaism that saw the Torah as God's special gift to Israel; the Gentiles, bound by a

lesser set of requirements, could attain righteousness without having to become full converts to Judaism.

3.5 Eschatological Pilgrims

As is true of most aspects of Second Temple Judaism, a survey of Jewish attitudes toward Gentiles is not complete without a consideration of the eschatological future. Indeed, in what has come to be known as the “eschatological pilgrimage of the nations,” we encounter one of the most distinctive of the Jewish patterns of universalism.

The various attitudes toward Gentiles in the present, as surveyed above, generally carry with them implications for the eschatological future. If Gentiles are forever outside the covenant and fit only for destruction (*Jub.* 15.26), for instance, then destruction is what awaits them at the eschaton. Alternately, in the case of proselytism, while there is no clear statement to the effect, it seems reasonable to believe that for at least some within Judaism, proselytism is an option limited to this age: those who fail to become proselytes in this age will have no share in the age to come. Others, as we have seen, believe that there are “righteous Gentiles” who will have a share in the age to come; the wicked, correspondingly, will not.

(Underline emphasis mine.)

No doubt many first-century Jews believed in the existence of a middle-group of “righteous Gentiles” who are righteous before God, yet not a part of God’s chosen people. These Jews would have believed that the “righteous Gentiles” would be resurrected to share in the Messianic age to come. It is not difficult to believe that Saul (later named Paul) had a heart for Gentiles. After his conversion, he devoted himself to bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. The following verses strongly suggest that Paul believed in “righteous Gentiles:”

Romans 2:12-16 ESV For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. (13) For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. (14) For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. (15) They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears

witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (16) on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

No doubt all the Jews, including Paul, were surprised that Gentiles could receive the Holy Spirit and be a part of Israel. Paul was probably initially surprised that Gentiles could be chosen by God to be a part of God's elect. But after gaining an understanding of this truth, Paul preached that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. Both can be a part of true Israel. Gentiles can be grafted into Israel.

Does this paradigm shift of Gentiles being included in Israel remove the middle-group of "righteous Gentiles?" Does this shift in thinking require that there be no middle group? No, because Paul himself spoke of both carnal and spiritual Christians, saying that both are saved. Interpreting Romans 2:12-16 in the context of Paul's culture would mean he also believed in three types of people.

Scripture was written mostly by Jews. Scripture must be interpreted in the context of first-century Jewish beliefs and culture. One should not say that interpreting Scripture to mean there are three types of people is simply reading extra meaning into the verses. It is just the opposite: we should not be influenced by our own traditions, which say that everybody goes to either heaven or hell as soon as they die. This is something that the Jews simply did not believe.

We should also accept the fact that Paul's training and traditions included the middle group known as "righteous Gentiles." Therefore, we cannot simply assume that when Paul used the phrase "inherit the kingdom," that he was strictly referring to past-tense salvation, and was not talking about a three-type system.

We must use Scripture alone to build our theology. We must guard against the assumptions of traditional church beliefs and our tendency to force Paul's words into our traditional two-type system when Paul himself would have grown up in the tradition of a three-type system.

1.12) Election vs. Free-Will Solved

The New Wine System presents three types of people: "The Wise," corresponding to Israel; "The Foolish," corresponding to righteous Gentiles; and "The Wicked," who are just wicked.

When ancient Jewish eschatology is applied to the Church, all Old Testament Scripture is fulfilled in the Church. We do not replace Israel. We are grafted into Israel. Just as Israel is God's chosen people, the Church is the elect. There is no

difference between Jew and Gentile (Romans 10:12). There is no difference between the Church and Israel. The Church is comprised of those chosen by God to be drawn into a mature relationship with Jesus Christ before either death or Christ's return. The foolish middle group are the nations of the earth. They can still be eternally saved. Everyone has the free-will opportunity to accept or reject Christ.

Therefore, there is no paradox between election and free-will. We need not have two sides of the same coin, or parallel lines that only intersect in some far distance place. One can say that election and free-will are both true, and that it can be easily understood. This concept is simple when it is understood there are three types of people in the grave.

1.13) Salvation is a Journey

Salvation must be understood as a journey. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). The Greek word translated "way" means "road."

The pastor of the Vineyard church I used to attend said that he could not pinpoint a specific date on which he was saved, but he is sure that he is saved now. He believes that at some point in his past his faith matured enough that God considered him to be saved. He also believes that if he had died before that point, he would have gone to hell. But from his perspective, he just gradually grew to know and believe in Christ more and more.

A conclusion that can be made is that at some point as a child he reached an age of accountability. If he had died before that point, he would have gone to heaven. After reaching that point, he would have been destined for hell, but at some later point in his life, he switched back to being destined for heaven again.

God's plan of salvation is not so complicated. Christ died for all of us. God loves the entire world, so salvation is a free gift that Christ offers to everyone. Salvation is a journey towards holiness. However, those who reject this free gift and refuse a relationship with Christ to become holy as He is holy, at some point, forfeit their salvation. But even the hardening of one's heart is more of a process than a decision. So we can journey towards God, or we can journey away from God. Eventually, we become wise, or we become wicked. But it's a long process.

1.14) The Millennium as an Alternative to Purgatory

According to the New Wine System, those who die without spiritual maturity can continue their journey to righteousness during the Messianic age. Those who still have sinful habits can overcome them in the millennium. Some view this as a type of purgatory. It does solve the same problem that purgatory was intended to answer. Catholics saw this dichotomy within Scripture and reasoned that only the most holy people, or saints, went straight to heaven. Everyone else would have to be purified by fire in purgatory.

Purgatory, however, is not found clearly in Scripture. But the millennium is Scriptural. Augustine and the Catholics assumed a purgatory, possibly due to the fact that Augustine had eliminated the millennial earthly reign of Christ. This elimination of the millennium forced Catholic scholars to view death as the end of salvation's journey, similar to Greek thinking. Purgatory was necessary to resolve this dichotomy of Scripture verses about salvation.

The millennial reign of Christ is not a time of punishment. Unlike purgatory, sanctification during the millennial reign of Christ maintains the full atonement for sin as a free gift. The millennial reign of Christ will be a much better life than our current lives under the reign of Satan and the rule of sinful men. The purpose of purgatory is for the cleansing of sin by fire. The purpose of the millennium is to give everyone the opportunity to overcome sin through sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Those who have not yet overcome sin will be resurrected, but not into spiritual bodies. The saints will rule over them as priests and kings, having already received their spiritual bodies.

Revelation 2:26-27 He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. (27) He will rule them with a rod of iron, shattering them like clay pots; as I also have received of my Father:

Verse 27 is a quote of Psalm 2:9, which refers to Christ's reign.

Psalms 2:7b-10 "You are my son. Today I have become your father. (8) Ask of me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession. (9) You shall break them with a rod of iron. You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (10) Now therefore be wise, you kings. Be instructed, you judges of the earth.

The Greek word for “rule” in Revelation 2:27 means “shepherd.” Christ does not destroy the nations, but is their shepherd. Those who overcome sin are saints and will reign with Christ as priests and kings. The nations are those who will not as yet completely overcome sin through a relationship with Christ.

These saints are not the canonized saints of the Catholic Church. The saints are all who will have matured in Christ before they die. God has his own list of saints. However, most canonized saints are probably real saints on God’s list of saints that include Protestants.

God’s desire is for us to overcome sin and be adopted as sons along with Christ. We will be “God’s children, since [we] are children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36). The true Church is the true Israel. Those who are truly saints are the true Israel. We must first become mature in Christ, walking as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), before receiving glorified bodies in the true Israel of the millennium.

1.15) What Does it Mean to be Sold Out for Christ?

During the Lord’s Supper the evening before the crucifixion, Jesus went around the room and washed the disciples’ feet. This made Peter very reluctant to have his Lord wash his feet.

John 13:6-9 Then he came to Simon Peter. He said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" (7) Jesus answered him, "You don't know what I am doing now, but you will understand later." (8) Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with me." (9) Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"

Jesus was teaching Peter and the other disciples a lesson that they would not understand until after Christ’s resurrection. Why was this lesson so important that Peter could not be a true disciple of Jesus unless he learned it? How many people today have also not learned this lesson or taken it to heart, yet consider themselves disciples of Jesus?

Salvation is a free gift, received by grace alone. But discipleship requires lots of work. We can be saved from death, which is to be resurrected to see the kingdom, as a free gift. But then there is the possibility of a second death (Rev. 20:6, 20:14, and 21:8). Those who inherit the kingdom, however, also inherit eternal life. They have worked to overcome sin, and are excluded from the possibility of a second death (Rev. 2:11). Jesus told his disciples, who already

believed in him, to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33, Luke 12:31). Those who inherit the kingdom also inherit eternal life. How do we seek the kingdom? We must be a servant and do the works the Father has given for us.

John 13:12-17 So when he had washed their feet, put his outer garment back on, and sat down again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" (13) You call me, 'Teacher' and 'Lord.' You say so correctly, for so I am. (14) If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (16) Most certainly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his lord, neither one who is sent greater than he who sent him. (17) If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

The difference between simply being saved at the resurrection and inheriting the kingdom and eternal life is all about one's maturity in Christ. We must walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6). In the kingdom of heaven, the last shall be first, and the first shall be last (Mat. 19:29-30, 20:16).

Mark 9:35 He sat down, and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any man wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all."

The wise are servants. Those who will reign as kings and priests in the age to come must first develop a servant's heart in this age. Being a minister for Christ is not about building big churches. It's about loving others and reflecting that love in one's actions. Jesus continues teaching at the Last Supper:

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just like I have loved you; that you also love one another. (35) By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Notice the condition given in order to become Christ's disciple. We must love one another. Christians can easily become caught up in the things of this world, and their love grows cold. They are still saved in spite of this. But without the supernatural love from Christ being carried out in their life, they won't be resurrected as one of Christ's disciples.

Did Peter possess the love for Christ that is necessary to be one of Christ's disciples at this time?

John 13:37-38 Peter said to him, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." (38) Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for me? Most certainly I tell you, the rooster won't crow until you have denied me three times.

Peter believed that he loved Christ enough to die for him. But as we find out later, Peter had not yet developed the maturity in Christ necessary to become a disciple and a leader. Everyone who is to be a priest and king in the millennium must possess the maturity and love of Christ in order to be one of Christ's leaders. To be resurrected with a spiritual body, we must be willing and ready to die for Christ.

Matthew 10:37-39 He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me isn't worthy of me. (38) He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me. (39) He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

Peter believed he was ready to die for Christ, but Jesus knew that Peter was not yet ready to sacrifice his life. Of course later we find that Peter, when put to the test, denied that he even knew Jesus.

This failure really tore at Peter's heart. The next time he was in Jesus' presence was after the resurrection. At their next meeting Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Read this way, as given in most English translations, Jesus comes across as being a real jerk. When Peter is at his lowest, Jesus keeps asking Peter if he loves him more than the other disciples. Peter keeps saying yes, but Jesus keeps asking until the point where Peter is grieved because Jesus asked a third time. Some people try to apologize for Jesus by pointing out that Peter had denied Jesus three times, so Jesus was asking three times. Yet this still makes Jesus out to be a jerk. But in the Greek something entirely different is happening.

In ancient Greek, there are three different words for 'love.' Agape love is unconditional love. Philos love is brotherly love. When Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me," these two types of love were being used in the conversation. In the following translation, "affection" is used for philos love and "love" for agape love. With this distinction being made in this translation, you can get the idea of what was really being said.

John 21:14-17 This is now the third time that Jesus was revealed to his disciples, after he had risen from the dead. (15) So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." (16) He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." (17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?" Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, "Do you have affection for me?" He said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection for you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Peter knew that he had failed the test. He had denied Christ because he was afraid for his life. To Peter's credit, he displayed honesty in this conversation with Christ. His love for Jesus was not unconditional, and this realization pained him greatly. Peter's grief over Jesus' repetition of this question is a completely different type of emotion than it would appear to be when read in a translation without the two different types of love. (Most translations do not make this distinction.) Peter was honest in his statement, "Lord, you know everything," and about his lack of love.

Was Jesus chastising Peter for his lack of love? No, Jesus was gently redeeming Peter, and gently revealing the way to bring his love from philo "affection" to agape love.

The way to increase our love for God is to increase our love for our neighbor. When Christ said, "feed my sheep," he was not talking about Peter becoming the pastor of his church. He wanted Peter to adopt a servant's heart toward anyone in need. "Feed my sheep" was a command to exercise the Spiritual gifts that God has given us in love for one another. As our love for Christ increases, our love for our neighbor increases. Consequently, as our love for our neighbor increases, our love for Christ increases.

In the very next verse, Jesus tells Peter he will love Christ unconditionally, and was going to die for Him in his old age. Normally this is not something that would brighten one's day. But in Peter's case, it was exactly what he needed to hear.

John 21:18-19 Most certainly I tell you, when you were young, you dressed yourself, and walked where you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you,

and carry you where you don't want to go." (19) Now he said this, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. When he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

This is an example of a servant's heart, and shows the way to be a true disciple of Christ. No man is greater than his master. Because Christ had only a servant's heart, His true disciples must only have a servant's heart. This love requires total devotion to Christ no matter the cost, even if it requires sacrificing one's life.

1.16) Is this Salvation by Works?

Many Protestants tend to conclude that Jesus and Paul preached two different gospels. Jesus tells us that if we do not become servants and work for others then we cannot be his disciples. Paul tells us that salvation is a free gift. Can both be true? In order to eternally live in Christ's kingdom we must become like Christ. And since Christ has a servant's heart, we must also have a servant's heart. The free gift is that the Holy Spirit, over time, changes us to be like Christ.

This is understood only when we think of salvation as a journey. Salvation is the process of changing us to be like Christ. Usually, it takes time. Catholics understand this because they already understand that salvation is a journey. Protestants have drifted away from considering salvation to be a journey because we stopped believing in purgatory. Without either purgatory or a free grace alternative to purgatory, one tends to stop believing that sanctification must be completed. If sanctification doesn't need to be completed, then salvation becomes a decision and not a journey. If salvation is a decision without the journey, then no real change is needed. We don't really need to become like Christ. The non-Scriptural assumption is made that we will magically become like Christ when we go to heaven. We can't magically get Christ's heart of a servant without undergoing changes that takes time. And we can't change ourselves.

The Holy Spirit changes us. As we begin to do the Father's works we are filled with the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit help us do the Father's works. Gifts are not limited to those listed by Paul. Our gifts are whatever talents we have. We use our talents to further the kingdom. Over time, this becomes more and more important to us. Over time, our sinful habits become less and less compelling. The Father's works wind up replacing our sinful habits.

Over time, we stop sinning. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit we cannot sin because God is in us and God cannot sin. Of course we can still fall into temptation. The Holy Spirit backs off. But we can confess our sin and be filled

again. It's like being an alcoholic. The longer one goes without taking a drink, the easier it is to avoid. The same is true with every sinful habit. All sins are habitual. All sinful habits can be overcome when we do the works of the Father and commit our lives to serving others and furthering the kingdom.

Our cups must be clean on the inside. Then we will be clean on the outside. If someone could read your mind, would you have anything to be embarrassed about? Living without sin is like being in the light. You have nothing to hide.

Reconciliation was a free gift. Christ died for us. Justification is a free gift. Believers are credited with righteousness. Sanctification is a gift because the Holy Spirit changes us over time. When Christ returns, those who have completed their journey of sanctification will be given the gift of glorified spiritual bodies.

1.17) The Watering Down of Christ's Teaching

Unless Jesus washed Peter's feet, he would not let Peter be a disciple. In other words, unless we live out of love for Christ, instead of just affection, we cannot be Christ's disciple.

Under the traditional dual system of being on a journey to either heaven or hell, Christians tend to believe that Christ would not be so strict. This level of total commitment is usually not understood to be a requirement for discipleship.

Surely if we believe in Christ and profess him as our Savior, then we are saved. If we are saved, then we are going to heaven. Yes, the Christian would acknowledge that Christ would like us to be sold out for Him. But being consumed with things like making a living is necessary. So we are destined for heaven if we simply believe in Christ, right? Going to heaven is all that really matters, right? This is the obvious conclusion under the two-type system of heaven-or-hell when you die.

However, under the three-type system of the wise, the foolish, and the wicked, the serious nature of Christ's teaching comes forth. We want to be counted among the wise group, not the foolish middle group.

One may say, "I'm not wise. I'm not a teacher. I'm not a preacher. Just let me stay in the comfortable foolish group." The wise group is wise in Christ. The term "wise" does not refer to personal wisdom. This wisdom is found through living out Christ's wise teachings, thus qualifying us to lead others. In the age to come, only those who do not seek power for themselves will be given the power to rule. The person who does not claim wisdom is the type of person Christ really needs to further His kingdom. The meek shall inherit the earth.

1.18) How Does All This Affect Missions?

Some would ask, “If people can still profess faith in Christ as Savior after the resurrection, then is witnessing and mission work really necessary?” Most definitely, the answer is yes. The basic gospel of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation has not changed. Everyone needs to ask Jesus to forgive them and take control of their lives. The sooner one falls in love with Jesus, the better off he or she will be.

Before Christ returns and the millennium comes, the antichrist will rule the entire world. He will require everyone to take the mark of the beast, leading those who do to the lake of fire. There will be no resurrection for those who take the mark of the beast. Jesus said:

Matthew 24:12-13 NIV Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, (13) but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

During this time of the end, people will be under enormous pressure to place their allegiance with the one-world government of the antichrist and deny Christ. Christians who stand firm to the end will be saved. The Holy Spirit is necessary. Consequently, the need of missions is greater today than any other time in history. Those who take the mark will be thrown eternally into the lake of fire.

Also, the purpose of this present age is to establish the elect, who will rule as priests and kings. Christ will only return when the elect from every nation, tribe, people, and language, have matured enough to reign in Christ’s kingdom. The gospel must be spread to every nation before the end can come (Mat. 24:14).

1.19) Profess Your Faith in Jesus Christ Now

Have you professed your personal faith in Jesus Christ? Jesus is the only way to eternal life. People who die having neither heard nor understood about Christ are not spending eternity in hell. They will have a chance to begin their journey when Christ returns. But if you have not done so, you should give your life to Christ immediately. The more you resist Christ’s calling, the more your heart is hardened. Do not let your heart become hardened. Be sold out for Christ, no matter the cost.

Salvation requires that Christ becomes your Lord and Savior. That means you become his servant. Never think about salvation as some kind of deal whereby God answers your prayers. Jesus is not your servant. You are his servant. But at the same time, a continual growing relationship with Jesus Christ, as you do the

things the Father wants of you, becomes a very gratifying life. But don't expect to have a life with no problems. If you are really living for Christ, persecution can easily come your way. Life's problems may even become worse. Living for Christ is all about what you can give to the Father and to others. Your life is not your own. You live for Christ. You have given it all to the Father. You store your treasures in heaven. This means your work is not focused on making money. Sure, you have to work to make a living. But the focus of your life must be on living and working for Christ, which is doing the will (works) of the Father. Only then are you on a path that leads to salvation.

Be cautious about saying "I've been saved." Salvation is a process whereby the Holy Spirit changes you as you do the Father's works. It's true that as long as you remain a servant and follower of Christ that you are assured you will eventually have eternal life. God will complete the work that he has begun in you. But you are the servant. He is the Master. Christ is your Lord. That means salvation is an ongoing journey. We are not eternally saved from death until we have glorified bodies that do not die.

The way of salvation is a completely different and perhaps a difficult life. It's not to be taken lightly. But it's very well worth it. It's great to start walking in the light and having nothing to hide. It's great to be free of sinful habits that once controlled your life. It's great knowing that even if others could read your mind, you would have nothing to be embarrassed about. That's true freedom. Being a follower of Christ is to live a life of freedom.

That's not to say that everyone who has dedicated their lives to Christ has overcome all their sinful habits. But you must believe that the Holy Spirit living in you is changing you so that you can live a life without sinful habits. That's faith. You have faith in Christ Jesus to change your life as you do the Father's works. You have faith in Jesus Christ to make you holy. Of course you struggle with the Holy Spirit to overcome whatever sinful habits that remain. But remember that faith in Jesus Christ is to live as Jesus would have lived. It's to walk as Jesus walked. It's a journey that will eventually end with eternal life. It's not about you. It's about loving God and loving our neighbors. That's the journey of salvation that leads to eternal life.

Chapter 2

Three Intermediate States in the Grave

If this New Wine System is true, then there must be three types of people in the grave instead of two, as traditional beliefs dictate. Traditionally, the two types of people in the grave have been those destined for heaven and those destined for hell. If there are three types of people in the grave, then it cannot be true that we go directly to heaven or hell when they die. Where would the middle group go?

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, death is often referred to as being asleep (Isaiah 26:19, Psalm 13:3, Jeremiah 51:39, 51:57, Daniel 12:2, 12:13, Matthew 27:52, John 11:11, Acts 7:60, 13:36, 1 Corinthians 15:6, 15:18, 15:20, 15:51, 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 4:14, 4:15, 5:10, 2 Peter 3:4). Isaiah 26:19 is the first Old Testament passage about the resurrection. It says, "Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust." Sleep and dwelling in the dust of the earth is also equated with death in Daniel 12:2, which is the other major Old Testament passage that directly prophesies the resurrection.

In the New Testament, the use of sleep to describe the state of death is most often used when the passage places emphasis on the resurrection. Death is a temporary state. The body is not asleep. The body decays and disappears. The state of sleep is in reference to the soul. The soul sleeps as he or she awaits a new body at the time of the resurrection.

Traditional Christian theology states that sleep is a metaphor for death. Many would say that it's a metaphor for the body being dead while the soul is alive in heaven or hell. The teaching of "soul sleep" is a more literal understanding of Scripture. Thus, the New Wine System is not only closer to Old Testament Jewish eschatology, it's also a more literal interpretation of the New Testament as compared with tradition. The areas in which the New Wine System is more literal are as follows:

1. Israel is literally elected to literally reign over the nations of the earth. Gentiles are grafted into literal Israel. We are not a "spiritual" Israel.
2. The meek will literally inherit the earth. Israel is a literal kingdom.
3. The dead are literally asleep. It doesn't mean their bodies are figuratively asleep while their souls are awake. It means their bodies are literally dead while their souls are literally asleep.

4. To be born again literally means you must literally have a new body. A spiritual body is literally a body designed for heaven. It's not a spirit. A spiritual body is a physical body with spiritual-like attributes. Born again is not a figurative way of saying you are spiritually a new person.
5. Christ is literally the Savior of all people. Salvation literally means being saved from death.
6. Heaven is literally up. Hell is literally down. Up and down are not figurative ways of talking about a spiritual realm. Heaven is literally the sky above us, which is the universe.
7. The New Jerusalem is a literal city that will literally appear when Christ returns. You must have a spiritual body in order to literally enter that city.

Figurative or allegorical interpretations are often used to make difficult passages of Scripture fit what one believes Scripture to be saying in the overall context. But when a literal interpretation better fits the overall context and culture of the time, the literal interpretation should be considered as more likely to be correct. Don't let tradition cloud one's judgment when the literal works quite well.

In this chapter we focus on point 3. The dead are asleep. In the Old Testament, both the righteous and the wicked went to Sheol, which is the Hebrew word for the grave. Traditional theologians believe this was changed by God after the crucifixion. The righteous, it is believed, now go straight to heaven when they die. There are a number of New Testament verses on which this Christian belief is based. In this chapter, we will examine each of these verses.

It is my belief that the ancient Jew, with Old Testament training, would not have interpreted these verses to mean the righteous dead now are immediately sent to heaven. With Jewish culture and the Old Testament background, these verses take on a very natural meaning that is not in conflict with Old Testament teaching about the afterlife.

It is important to interpret New Testament Scripture in the context of the Old Testament. The Old Testament should not be re-interpreted by the New Testament. Instead, we should suspend our beliefs in Christian traditions about heaven and hell, and instead should try to read the New Testament as an ancient Jew would have done. As we will see, nothing has changed regarding the intermediate state between death and the resurrection. Both the righteous and the wicked are still in Hades. Scripture regarding the afterlife, and its teaching about eternal life, has always focused on the resurrection.

2.1) Death from the Ancient Jewish Perspective

The Encyclopedia Britannica has an article titled, “Death/Judaism.” Here is an excerpt from that article. (Underline emphasis mine.)

Saul’s request to the witch of Endor to “bring up” the dead prophet Samuel for him (I Sam. 28:3–20) implied that the dead, or at least some of them, still existed somewhere or other, probably in Sheol, “the land of gloom and deep darkness” (Job 10:21). In Sheol, the good and the wicked shared a common fate, much as they had in the Babylonian underworld. The place did not conjure up images of an afterlife, for nothing happened there. It was literally inconceivable, and this is what made it frightening: death was utterly definitive, even if rather ill-defined.

[Skipping two paragraphs.]

The notion of a resurrection of the dead has a more concrete evolution. It seems to have originated during Judaism’s Hellenistic period (4th century bc–2nd century ad). Isaiah announced that the “dead shall live, their bodies shall rise,” and the “dwellers in the dust” would be enjoined to “awake and sing” (Isa. 26:19). Both the good and the wicked would be resurrected. According to their deserts, some would be granted “everlasting life,” others consigned to an existence of “shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). The idea that a person’s future would be determined by conduct on earth was to have profound repercussions. The first beneficiaries seem to have been those killed in battle on behalf of Israel. Judas Maccabeus, the 2nd-century-bc Jewish patriot who led a struggle against Seleucid domination and Greek cultural penetration, found that his own supporters had infringed the law. He collected money and sent it to Jerusalem to expiate their sins, acting thereby “very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead” (II Macc. 12:43–45).

Sheol itself became departmentalized. According to the First Book of Enoch, a noncanonical work believed to have been written between the 2nd century bc and the 2nd century ad, Sheol was composed of three divisions, to which the dead would be assigned

according to their moral deserts. The real Ge Hinnom (“Valley of Hinnom”), where the early Israelites were said to have sacrificed their children to Moloch (and in which later biblical generations incinerated Jerusalem’s municipal rubbish), was transmuted into the notion of Gehenna, a vast camp designed for torturing the wicked by fire. This was a clear precursor of things to come—the Christian and Islāmic versions of hell.

2.2) Hades and Gehenna

In the centuries that followed Christ, the afterlife became equated strictly to two destinations: heaven and hell. There was no middle-ground. Even the word “Hades” was translated as hell in subsequent Bible translations such as the King James Version. Perhaps our English word “hell” originates from the Greek word “Hades.” However, the two words have very different meanings. The word “Hades” literally means “grave,” equivalent to the Hebrew word “Sheol.” In the Old Testament, both the just and the unjust were sent to Sheol when they died.

"George E. Ladd [was] Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Among his numerous books are *The Presence of the Future*, *The Blessed Hope*, *A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, and *A Theology of the New Testament*." (From the back cover of "The Last Things.") In his book, "The Last Things," the late George E. Ladd has a chapter on "The Intermediate State." The intermediate state is the theological term for our state of being after death but before the resurrection and Christ's return. Ladd writes at the start of this chapter (emphasis mine):

*There's a land beyond the river
That they call the sweet forever,
And we only reach that shore by faith's decree;
One by one we reach the portals,
There to dwell with the immortals,
When they ring those golden bells for you and me.*

This old evangelistic song expresses the idea many Christians have of life after death. When we die, "we go to heaven." The popular idea is that heaven is a state of blessedness - "the sweet forever" - through whose portals the man of faith passes when he dies and crosses the river of death. There, in a state of disembodied blessedness, he will "dwell with the immortals."

Such thinking, popular as it is, is more an expression of Greek thought than of biblical theology. The Greeks - at least many of them who followed in the philosophical tradition of Plato - believed in a cosmic dualism. There were two worlds - the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible, the phenomenal and the noumenal. The visible world was a realm of ebb and flow, flux and change, instability, having only the appearance of reality. The unseen world was the world of permanence, of ultimate reality. In the same way man was a dualism of body and soul. The body belongs to the phenomenal world, the soul to the noumenal world.

A few paragraphs down, Ladd writes:

We must understand the Old Testament concept of man to understand its view of the intermediate state, and we must understand the Old Testament concept of the world to understand its doctrine of man. Just as there is no trace of dualistic thinking about the world, so the Old Testament view of man is not dualistic. Man is not, as the Greeks thought, a dualism of body and soul, or of body and spirit. "Spirit" is God's breath, God's power, working in the world (Isa. 40:7; 31:3). It's God's breath creating and sustaining life (Ps. 33:6; 104:29-30). Man's "spirit" is man's breath which comes from God (Isa. 42:5; Job 33:4; 27:3; 32:8).

A few paragraphs down, Ladd writes:

What is seen in Sheol is not man's soul or spirit but the *rephaim*, translated "shades" in the Revised Standard Version, the "dead" in the King James. "The shades below tremble, the waters and their inhabitants" (Job 26:5). The shades are unable to rise up and praise God (Ps. 88:10). "Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come, it rouses the shades to greet you, all who were kings of the nations" (Isa. 14:9; see also Prov. 9:18).

The shades are not to be identified with man's departed soul or spirit. It seem to be some kind of pale replica of man himself. It attests to the Hebrews' conviction, shared with other ancient peoples, that death does not mean the end of human existence. It appears that God has implanted in the hearts of men everywhere the idea that somehow man will survive death.

However, the Hebrew concept of death also witnesses to the conviction that *life is bodily life*. For the shades in Sheol, conscious fellowship with God has been lost; therefore descent to Sheol does not mean life.

The Hebrew word *rephaim* means shades or ghosts. The Old Testament view of the dead is often referred to as "soul sleep." Most of the *rephaim* (shades) do not stay dead forever. Some do, but not all.

Isaiah 26:14 ESV They are dead, they will not live; they are shades, they will not arise; to that end you have visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them.

This is in reference to the wicked (verse 10). But a few verses down we read:

Isaiah 26:19 ESV Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the [shades].

Sheol (Hades) is not a place of reward or punishment. Of course, Jesus does mention a place of punishment in His teachings. The Greek word "Gehenna," which was the name for the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem, was used to describe a place of punishment. Garbage was constantly burned in this place. Thus, it was used as a metaphor for a place of punishment by fire.

Modern-day Bible translations distinguish Hades from Gehenna. Hades is usually rendered simply as Hades, while Gehenna is rendered as hell. However, the KJV renders both Greek words as hell. This shows an apparent lack of understanding about ancient Jewish beliefs in the early Bible translations. Traditionally, both Protestants and Catholics have believed that the dead go straight to heaven or hell.

In the book of Revelation, after the millennial reign of Christ, the Book of Life is opened. Those who are not found in the Book of Life, at that time, are thrown eternally into the lake of fire (Rev. 14:9-11, 20:15). Death and Hades is thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). The second death is the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). Thus, Gehenna is associated with punishment, as in the lake of fire, after the final judgment. Hades is associated with everyone's death, while they await the resurrection or the final judgment. The lake of fire (Gehenna) is not until a thousand years after the resurrection.

2.3) The Gates of Hell (Hades) Shall Not Prevail

The KJV translated Hades as hell. Jesus said to Peter, “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of [Hades] shall not prevail against it” (ESV Mat. 16:18 – with the word “hell” changed to “Hades”). Even the ESV, a very modern translation, uses hell in this particular verse, although all the other New Testament verses render Hades as simply “Hades” (or death). Church tradition interprets this verse to mean a demonic force from hell fighting against the Church. This is most likely the reason the ESV used “hell” instead of “Hades,” and demonstrates the depth of confusion which church tradition has imposed on the concept of Hades.

Peter would not have believed the gates of Hades host a demonic force. They believed that both the just and the unjust are dwelling in separate regions of Hades. One would not assume that the gates of Hades are controlled by the demonic. Thus, the traditional church interpretation of this verse, with the gates of Hades guarded by demonic forces, would never have occurred to Peter, who grew up in first-century Jewish culture. This is just an example of how much church traditions have caused misunderstandings of Scripture.

In Greek mythology, the underworld was known as Hades, and possessed an entry gate and a king of the underworld. Was the early church influenced by Greek culture when interpreting this verse?

Philo, Clemet of Alexandria, and Origen were famous early-church fathers from the school of Alexandria. (Actually, Philo was Jewish and pre-dated Christianity.) Their goals were to make Scripture, especially Old Testament Scripture, more acceptable to the Greeks. Clemet and especially Origen interpreted Scripture in a very allegorical way. Augustine was also from Alexandria. With this purpose and tradition in mind, and their knowledge of Greek mythology, how would Clemet, Origen, and Augustine have interpreted, the “gates of Hades?” How much influence did they have over the early Church?

It is very unlikely that Peter, a Jewish fisherman, would have been familiar with Greek mythology. And even if he did, we should not assume that Jesus would have been referencing Greek mythology when speaking to Peter.

The Greek word Hades literally means “grave.” I think Jesus was simply telling Peter, in a poetic way, that the Church itself will never die out. It may have even been an idiom. In other words, on the rock of Peter Jesus would build his assembly of believers, meaning Church. And this Church would not die out, meaning it would not metaphorically fall to the grave. It would not dwindle into a small footnote of history, as other Jewish sects of the time had done.

2.4) The Intermediate State in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, both the righteous and the unrighteous went to Sheol, which means the grave (Psalm 89:48). Jacob spoke of going “down to Sheol” when mourning for his son, whom he thought was dead (Gen 37:35, 42:38, 44:29, 44:31). The righteous go to Sheol (Psalm 16:10). The wicked also go to Sheol (Num. 16:30-33, Psalm 9:7).

There is a type of afterlife mentioned in the Old Testament. However, it is described as a state similar to sleep. There is “no work or thought or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). In the Old Testament, the dead rest in Sheol until the resurrection.

Daniel was told that he would rest until the end of the days (Daniel 12:13). From the context of the chapter, the end is the time of the resurrection (verse 2), when “those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” Some believe that those in Sheol were brought into heaven after Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. However, Daniel was told that he would “rest” until the time of the end, which in the context would be the resurrection. Daniel did not “rest” until the crucifixion.

In the Old Testament, the dead are always spoken of as being in the ground, or in a downward direction, and are thought of as asleep. Yet, these dead also seem to have some awareness. When Cain killed Abel, God said the voice of Abel’s blood was crying from the ground.

After Samuel had died, Saul went secretly to a medium in order to attempt to communicate with Samuel (1 Samuel 28). The medium was able to bring Samuel up. Samuel said, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” (Verse 15) Some will say that it was a demon speaking, and not actually Samuel. But the Scripture makes no indication of this, and appears to say that Samuel was actually speaking to Saul. Scripture directly attributes the words spoken as the words of Samuel. Also, the words that Samuel spoke to Saul were not words Saul wanted to hear, but probably what Samuel would have said had he been alive. It is unlikely that these were the words of a demon.

Some traditional scholars have said the dead are no longer in Sheol, but that its inhabitants went to heaven or hell after the crucifixion. The New Testament evidence that has been offered to support this claim includes the Scripture passages: (1) “Absent from the body is presence with the Lord,” (2) “Today, you will be with me in Paradise,” (3) the souls under the altar, (4) Elijah and Moses, (5) the angelic host in heaven, and (6) the captives set free. As we will see, all these passages are misinterpreted because they are read with Greek thinking.

2.5) Absence from the body is presence with the Lord

An often quoted verse that is considered in this type of discussion is 2 Corinthians 5:8, in which Paul says that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. Paul put a lot of emphasis on the resurrection. Did Paul believe that after his death he would be spiritually present with the Lord, alive in heaven? Or did Paul believe that after death, from his viewpoint, he would physically be present with the Lord at the resurrection?

Paul did not say that if you are absent from the body then you will be present with the Lord. The verse says that Paul "prefers" (NIV) or "would rather be" (ESV) absent from the body so that he will be "at home with the Lord" (at the resurrection.) Let's look at the first eight verses without the Greek mindset:

Verse 1: "For we know that if the earthly house of our tent is dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." (If we die we will get a spiritual body.)

Verse 2: "For most certainly in this we groan, longing to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven." (We desire to get a spiritual body.)

Verse 3: "If so be that being clothed we will not be found naked." (This is not just getting rid of the body and living as a spirit.)

Verse 4: "For indeed we who are in this tent do groan, being burdened; not that we desire to be unclothed, but that we desire to be clothed, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." (We long for our spiritual bodies at the resurrection. Death swallowed by life is a resurrection reference. Compare with 1 Cor. 15:54).

Verse 5: "Now he who made us for this very thing is God, who also gave to us the down payment of the Spirit." (The Spirit is the guarantee of resurrection.)

Verse 6: "Therefore, we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." (This verse gives us confidence even though we don't see it now.)

Verse 7: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." (Paul's focus of salvation itself is to have faith in the resurrection.)

Verse 8: "We are of good courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord." (This verse then uses a linguistic form known as metonymy, in which a part is referred

to, implying the whole. Paul is saying he would rather die and be resurrected because then he will be with the Lord. This verb can be seen as a dynamic verb, meaning that it occurs over a period of time. Paul does not mean that he will immediately be with the Lord.

Let's go back and unpack these verses a bit more closely. A careful comparison between 2 Corinthians 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 indicates that Paul anticipated that he would rest until the resurrection.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1, the earthly home mentioned is our current physical bodies. We know this because Paul speaks of death as a destruction of the earthly home. In 1 Corinthians 15:40 Paul compares heavenly bodies to earthly bodies. In this context, the heavenly bodies are spiritual bodies at the time of the resurrection. Therefore, the heavenly house of 2 Corinthians 5:1 most likely also represents our spiritual bodies at the time of the resurrection.

In 2 Corinthians 5:2, Paul says that we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. In Romans 8:22, the whole Creation groans, awaiting the resurrection. In Romans 8:22, the Greek word is a collective groaning. In 2 Corinthians 5:2, the Greek word means to groan within one's self. Based on Paul's focus on the resurrection, it would be logical to assume that Paul is groaning for the same thing in both passages.

In 2 Corinthians 5:2, Paul speaks of this groaning as being "further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up in life." Compare this to 1 Corinthians 15:54, where Paul says, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory." This comparison solidifies the conclusion that Paul was referring to the resurrection.

Compare Ephesians 1:13-14 and 2 Corinthians 1:22 with 2 Corinthians 5:5. All three verses speak of the Holy Spirit guaranteeing what is to come. Ephesians 1:13-14 explicitly states that those who are God's possessions are guaranteed redemption. Based on Paul's focus on the resurrection, most likely he is referring to the redemption of our bodies at the resurrection. The Holy Spirit is a guarantee of the resurrection that is to come. Romans 8:23 clearly speaks of the "firstfruits of the Spirit" at time of the resurrection, when it speaks of the "redemption of our bodies." If Paul is being consistent, then 2 Corinthians 5:5 would also be talking about the redemption of our bodies at the resurrection. It is very unlikely that Paul was talking about an intermediate state. Paul's teachings are consistent with Old Testament teaching about Sheol.

This is not to say that Paul didn't believe the spirit could exist apart from the body. When Paul talked about his trip to Paradise, he was uncertain whether his journey was made while the soul was still contained within his body (2 Cor. 12:3). Thus, Paul unquestionably believed the spirit could exist apart from the body, and could also have experiences such as a trip to Paradise.

However, this should not make us doubt that Paul's focus was on the resurrection in 2 Corinthians 5. Daniel was told that he would rest until the time of the end, which by context is the time of the resurrection. A spirit without a body simply waits and rests until the resurrection. When we are naturally asleep at night, we do not experience much time. We may wake up for short moments and then go right back to sleep. By morning, it does not seem as if eight hours have passed. Likewise, spirits in Hades would not experience much time. This may be considered a form of "soul sleep." But there is no denying that the soul may have some short experiences while awaiting the resurrection. My guess is that Paul believed that, after death, he would wake up at the resurrection.

Given the resurrection terminology that Paul uses in this chapter, I do not think the one phrase, "willing to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord," is sufficient evidence to establish a whole new paradigm for the intermediate state other than the Sheol of the Old Testament. The New Testament certainly reveals more details about Sheol (Hades). However, I do not think this one phrase is sufficient evidence to conclude that the dead no longer go to Sheol, but now go straight to heaven or hell.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:5-11, Paul promises relief for those who are suffering. The relief spoken of comes when Christ returns. Our problems of persecution are solved when Christ returns. The sense is that it will be soon. For those who live and die under that persecution, the relief from suffering will come soon. For them, it's almost immediately after they die. Paul was probably thinking along the same lines when he spoke of his own death, and being absent from the body.

2.6) Today, you will be with me in Paradise

Most versions of Luke 23:43 are translated something like this: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." If Jesus was in heaven that very day with the thief on the cross, then why did He tell Mary some three days later to not cling to him? Jesus said not to cling to him because he had not yet ascended to the Father (John 20:17).

Some theologians have stated that Paradise was in the upper regions of Hades, and was later moved to heaven by the time Paul visited the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2-3). This view provides a solution to the dilemma. If Paradise was in Hades, then Christ and the thief could have been together in Paradise, but would have still been in Hades. Then later, Christ could have truthfully said to Mary that he had not yet gone to the Father, since he would have only been in Hades. But this theory seems very strange. There is no other Scriptural evidence that Paradise was ever in Hades, despite the arguments by Christian theologians.

One such author is Dr. Robert A. Morey. In his book, "Death and the Afterlife," on pages 85-86, Dr. Morey writes: (Underline emphasis mine.)

Before Christ's ascension, believers as well as unbelievers were said to enter Sheol or Hades. After Christ's resurrection, the New Testament pictures believers after death as entering heaven to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23), which is far better than Hades. They are present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6-8), worshiping with the angelic hosts of heaven (Heb. 12:22, 23) at the altar of God (Rev. 6:9-11). Thus believers do not now enter Hades but ascend immediately to the throne of God.

In the New Testament, there is, therefore, a development of understanding which took place after Christ's resurrection. Before Jesus was raised from the dead, the apostles assumed that everyone went to Sheol or Hades. This Hades had two sections, one for the righteous and one for the wicked. But Christ's resurrection changed this picture. Thus Paul uses the language of transition where he speaks of Christ taking the righteous out of Hades and bringing them to heaven (Eph. 4:8,9).

That Christ went to Hades, i.e., the world beyond death, is clear from Acts 2:31. While in Hades, Peter pictures Christ as proclaiming to "the spirits now in prison" the completion of His atonement (1 Pet. 3:18-22). Whereas "paradise" in the gospel account (Luke 23:43) referred to the section of Hades reserved for the righteous, by the time Paul wrote 2 Cor. 12:2-4, it was assumed that paradise had been taken out of Hades and was now placed in the third heaven.

According to the post-resurrection teaching in the New Testament, the believer now goes to heaven at death to await the coming

resurrection and the eternal state. But, what of the wicked? The wicked at death descend into Hades which is a place of temporary torment while they await the coming resurrection and their eternal punishment.

One problem with this view is that "Paradise," meaning "garden," is the word used in the Septuagint for the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8,9,10,15,16; 3:1,2,3,8*2,10,23,24; 13:10; Num. 24:6; Neh. 2:8; Joel 2:3; Isaiah 51:3; Ezek. 28:13; 31:8*2, 31:9). Isaiah and Ezekiel refer to it as the Paradise (Garden) of God. Was the Garden of God ever in Hades? Was the Tree of Life ever in the Grave?

In the section 19.3 of this book, titled "The Seven Heavens," there is a quote from Paula Gooder's book titled, "Only the Third Heaven?: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 And Heavenly Ascent." She documents that the ancient Jews already believed that Paradise is contained within the third heaven. Paul said that Paradise is in the third heaven because that was what he had been taught as a Pharisee. And apparently Paul's beliefs about that remained unchanged after his journey there (2 Cor. 12:2-4).

Therefore, Paradise was most likely never in Hades, nor is it likely that Paradise was moved from Hades to heaven after the crucifixion. Theologians like Dr. Morey have had to adopt this unlikely view because they believe Christ was with the thief on the cross in Paradise the very same day He was crucified.

A better answer to the problem is to take a close look at the Greek in Luke 23:43. The adverb for "today" has two words between it and the verb for "be with." The adverb "today", however, is right after the verb "to say or speak." Which of these two verbs does the adverb modify? The answer to this question dramatically effects the meaning of the verse.

Luke 23:43 ESV Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

Luke 23:43 Ἀμήν (Truly) σοι (to you)
λέγω (I say) σήμερον (today) μετ' (with) ἐμοῦ (me) ἔσῃ (you will be)
ἐν (in) τῷ (the) παραδείσῳ (Paradise)

In Greek, adverbs can be placed either before or after the verbs they modify. This adverb is between the two verbs. Therefore, the grammar is ambiguous as to which verb it modifies. If the adverb σήμερον (today) modifies the verb λέγω (I say), instead of ἔσῃ (you will be), then the translation would be something like, "Truly today I say to you, you will be with me in Paradise." In this case Jesus was just adding emphasis to the statement.

If the Greek grammar is ambiguous, and if there is clear precedent for the word usage in another verse, then the translator should turn to context. Is there a contextual reason as to why Jesus might have wanted to say “today” in relation to him saying, “I say to you”?

Let’s compare Luke’s account of this event with Matthew’s account. This comparison is often avoided because at first it appears to be a contradiction.

Matthew 27:38-44 Then there were two robbers crucified with him, one on his right hand and one on the left. (39) Those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads, (40) and saying, “You who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!” (41) Likewise the chief priests also mocking, with the scribes, the Pharisees, and the elders, said, (42) “He saved others, but he can’t save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. (43) He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants him; for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ” (44) The robbers also who were crucified with him cast on him the same reproach.

Matthew apparently believed that both the robbers were against Christ. Luke said that one was for Christ, and one was against Christ. Is this a contradiction? Some have said there could have been four robbers. However, both Matthew’s account and Luke’s account said that one was on Christ’s right and the other was on his left (Mat. 27:38, Luke 23:33).

A better explanation is that both the thieves reviled Christ leading up to the crucifixion, but then one had a change of heart while he was hanging on the cross. John was the only disciple to actually see Christ hanging on the cross. The other disciples were fearful and hid. Apparently Matthew was unaware that one of the thieves had a change of heart.

Here is another situation where a man has a change of heart:

Luke 19:8-10 Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. If I have wrongfully exacted anything of anyone, I restore four times as much.” (9) Jesus said to him, “Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. (10) For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.”

The grammar usage in this statement is different than that of the previous passages, but Jesus is applying the word “today” to a very similar situation. “Today,” salvation came into the house of Zacchaeus because of his change in heart - that day. “Today,” Jesus told the thief about his salvation because of his change in heart - that day.

The grammar of Luke 23:43 is ambiguous. Use of the word “today” fits the context of a man having a change of heart during that same day. The final question a translator should examine is that of doctrine. Are there doctrinal problems with Jesus entering Paradise on the same day as the crucifixion?

Scripture is clear that Christ spent three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40). Christ spent this time in Hades (Acts 2:31) and did not rise until the third day. After he rose, he told Mary that he had not yet been to the Father (John 20:17). Therefore, Christ’s ascent to Paradise was impossible that first day in the grave unless Paradise was in Hades with him and the thief. But Paradise was never in Hades. The Garden of Eden was never in Hades.

I believe this is another case where church tradition causes us to misinterpret Scripture. Church tradition says that everyone goes straight to heaven or hell when they die. The thief was not going to hell. Therefore, by the church tradition of heaven and hell, the thief must have gone straight to heaven. This makes translators assume that the adverb “today” was meant to indicate such. This cycle of belief is reinforced by the translation, and the incorrect church tradition grows.

The teaching that everybody goes immediately to heaven or hell upon death probably developed as a result of the early Church trying to distance themselves from the Jews. The school at Alexandria was very concerned with interpreting the Bible in a way that was more acceptable to the Greeks. The Greeks believed in an immediate afterlife, not a resurrection.

As mentioned in section 2.3, Philo, Clemet of Alexandria, and Origen were famous early-church fathers from the school of Alexandria. (Philo was Jewish before Christ’s ministry.) Clemet and especially Origen interpreted Scripture in a very allegorical way. The events themselves were not as important as the moral meanings found in Scripture. This follows the tradition of Greek mythology, the purpose of which was not to be taken literally, but to demonstrate moral values. This was especially true of the Old Testament, which Greeks considered to be barbaric. The Old Testament was not considered important in the interpretation of the New Testament. There was even a strong movement to eliminate the Old Testament from the canon. Augustine was also from Alexandria.

Early church fathers obviously believed in immediate transportation to heaven or hell upon death. How much of this was originally influenced by Greek beliefs concerning the afterlife? In Greek culture, ‘Hades’ was the place where immoral people went after death. The Greeks did not believe in a resurrection. This diverted the Greek focus on death to what happens immediately after, in the afterlife. On the other hand, in Jewish culture, Sheol (Hades) was the place for both the righteous and the wicked. In this culture, the focus is on the resurrection.

Thus, the traditional view about the thief on the cross seems to have been derived from the Greek belief about the afterlife. An ancient Greek would have interpreted this verse with the mindset of events occurring immediately after death. Jewish thinking, however, focused on the resurrection, and would have interpreted the passage to mean that Christ would join the thief in Paradise sometime after the resurrection. The Jews understood Paradise to be in the third heaven. But everyone waited for the resurrection. Before the resurrection, Paradise was inaccessible.

2.7) The Souls Under the Altar

Traditional scholars have said the righteous dead are no longer in Sheol and that they went to heaven or hell after the crucifixion. Another verse that is used to make this point is Revelation 6:9-11. This verse was mentioned by Dr. Morey. (See the quote section 2.6 above.) In this verse the fifth seal appears, and John sees, under the altar, the souls of those who had been slain because of their testimony for Christ. They cry out in a loud voice, saying “How long ... until you ... avenge our blood?”

Sometimes in Revelation it is difficult to determine exactly what is literal and what is symbolic. How literally are we to take the first four seals? What point is being made about the first four seals? Does it represent four literal horses and four literal riders, or is their symbolic meaning what is important? In the end times, do we really expect to see some guy riding around on a horse saying something about wheat, barley, oil, and wine? Or do we understand that this means difficult economic times for a specific nation (Russia) during the end times?

No two theologians are going to agree on the exact meaning of these five seals. It is my belief that the four horses refer to the United States, Russia, China, and the one-world government during this end-time generation. You might want to look ahead at section 22.3, the section on the four horses. The point here is that the first four seals are not usually interpreted as literal horses and riders. Likewise, are

we to believe the souls are literally under a literal altar? Or is the altar simply a symbolic way of saying their lives were sacrificed as martyrs?

The fifth seal tells us that many missionaries have died, and will continue to die, during this end-time generation. The witnesses are told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants is completed. More will die because of their testimony for Christ. This generation is unlike any other generation because they have seen the gospel preached to all the nations. The deaths of many of Christ's witnesses have been a consequence of modern-day missions.

How would the ancient Jews have interpreted this verse? Remember that Samuel was awakened from his rest and spoke. Even if these souls are literal, could they have likewise been temporarily awakened from their sleep? The blood of Abel spoke from the ground. Yet the dead are at rest, in the heart of the earth, waiting on the resurrection. I do not believe the ancient Jews would have read this verse, in its context, as different from their belief about the afterlife. The dead are still in Sheol, resting and waiting on the resurrection.

2.8) Elijah and Moses

Peter, James and John saw Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mat. 17:3-4). This is not a parable. They did not see ghosts, which were perceived as frightening to see (Mat. 14:26, Mark 6:49-50). The Elijah and Moses are described as "talking with him." They appear to have looked very much the same as everyone else. Does this mean that all the righteous dead can appear with bodies, just like anybody who is alive? If so, then what is the point of the resurrection?

Elijah was a special case because he never died. He was taken up in bodily form and did not go to Sheol. The "chariots of fire and horses" took him "up by a whirlwind into heaven" (ESV 2 Kings 2:11).

Enoch was also a special case, and never died. "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him" (ESV Genesis 5:24).

Moses died, but Scripture indicates there is some mystery about his body by telling us that Moses was buried in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor (Deu. 34:5-6). The people were told this by God, but nobody knew where Moses was buried. Apparently an angel buried Moses. We can also see a bit of this mystery in Jude 1:9, in which the archangel Michael disputed with the devil about the body of Moses.

Moses died. Elijah didn't die. Yet they are both seen together on the Mount of Transfiguration with spiritual bodies. Apparently God has an exception for a small number of people, who are either immediately resurrected when they die, or are caught up in a rapture event.

It's my guess that the 24 elders (of Revelation 5) are these small number of people with spiritual bodies. They are apparently in Paradise right now. One could speculate that the number 24 indicates 12 apostles and 12 Old Testament saints. Paul is probably the apostle who replaced Judas.

Dr. Morey has claimed that, "After Christ's resurrection, the New Testament pictures believers after death as entering heaven to be with Christ." (See the quote in section 2.6 above.) Dr. Morey references all the New Testament verses that support a difference in the afterlife between the Old Testament and the New Testament. However, he notably leaves the transfiguration out of his list. Perhaps it was an oversight. However, Elijah and Moses appeared before the crucifixion. The mount of transfiguration cannot be used to say anything about a change in the afterlife after the crucifixion.

2.9) The Angelic Host in Heaven

One passage that Dr. Morey used is Hebrews 12:22, 23.

Hebrews 12:22-23 But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable multitudes of angels, (23) to the general assembly and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

The author says, "YOU ... have come to ... the heavenly Jerusalem." Yet the audience is not yet literally in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a foreshadowing of the future for us. Only those who already possess the mindset of going straight to heaven when they die would view this passage as a description of the present, rather than the future.

Other theologians have used Hebrews 12:1, in this same chapter.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore let us also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

The cloud of witnesses is seen in the previous chapter. These are all the Old Testament saints who were saved by faith. But is this verse to be interpreted literally? Are all these Old Testament saints literally surrounding us? Or is the author simply referring to our written history in Scripture about the faith of these Old Testament saints? Again, I think that only those who already have the mindset of going straight to heaven when they die would see this passage as describing saints in heaven looking down upon us.

2.10) The Captives are Set Free

Ephesians 4:8-10 contains what is probably the strongest scriptural evidence for the interpretation that after the cross, souls ascend directly to heaven instead of resting in Sheol.

Ephesians 4:8-10 NIV This is why it {Or God} says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." {Psalm 68:18} (9) (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? {Or the depths of the earth} (10) He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

This verse has been interpreted to mean that Christ lead souls out of Hades upon his ascent into heaven. Whenever we see a New Testament author quote the Old Testament, the Old Testament passage should be considered and interpreted in its original context. The Old Testament passage helps give a better understanding of what the New Testament author was thinking when he wrote the words. Let's look at the verse Paul was quoting.

Psalms 68:16-21 NIV Why gaze in envy, O rugged mountains, at the mountain where God chooses to reign, where the LORD himself will dwell forever? (17) The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary. (18) When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious— that you, O LORD God, might dwell there. (19) Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. *Selah* (20) Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death. (21) Surely God will crush the heads of his enemies, the hairy crowns of those who go on in their sins.

Notice the difference in the quote? In this Old Testament verse, God receives gifts from men. Paul quotes it as to say that God is giving gifts to men. Why the change? The NIV study notes on Ephesians 4:8 has this to say:

Ps 68:18 speaks of God's triumphant ascension to his throne in the temple at Jerusalem (symbol of the heavenly throne). Paul applies this to Christ's triumphal ascension into heaven. Where the psalm states further that God "received gifts from men," Paul apparently takes his cue from certain rabbinic interpretations current in his day that read the Hebrew preposition for "from" in the sense of "to" (a meaning it often has) and the verb for "received" in the sense of "take and give" (a meaning it sometimes has – but with a different preposition; see Ge 15:9; 18:5, 27:13; Ex 25:2, 1 Ki 17:10-11). *captives*. Probably Paul applies this to the spiritual enemies Christ defeated at the cross.

Therefore, Paul is using a play on words. The context of the passage in Ephesians is God's grace and God's gift of salvation. Paul sees the crucifixion as a victory over our sins. He then quotes a verse that is about God ascending into heaven as a conqueror over rebellious sinners. God saves us as he crushes the heads of his enemies. The conqueror is figuratively depicted as receiving gifts from men, like a king would receive gifts from those he has conquered. Paul turns this around and changes the gift giver from men to God. Paul also adds the fact that Christ descended into the lower regions of the earth when he died, making more glorious Christ's ascension into heaven. The dissension is God's gift to us, and the ascension is our salvation. We then, whether physically dead or alive, are the captives in his train. We have been set free from sin.

Now, let's look at the passage in Ephesians again to better see the immediate context of the gift from God. This brings home the point that Paul was taking about God's gift of salvation when he quoted this Old Testament passage. And that gift is to each one of us, not just to those who were in Hades at the time.

Ephesians 4:7-13 NIV But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. (8) This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (9) (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? (10) He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) (11) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to

be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (12) to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (13) until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

It is not, then, captives of Hades that were set free, but captives of sin that were set free, by the crucifixion. We were all set free, whether still alive or dead. I do not believe this verse should be interpreted as a literal train of souls moving from Hades to heaven. To say this is talking about bring souls out of Hades, I think, is to take the gift out of the immediate context.

2.11) The Earth Gives Birth to the Dead

In the Old Testament, the original verse about the resurrection is in Isaiah 26:17-21. Verse 19 (NIV) says, “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You, who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.” This passage will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. However, the important point to see here is that the resurrection happens from the earth, not from heaven. Those who dwell in the dust of the earth are still in the earth and will remain there until the resurrection. If they had been moved to heaven, then it would not be the earth that will give birth to the dead.

This can also be seen in Daniel 12:2 (ESV). It says, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” Both the wise and the foolish awake from the dust of the earth. The ancient Jew would never have interpreted these New Testament verses to mean that souls had been moved from the dust of the earth to heaven. They would have immediately objected to such an interpretation, because it violates the clear and basic Old Testament teaching that the dead are asleep in the dust of the earth and will remain so until the time of the resurrection.

Here is another Old Testament verse that strongly indicates the dead will be in their graves at the time of the resurrection.

Ezekiel 37:12-13 ESV Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. (13) And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people.

In the New Testament, Jesus said those in their tombs will hear his voice and come out (John 5:28-29). They are not coming out of heaven, but out of their tombs. The tomb, used here, is probably a metaphor for those who actually hear Christ's voice. Certainly many souls are no longer literally in tombs. Nevertheless, this metaphor fits a resurrection from the earth much better than a resurrection from heaven. Also, take a close look at the rapture verse in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 ESV For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Christ descends, and the dead are raised. Then we all are caught up in the rapture together. Again, the dead are raised from the dust of the earth. So the New Testament remains in harmony with the Old Testament concerning the intermediate state of the dead.

2.12) Not the God of the Dead but the God of the Living

Some have argued against soul sleep by referencing the argument Jesus made to the Sadducees about the resurrection (Matthew 22:23-32, Mark 12:18-28, Luke 20:27-38). All three of these accounts point out that the Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection. Apparently the Sadducees only believed in the Torah because Jesus had to go to the story of Moses and the burning bush in order to find evidence for the resurrection. We also know the Sadducees did not believe in angels or spirits (Acts 23:8). So for them, when you die there was no hope of an afterlife. After responding to their hypothetical about the seven brothers, Jesus says God is not the God of the dead but the God of the living.

Luke 20:37-38 But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord 'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' (38) Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all are alive to him."

Some who argue against soul sleep interpret this verse as saying that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are currently living. Some of these same people will acknowledge that the Old Testament undeniably teaches soul sleep and that in Old Testament times the dead were asleep, but that they went from hades to heaven at the time of the crucifixion. But Jesus used this argument before the crucifixion.

Jesus is using this argument specifically towards the point “that the dead are raised” as it says in verse 37. The Sadducees did not believe in angels or an afterlife (Acts 23:8). For Jesus to say to them that God is the God of the living is simply to deny their belief that there is no afterlife. And since Jesus’ point was stated as being about the resurrection, there is really no reason to imply that Jesus was also addressing the existence of an afterlife immediately after death.

Verse 38 says, “Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all are alive to him.” In other words, all are alive to God because God intends to make them alive at the resurrection. That is the point that Jesus is making because Jesus is arguing for the resurrection. God calls things that are not as though they were.

Romans 4:17 NIV As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Paul puts all the focus of our hope in Christ on the resurrection. Paul goes as far as saying that without the resurrection our faith is in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:12-14 Now if Christ is preached, that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? (13) But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised. (14) If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith also is in vain.

Who were these in the church at Corinth who denied the resurrection? It’s unlikely that they were Jewish Sadducees. They were most likely former pagans who still held onto some of their old Greek teachings. Apparently there was a big debate going on in Corinth as to whether there is a resurrection. The Greeks said there is no resurrection; but they nevertheless believed in an afterlife. You either belied in the resurrection or you believed in an immediate afterlife in heaven or hell. Apparently the early church compromised on this issue.

What really is the point in having a resurrection if the righteous are already celebrating in heaven? Many say it’s because they are not complete. They are celebrating in heaven but they don’t as yet have bodies. But Paul clearly teaches that our hope is in the resurrection. Without it, our faith is in vain. If the righteous really go to heaven when they die, would our faith still be in vain without the resurrection? No, our faith would be to go to heaven when you die. And that’s exactly what we hear at funerals. Preachers rarely mention the resurrection at funerals. They speak of the hope that our loved ones are in heaven.

When Martha was grieving over the death of her brother Lazarus, did she seek comfort in knowing Lazarus was in heaven? Or did she seek comfort in knowing he would be raised on the last day (John 11:24)? When we start believing in heaven-or-hell when you die, the hope becomes that of going to heaven. It's only when you are taught soul-sleep that the hope becomes that of the resurrection. Scripture teaches us to place our faith in Christ Jesus for salvation. Scripture teaches us to have faith in salvation because we have hope for the resurrection. In teaching about the resurrection, Paul says:

1 Corinthians 15:54-55 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (55) "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

Paul is making reference to Hosea 13:14 where it says Ephraim would not be ransomed from Sheol when the pain of childbirth comes. The saying about death being swallowed up in victory only comes true at the time of the resurrection. You see, our victory over death happens at the time of the resurrection.

Preachers also tell us that the wicked are currently in hell. Then, at the time of the resurrection, they will be raised in order to be judged. After they are judged they will go back to hell. Why will they be raised to be judged if they have already been judged because they are already in hell? Instead, the wicked will remain asleep in Hades until the Great White Throne of Judgment at the end of the millennium. Then, they will be thrown into the lake of fire, which is hell.

The focus of Scripture is on the resurrection. But the modern-day Church seems to remember the resurrection only on Easter. Every other day of the year we focus on going to heaven. The resurrection becomes very anti-climactic since one is assumed to already be in heaven at the time of the resurrection. People say we will be spirits in heaven but will get our "spiritual bodies" at the resurrection. Where in Scripture does it say we will be spirits in heaven? Just as in Scripture, the New Wine System puts the focus back on the resurrection.

2.13) The Wise Group: Souls under the Altar

The purpose of all this has been to allow for more than two types of people who have died. If there is simply heaven and hell, then eternity is established for everyone when they die. If everyone is still in Hades, waiting on the resurrection, then one's final state in eternity might or might not still be undetermined.

The New Wine System is based on three types of people in the grave. The wise are those who have completed their journey of righteousness before they die. The foolish are the ones who are still maturing, whether or not they have faith in Jesus Christ. The wicked are those who have hardened their hearts to the point where they can no longer hear Christ's voice (Heb. 3:7, 15, 4:7). Let's take a look at a few more verses to see if we can identify these three groups in New Testament verses about the dead.

We have already talked about the souls under the altar. We concluded these are not to be taken literally. However, the souls under the altar can be representative of the wise who have given their lives for Christ.

2.14) The Foolish Group: Jesus Preaches to Dead Guys

In the following verse, Jesus preached to dead spirits of people who had died in the Great Flood.

1 Peter 3:18-20 NIV For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, (19) through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison (20) who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

If our final destiny of heaven or hell is determined when we die, then why did Christ preach to people already dead? What good was he hoping to accomplish? Some will argue that Christ was preaching to demons, but this argument does not fit the context. Verse 18 says Christ died for the unrighteous. Those in prison who disobeyed long ago are very good examples of the unrighteous. Only eight were found to be righteous, and consequently saved through the flood. Christ died for the unrighteous people from before the flood as well, so he preached to them. Why would Jesus preach to souls who are already dead, if they have no hope of eternal salvation?

For argument's sake, suppose these spirits were demons. Or, suppose they were the spirits of people who have no hope of salvation. Would preaching to eternally condemned spirits fit God's character?

Traditional thinking holds that when people die, they go straight to heaven or hell with no possibility given for their journey to continue after the resurrection. But these people are not in hell or heaven. They are in “prison.”

This is further evidence that the eternal states of people are not generally determined at their time of death. These people sinned greatly. However, only the unpardonable sin condemns people to the lake of fire. These people could not have rejected the Messiah while living before the Great Flood because they didn’t have special revelation about the Messiah.

Here is another verse about the preaching to those who are dead. This verse is just eight verses down from our previous quote in 1 Peter, and is therefore in the same context. This context connection is sometimes missed because it’s in a different chapter. This verse gives further clarification of what Peter was saying.

1 Peter 4:6 NIV For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

If the reader takes this verse out of context, given the way it’s translated in the NIV, they could argue that the preaching was done before they were dead. The phrase “who are now dead” seems to imply they were not dead at the time of the preaching. But if we see this verse in the context of 3:18-12 (quoted above), it becomes obvious that this preaching was done after they were dead. Here is Young’s Literal Translation of the verse:

1 Peter 4:6 YLT For this also to dead men was good news proclaimed, that they may be judged, indeed, according to men in the flesh, and may live according to God in the spirit.

What does it mean for these dead men to be judged “according to men in the flesh?” Why is it possible for these dead men to “live according to God in the spirit?” Could it be that these dead men will someday have flesh? Will they be given further opportunity to “live according” to God’s ways?

It’s obvious that the NIV translators misinterpreted Peter’s message. The original Greek tells us that the gospel was proclaimed to dead people. But that goes against tradition, so the NIV translators apparently rendered it “who are now dead” in order to make it fit these traditions.

In the New Testament, more distinctions are made for the destinations of people who die. The Greek word Gehenna is used 12 times in the New Testament.

The word Gehenna comes from the name of the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem where garbage was burned. It's generally translated as hell, and is always used in a context that implies punishment.

We also have one occurrence of the Greek word "Tartarus," which is a place of gloomy dungeons where angels who sinned awaited their judgment (2 Peter 2:4). We also have 1 Peter 4:18-20, quoted above, where Christ preached to the spirits in prison. The word "Tartarus" is not used in this verse. The Greek word simply means prison.

In the New Testament times, there were far more distinctions made for places souls went in the afterlife. Apparently, between the times of the Old Testament and the New Testament, the ancient Jews received a much greater understanding (or perhaps a much greater confusion) about the afterlife. Nowhere in the New Testament does the writer simply sit down and explain it all.

Today, at funerals and in sermons, preachers speak of going straight to heaven or hell after we die. We speak of our dead loved ones as being in a better place, in heaven, even though the New Testament does not approach death in this way. The New Testament focuses on the hope of the resurrection.

The details of how the afterlife works may have to wait until the resurrection. We simply are not given enough information in Scripture. One thing is for certain, however, it's more complex than simply heaven or hell after you die.

2.15) The Wicked Group: The Parable of Lazarus

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man depicts an after-life conversation between Abraham and a rich man who is in torment in Hades (Luke 16:19-31). From the Jewish perspective, it's important to note that Lazarus, Abraham, and the rich man are in Hades and not Gehennah. In every other case, hell-fire is associated with Gehennah. Hades is the equivalent to the Old Testament Sheol, which is a place of rest for the dead. Both the just and the unjust are in Hades awaiting the resurrection. So this parable is more about the possibility of coming back from the dead, which is only possible for those who are still in Hades.

The Jews believed Abraham is in Hades awaiting the resurrection. Those who are never resurrected from Hades will eventually suffer torment in Gehennah. Therefore, the chasm between Abraham and the rich man in torment would be a chasm between Hades and Gehennah. Thus, the chasm is a chasm of time. That's why it would have been impossible to cross the chasm.

Do the dead souls undergoing punishment have bodies? The rich man is described as having fingers and a tongue, but this should not be taken literally. The fingers and tongue are merely devices used for building the parable. A parable is simply a fictitious story that is used to make a point. The point is that the wicked will wake up in real torment in Gehennah, after the thousand years.

Some have said this conversation is not a fictitious story, but that it actually occurred. The reason for this is that parables usually did not employ proper names, such as Lazarus. However, I believe the reason for the proper name is to connect the parable to the real Lazarus of John 11-12. (There are no other people called Lazarus in Scripture.) The point of the parable is that even if Lazarus had been raised and sent back to the living, the rich would still not believe.

The teaching of this parable was demonstrated when Jesus raised the real Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, from the dead (John 11-12). The raising of Lazarus did not cause the religious leaders to repent, just as Abraham had foretold in the parable. The chief priests even made plans to kill Lazarus (John 11:53, 12:10-11). It is also important to note that the raising of Lazarus occurred just a few weeks prior to the crucifixion (John 11:55, 12:1, 12:13).

Luke 16:27-31 "He said, 'I ask you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house; (28) for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, so they won't also come into this place of torment.' (29) "But Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' (30) "He said, 'No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' (31) "He said to him, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rises from the dead.'"

When one realizes the strong connection between the parable and the raising of the real Lazarus, we see that the rich man in the parable is representative of the chief priests who plotted to kill Jesus and Lazarus. Is it a coincidence that Jesus confronted chief priests about not believing Moses, and that this is also mentioned in the parable? They would not believe Moses, even when Lazarus was raised from the dead.

John 5:45-47 "Don't think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you, even Moses, on whom you have set your hope. (46) For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote about me. (47) But if you don't believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

Before Lazarus was raised, most of the other miracles were easier to ignore. Talk of healing the blind, sick, and crippled would have spread throughout Jerusalem. But these were poor people, and the rich could have easily ignored them.

However, not all the miracles of healing of the poor could be ignored. When Jesus was tested about healing on the Sabbath, He healed a man with a withered hand sitting in the synagogue (Matthew 12:9-13). In response, the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, discussing how to destroy him (verse 14).

You may want to refer to section 7.1, titled "Blaspheming the Holy Spirit." The section takes a close look at Matthew 12. The conclusion of Matthew 12 is that the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit constitutes seeing the miracles performed by the Holy Spirit, and attributing them to Satan. When God personally reveals Himself in this way, a rejection of that personal revelation is unpardonable.

The chief priests could not deny the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. Many prominent people had seen it. The chief priests knew without question that the miracle had taken place. The Lazarus in the parable was a poor beggar. If a beggar had been raised back to life, would the rich believe that it had happened? They would reason, "Why would God bother with a poor beggar?" But the real Lazarus was not a poor person. Everyone in Jerusalem knew of its occurrence, and as a result they proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah when he rode in on a donkey. In other words everybody, including the chief priests, knew Jesus must be the Messiah, because of this miracle and the many miracles proceeding this one. Jesus' power was undeniable, yet the chief priests plotted to kill Him. This is the unpardonable sin.

I do not believe the parable of Lazarus was referring to everyone who dies without having accepted Christ as their Savior. The parable of Lazarus is talking about some of the rich chief priests whose hearts were so hard that even the raising of the dead would not convince them that Jesus must be the Messiah.

The parable of Lazarus, therefore, is about the wicked. It was not focused on the foolish group. Its purpose was to talk about the Pharisees who plotted to kill Lazarus and Jesus, even when Lazarus was sent back from the grave.

But are the wicked currently being punished in Hades? Jesus speaks of the punishment in the fire of Gehenna. But that probably refers to the lake of fire after the millennial reign of Christ. Remember that in the Jewish culture, the dead are asleep. They expect to wake up very soon at the time of the resurrection. But the wicked will not be raised. So for them, the Great White Throne Judgment would be perceived as very soon after death.

2.16) Where Are The Saints?

Catholics might agree that those in the foolish middle group are asleep in Hades, awaiting life in the millennium instead of in purgatory. However, the Catholics have a strong tradition that the saints are in heaven. They strongly believe in a communion with saints in heaven. Could the souls of the saints be in heaven while the middle group is still in Hades?

A friend of mine (who was tragically killed in a car accident) once told me she had seen the spirits of three people who had died. She had known each of them, but they did not speak to her. They simply stood there for a bit and then disappeared. One of these three was my grandfather. All of them had attended Baptist churches. Before this vision, my friend had not been a Christian. This event convinced her there is an afterlife, and that she should be prepared for it.

All three had been Baptist, so she went to several local Baptist churches. When she told her story they either did not believe her, or attributed her vision to demonic influence. But were these so-called demons driving my friend towards Christianity? Next, she attended the local Catholic Church. They believed her because this kind of vision is much more in line with Catholic traditions. Thus, my friend became a Catholic.

Personally, I believe her. And I don't think they were demons. This was a life-changing experience for her. So how does this fit with the New Wine System? I think that God can use the saints who have departed to further His purpose. I don't, however, believe they can have a productive, enjoyable life until they again receive a body after the resurrection. Otherwise, there would not be much point to the resurrection. Any that appear have simply been temporarily awakened like Samuel (1 Samuel 28). Or perhaps my friend simply saw a vision.

If Catholics and Protestants have a difficult time believing the saints are not yet alive and in heaven, such a belief would not destroy the New Wine System. The system works as long as there are three types of people who have died: (1) the saints, (2) those still on the path of righteousness, and (3) the wicked. If one were to insist that the saints are in alive and rejoicing in heaven, this would not be detrimental to the New Wine System. Likewise, the wicked group could be in hell since their names are blotted from the Lamb's book of Life. The view of (1) saints, the (2) foolish, and the (3) wicked can still fit traditional Catholic doctrine. The difference being that those in the middle group are not in purgatory. They are still asleep and await the resurrection and the continuation of their journey of righteousness during the millennium.

2.17) What Is Paradise Anyway?

Earlier in this chapter, we examined the verse where Jesus told the thief on the cross that he will be with Jesus in Paradise, which Paul later visited in the third heaven. What is Paradise?

The word Paradise comes from a Persian word meaning a walled or enclosed garden. The Septuagint uses the word Paradise in Genesis for the Garden of Eden. When the Jewish people heard the word Paradise, they would have thought of the Garden of Eden. Revelation 2:7 tells us the tree of life is in Paradise.

Revelation 2:7b To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of my God.

Revelation 3:12 He who overcomes, ... the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name.

At the end of Revelation we see the tree of life in the New Jerusalem, which is described as a walled or enclosed garden, invoking the very meaning of Paradise. These verses say that Paradise, the New Jerusalem, is a reward for those who conquer (overcome) sin by the time of Christ's return, not at the end of the millennium. Also, the description of New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22 is very similar to that of the Garden of Eden in Genesis. The tree of life is located in Paradise. Since the tree of life is in the New Jerusalem, Paradise must be the New Jerusalem as described in Revelation 21-22.

It is approximately 1400 miles wide, 1400 miles long, and 1400 miles high. If it were to sit on the earth it would tower high into space, much higher than the space shuttle flights and the international space station. In my opinion, it will not sit on the earth, but will be in orbit when Christ returns.

John 14:2-3 ESV In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?
(3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

These rooms (dwelling-places) are apparently to be given to all who abide in Christ. They will be ready when Christ returns. Yet, the nations will live throughout the world during the millennium.

How big does the Father's house need to be in order to have rooms for a countless number of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language? Yet, Jesus will be here on earth, and we will reign with him.

Hebrews 12:22-23 But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable multitudes of angels, (23) to the general assembly and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

This verse says those in the Bride are "enrolled in heaven." The elect are "enrolled" to be at the wedding banquet. However, those enrolled in the "heavenly Jerusalem" are only the "firstborn," according to this verse. If the Bride of Christ is only composed of the "firstborn," many others are to follow. Therefore, many in the middle group will also become righteous and eternal life.

Hebrews 13:14 For we don't have here an enduring city, but we seek that which is to come.

We won't have to wait until the end of the millennium. The New Jerusalem will be with Christ when he returns. Instead of us going to heaven when we die, the kingdom of heaven will come to earth when Christ returns.

Revelation 21:9-10 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were loaded with the seven last plagues came, and he spoke with me, saying, "Come here. I will show you the wife, the Lamb's bride." (10) He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

The New Jerusalem is "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." Also, Revelation 22:14-15 implies that only those with spiritual bodies can enter. Sinners remain outside (verse 15). The New Jerusalem is the place where the wedding banquet is held.

Revelation 22:14-15 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. (15) Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Thus, the New Jerusalem will have rooms for all those who will reign with Christ. The middle group will not be able to enter Paradise. The wise, however, will be able to go between the earth and Paradise, which will be in orbit around the earth.

Chapter 3

Born Again Verses

To get a better understanding of various doctrinal systems that are believed, we need to take a look at John 3 to see what Jesus was talking about when he spoke to Nicodemus. What does it mean to be born again? Then we will compare and contrast Jesus' teaching about entering the kingdom of heaven with Paul's teaching about salvation.

Books have been written about the apparent dichotomy between the gospel of Paul and the gospel of Jesus. In other words, how do we resolve the difference between holiness verses and free-grace verses? Is salvation a journey from infant baptism? Or is salvation a decision that is made by one who understands what Christ has done for them and asks Christ to come into their hearts and to forgive them of their sins? Or could there be some truth to both of these viewpoints?

The "born again" debate is an area of Scripture of which the Catholics and the Baptists have had a major disagreement. It's the issue of infant baptism vs. the believer's water baptism by immersion. Which is correct? With infant baptism, salvation is a journey to holiness. This view would tend to put more emphasis on Jesus' words of the holiness that's needed in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

On the other hand, with immersion baptism, salvation is a "born again" decision or experience at the time when a person accepts Christ as their personal Savior. With immersion baptism, salvation is more of a decision than a journey. This view would tend to place more emphasis on Paul's free-grace verses than on the holiness verses of Jesus.

Augustine taught infant baptism. Luther was a big fan of Augustine. So the Protestant Reformation continued with the practice of infant baptism. Early on, Anabaptists were killed, by Protestants and Catholics alike, for their belief in immersion baptism. Today, Lutherans tend to hold a middle ground between Roman Catholics and Reformed Calvinists. On the other side of this issue, today Baptists and other Conservative Evangelicals place emphasis on missions and getting people saved. They tend to hold a "once saved always saved" view. Why is baptism such a divisive topic?

3.1) Born Again as Infant Baptism

Barnabas (100 AD) spoke of baptism by water immersion (The Epistle of Barnabas, chapter XI). The early church fathers also seemed to interpret being born of water and of Spirit as water baptism. This included Justin Martyr (First Apology LX) and Irenaeus (Fragment XXXIV). In other words, they believed we are “born again” when we are baptized. By the time of Augustine, this had become infant baptism. Augustine wrote (Letter XCVII paragraph 2):

But the possibility of regeneration through the office rendered by the will of another, when the child is presented to receive the sacred rite, is the work exclusively of the Spirit by whom the child thus presented is regenerated. For it is not written, "Except a man be born again by the will of his parents, or by the faith of those presenting the child, or of those administering the ordinance," but, "Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit." By the water, therefore; which holds forth the sacrament of grace in its outward form, and by the Spirit who bestows the benefit of grace in its inward power, cancelling the bond of guilt, and restoring natural goodness [reconcilians bonum naturae], the man deriving his first birth originally from Adam alone, is regenerated in Christ alone. Now the regenerating Spirit is possessed in common both by the parents who present the child, and by the infant that is presented and is born again.

Notice the progression from Adam to Christ at the time of infancy. Could Augustine have been thinking of this verse?

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruits of those who are asleep. (21) For since death came by man, the resurrection of the dead also came by man. (22) For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (23) But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who are Christ's, at his coming.

But I would argue that in context Paul is talking about the resurrection, not about a spiritual regeneration. The whole chapter is about the resurrection. One could argue that the death in Adam is a spiritual death, and thus all are made alive spiritually in Christ. But it's also just as valid to say that everyone will physically die because of Adam, and thus everyone will be physically resurrected because of Christ. That fits the context much better. But will everyone really be physically

resurrected in Christ in the same way that everyone will physically die because of Adam? Protestant tradition says that only believers will be made alive at the resurrection. But the New Wine System says that everyone will be made alive. True, there are exceptions to the rule. The wicked will not be resurrected. And likewise, those alive in Christ at the time of Christ's return will not die. But as a general rule, everyone will be resurrected because of Christ's sacrifice just as everyone will die because of Adam's sin. So I believe that in context this verse is talking about the resurrection.

But Augustine probably believed 1 Corinthians 15:22 to be talking about a spiritual birth at the time of infant baptism. Likewise, Augustine believed that John 3:5-6 is also talking about infant baptism. But as we will see later in this chapter, I believe that 1 Corinthians 15:22 and John 3:5-6 are both talking about the physical resurrection. To be "born again" is not a spiritual regeneration at the time of infancy. Nor is it a spiritual regeneration at the time of a believer's faith in Christ. As we will see later in the chapter, to be "born again" is to be resurrected.

John 3:3, 5-6 ESV Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." ... (5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

But what happens to infants who die without being baptized? Many theorized a place called Limbo where infants would remain for eternity without growing up.

One issue that arises from the infant baptism view is who or what church organizations can perform the baptism? When the Protestant Reformation came along, Luther continued the practice of infant baptism. There was a need for Scriptural doctrine that would allow for infant baptism, and for the other ordinances, without the traditional Catholic Church being involved.

Therefore, the Reformed Covenantal System was put forth. This system states that Israel is all those who are in Christ, which is the spiritual one true Church. The new covenant is a continuation of the system of covenants in the Old Testament. The word "testament" means covenant. Older Bibles were divided into the Old Covenant and New Covenant sections.

Then it was observed that infant circumcision was the sign for being a part of God's covenantal relationship with Israel. Therefore, it was reasoned, infant baptism should be the sign of God's covenantal relationship under the new

covenant. For the Reformation to work, the authority of the Catholic Church was replaced by the authority of the Covenantal System. Infant baptism became the sign of the new covenant. There is one verse that has been used to say that baptism is the new circumcision.

Colossians 2:11-13 in whom you were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; (12) having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. (13) You were dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.

One can make the case with this verse that baptism is the sign of the new covenant just as circumcision was the sign of the old covenant. John the Baptist was baptizing before the crucifixion, arguably under the old covenant. Nevertheless, baptism clearly took on the new meaning of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

This verse doesn't explicitly state that baptism is the sign of the new covenant in the same way that circumcision is the sign of the old covenant. But many would see that it's strongly implied. One can then make the case that baptism should be for infants in the same way that circumcision was for infants. Or is this simply something that is being read into the verse to support a very strong tradition? We must all make up our own minds on that question. But there is a strong case for it.

The belief in infant baptism would be a hard tradition and belief to overcome. Parents would be terrified that their infant children might die and go to hell. Later, Baptists observed that in Scripture all occurrences of baptism were immersion in water by a believer. So they began to practice believer's water baptism. And for infants, the concept of an age of accountability was developed, which is not found in Scripture.

Of course with the New Wine System, none of this is a problem. And there is no need for an infant Limbo. Infants were all reconciled to God, by the blood of Christ, before they were even born. Even infants can hear Christ's voice. Infants grow up and continue to hear Christ's voice. Any infant or child who dies young is simply resurrected to grow up in the millennium. Infants who die young do not go directly to heaven because no man (or infant) can come to the Father without first maturing in Jesus Christ.

3.2) Catholic Born Again and Catholic Salvation

As we have seen, the term “born again” traditionally means infant baptism. When the baby is sprinkled, he or she becomes a new creature. The original sin of Adam is removed.

Does this mean the baby is saved? Not under the Catholic system. Many Protestants are surprised to learn that to a Catholic, “born again” does not mean “saved.” Also, many Protestants are surprised to learn that salvation for Catholics is not by works. Salvation for Catholics is by faith through God’s grace.

The difference between the Catholic and Protestant systems is that Catholics are saved each time they confess their sins. Salvation is an ongoing process. Salvation is a journey. Salvation and sanctification are the same. You might ask a Catholic, “Are you saved?” He or she might answer, “No, but I will be.” There is truth in this view. We must “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Phi. 2:12). It’s not so important where we begin on this path. The important thing is where we end up. Salvation is a journey, not a one-time decision.

A friend, while reading an earlier edition of this book, had a few comments to make. He wrote:

I was baptized as an infant, and after my "born again" experience in my late 20's was baptized again as an adult. About a year later after gaining a greater understanding of God's grace, I came to realize my "real" baptism was my infant one. I came to understand that baptism is best understood as a picture of salvation which is best understood as God's commitment to me, not my commitment to God. This is a viewpoint that you will find common among Bible believing Lutherans. I was not raised Lutheran, but came to have a very high regard for the clarity of Law-Gospel in Lutheran theology.

Lutherans have held distinctly different positions from Calvinists for centuries and these are detailed in their confessions and creeds, particularly the Augsburg Confession. Lutherans have long held the middle ground between Reformed and Catholic theology.

This friend has realized in his own life that God has been working with him from infancy. Catholics and Lutherans experience this all the time.

3.3) Born Again with Believer's Immersion Baptism

The (Baptist) Conservative Evangelical has a very different meaning for the term "born again." He or she believes we are born again when for the first time we confess our sins to Jesus, and ask Christ to save us. At this point in time we become new creatures. We are spiritually born again. Salvation and "born again" are equivalent. The born-again salvation experience happens only once. It's the one-time baptism of the Spirit. Later, there can be many occasions for a renewing of the Spirit, or being filled again with the Spirit. Much more emphasis tends to be placed on the need for that first-time born-again experience.

When do we receive the Holy Spirit? If infant baptism is being born of water and of Spirit, then the infant, at the time of the sprinkling, receives the Holy Spirit. If the Conservative Evangelical is correct, then we receive the Holy Spirit when we make our first profession of faith.

How does the Evangelical interpret being "born of water and of Spirit" (John 3:5)? What is the water? Many Evangelicals tend to spiritualize the water, saying it's cleansing or perhaps hearing of God's word. Usually, anything that is not understood or does not fit one's system is spiritualized. However, I believe the best answer is to say the water is our literal physical (flesh) birth from the womb of our mothers. Consider the following parallelism in the text.

John 3:5-6 Jesus answered, "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God! (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

In other words, the water is in reference to the mother's water breaking right before she gives birth. There is nothing in the context of the passage to suggest baptism.

The Evangelical understands the term "born again" to be the same as salvation. However, salvation should be viewed as a continual process. We were saved (Rom 8:24), we are being saved (1 Cor. 1:18), and we will be saved (Rom 5:10). Salvation must include reconciliation, justification, sanctification, and finally the glorification of our bodies. Reconciliation is what Christ did on the cross for everyone. Justification means to be declared righteous (credited with righteousness), by faith. Sanctification is the journey towards that righteousness. Glorification of our bodies is to receive eternal life spiritual bodies. This cannot happen until we are entirely sanctified. When we start viewing salvation as a "born again" event, other than the event of spiritual bodies, we get into trouble. Salvation should be thought of as a road. We are on a journey of righteousness to complete

holiness. The end of the road is eternal life. So the entire road can be considered the process of salvation, which is to receive eternal life. We are “born again” into spiritual bodies at the end of the journey.

It’s hard to view the term “born again” as a continual process. And Evangelicals do not. Evangelicals understand there is a sanctification process that continues. However, the Evangelicals mostly view one’s initial decision for Christ as being born again and salvation. Very rarely does the Evangelical ask, “Are you being saved?” Or, “will you be saved?” The Evangelical would never ask, “Are you being born again?” The Evangelical asks, “When were you saved?” Or, “When were you born again?” Many of us have the date of our salvation and the date of our baptism written in our Bibles. Often, very little emphasis is placed on our continual path towards salvation. Basically, it’s “once saved always saved.” For many, this removes much of the importance for our continued walk.

Jewish eschatology provides Scriptural evidence that children who die young do not go to hell. Solved by applying Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church.

3.4) The Second Adam and the Removal of the Original Sin

In section 3.1 (above), we talked about Augustine’s view of infant baptism. He based infant baptism on John 3:5.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God!"

Augustine associated the original birth with Adam and the second birth of being “born again,” in infant baptism, with Christ. He wrote, “The man deriving his first birth originally from Adam alone, is regenerated in Christ alone,” as quoted in section 3.1 above. This developed into the Catholic belief that infant baptism removes the original sin of Adam. We also considered a Protestant view of John 3:5, which is to say the water is not baptism. It’s representative of the physical birth. Just before we are physically born, the mother’s water breaks.

Here again is the verse in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 that relates to Christ being the second Adam.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruits of those who are asleep. (21) For since death came by man, the resurrection of the dead also came by man. (22) For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (23) But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who are Christ's, at his coming.

I would argue that in context Paul is talking about the resurrection, not about a spiritual regeneration. The whole chapter is about the resurrection. To dig deeper, we also need to look at Romans 5. In this chapter Paul talks more about Christ being the second Adam. As we will see, there is nothing about baptism. However, there is a lot about the reversal of Adam's original sin for everyone. Thus, the truth hides in the middle between the Catholics and the Protestants.

Romans 5:10-12 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life. (11) Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (12) Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned.

While we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son. Everyone has been an enemy of God because everyone has sinned. Thus, everyone has been reconciled to God through the death of his Son. Again, this is while we were enemies. Everyone is reconciled because of Christ's death. But only the believers are justified by faith. Our sins are forgiven only when we become believers. Is this splitting hairs?

No, because Adam's original sin is removed for everyone, not just for infants who are baptized. The wages of sin is death for everyone because of Adam. But since everyone has been reconciled, everyone can be resurrected and live in the nations during Christ's reign. Again, since everyone was an enemy, everyone was reconciled, and thus everyone "will be saved by his life" (verse 10). To be saved means one is saved from death. It means one is resurrected. Jesus paid the price (ransom) for everyone to be able to live under his kingdom and thus have the opportunity to have faith in Christ for eternal life. Next, Paul outlines a few differences between Adam's one sin and Christ's one act of righteousness.

Romans 5:15-17 But the free gift isn't like the trespass. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. (16) The gift is not as through one who sinned: for the judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification. (17) For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ.

Everyone was condemned by the sin of Adam, because we were all born with a sinful nature. The free gift is that “those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness [will] reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ.” In other words, only those who have faith in Christ will receive this abundance of grace to become righteous. Everyone is reconciled. But not everyone becomes righteous. Everyone can be resurrected. But not everyone receives eternal life.

Romans 5:18 So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life.

“All men were justified to life.” This doesn’t mean that all men are made righteous. In other words, not everyone will accept Christ and have faith in Christ. But “all men were justified to life” by the cross. The ESV translates it as “one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.” The translators included the verb “leads to.” But that verb is not in the Greek. The translators have a bias that says not everyone will be given life. But that’s a bias of the translators based on their personal doctrines. The truth of the matter is that Christ’s one act of righteousness, the cross, brought a justification for everyone and everyone will be given life. Everyone will be resurrected. Of course there are exceptions to this rule. But it’s a resurrection of both the just and the unjust (Acts 24:15).

Romans 5:19-21 For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous. (20) The law came in besides, that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly; (21) that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul has been using parallelism. He draws the parallel between Adam and Christ, making Christ be the second Adam. In verse 19 (above), Paul continues his parallelism. “Many, [but not all,] will be made righteous.” This is in a parallelism with “many were made sinners.” Of course everyone was made a sinner. Paul is doing a play on words for the sake of the parallelism. One could argue that those who are made righteous are treated by God as if they were never sinners. The important point to see is that “all men were justified to life.”

All men were “justified to life” while we were still Christ’s enemies. In other words, before we were even born we were “justified to life.” The original sin has been removed for everyone. This means that infant baptism is not necessary. Everyone still has a sinful nature because of Adam’s sin. But no one has the penalty of death because of Adam’s sin. Everyone has be ransomed. That’s why Christ is the second Adam.

1 Timothy 2:3-6 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; (4) who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth. (5) For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (6) who gave himself as a ransom for all; the testimony in its own times;

The New Wine System is entirely formulated using Scripture alone. And with the New Wine System, there is no need to add patches to the system in order to make it work. There is no need for purgatory, limbo, born again infant baptism, infant baptism as a sign of the new covenant, or an age of accountability. No man, not even infants and the mentally ill, can come to the Father except through Jesus Christ. An infant who dies is simply resurrected in the millennium. People with a mental illness that prevents them from understanding about Christ will simply be resurrected in the millennium.

But does the New Wine System require the elimination of infant baptism? No, because infant baptism can be seen as a symbol of the journey of righteousness that the parent intends to instigate in the child. Infant baptism should be seen as a dedication by the parents to help the child as he or she grows in the building of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It's a dedication to teach the child about Jesus and to help the child grow and understand about God. Then, perhaps, believer's immersion can also be included later on when the person grows to the point of taking on that responsibility for themselves. Ok, then what does Scripture say about being born again?

3.5) Born Again in the Old Testament

What most people miss about the born again passage is that Jesus indicates that being born again is a concept from the Old Testament. If possible, it's always best to interpret the New Testament in the context of the Old Testament. This is necessary when following the hermeneutic of progressive revelation.

In John 3:3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Nicodemus didn't understand how he could go back into his mother's womb. "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?" (John 3:10) Jesus was being kind to Nicodemus. He wasn't being sarcastic. Jesus was speaking of Old Testament Scripture about being born again, which Nicodemus was not recalling. Does the average Christian know where in the Old Testament it talks about being born again? Jesus was talking about the earth giving birth to her dead (Isaiah 26:16-21). In other words, at the resurrection we will be "born again."

We will be literally "born again" at the resurrection. But this is not to deny our spiritual "born again" experiences as we journey down that road. It's like the word "salvation." We were saved (Rom. 8:24), we are being saved (1 Cor. 1:18), and in the future we will be literally saved (Rom. 5:10) from sin and death at the resurrection. We were figuratively "born again" when we accepted Christ and received the Holy Spirit. With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we become new creatures. All our past, present, and future sins are forgiven when we become believers. But in the future, we will be physically and literally born again at the time of the resurrection. We will literally be born into new bodies.

The term "born," for a new spiritual birth, is used by New Testament writers in 1 Cor. 15:8, Gal. 4:29 1 Peter 1:3, 1:23 and 1 John 3:9. Paul said we become "new creatures" (Gal. 6:15, 2 Cor. 5:17) and "new selves" (Col. 3:10, Eph. 4:24) in reference to our salvation experience. So Jesus was indirectly speaking about the road of righteousness. But more directly Jesus was speaking about the end of that road, at the resurrection, when we are literally saved from sin and death.

Nicodemus didn't immediately connect the term "born again" to the resurrection. But Nicodemus was probably aware of the passage in Isaiah. It's one of the few passages in the Old Testament on the resurrection. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. The debate of that time between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was whether or not there will be a resurrection. So Nicodemus probably was just not used to having the term "born again" used in reference to the resurrection. However, the term "born again" is quite appropriate for the verse.

Isaiah 26:17 speaks of a woman with child, about to give birth, who cries out in her pain. Isaiah compares this with Israel, whose task it was to bring salvation from sin and death into the world. But Israel only brings birth to wind (verse 18). Yet Isaiah prophesies (verse 19) that the dead will live. Their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy. The earth will give birth to her dead.

Then, in the next two verses, and into the next chapter, Isaiah speaks of the wrath of God. So the wrath of God immediately follows the resurrection. Also, notice that the context of these verses is "salvation to the earth ... to the people of the world." The resurrection is not just for Israel. It's not just for the chosen. It's for the entire world. From the Jewish perspective, this is a resurrection for both Israel and for the nations. These verses in Isaiah about the resurrection do not distinguish the righteous from the unrighteous.

In the Old Testament, both the righteous and the unrighteous die and remain in Sheol (Hades). In the New Testament, Gehenna was introduced, and the idea of going to Paradise was introduced. But in Old Testament times, no real distinction was made between the just and the unjust. Everyone went to Sheol when they died. Let's be sure to read Isaiah 26:16-21 the way ancient Jews would have read it. At the resurrection, the majority of everyone who has ever died will be raised (John 5:28-29). But as we have seen, the truly evil (wicked) people, and those who will have taken the mark of the beast, will not be raised. They will not be raised because they choose to become enemies of God and thus they reject Christ's salvation.

Let's look back again at what Jesus said in the context of Isaiah 26. It's "salvation to the earth ... to the people of the world."

John 3:5-6 Jesus answered, "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God!
(6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

At the resurrection, there will be two types of people raised. The wise will be raised with spiritual bodies, born of the Spirit. The foolish will be raised with natural bodies of flesh, which in nature are born of water. Both resurrections are new bodies and thus technically they are both born again. But in order to actually enter the kingdom, you must have a spiritual body.

3.6) Entering the Kingdom and Inheriting the Kingdom

John 3:5-6 says, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and of Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." So you have to have a spiritual body in order to "enter" the literal and natural kingdom of God.

John 3:3-5 ESV Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (4) Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

What is the kingdom of God in this context? During the millennium, there will be sinners who reject Christ's reign. This is apparent because when Satan is released, at the end of the millennium, many people will follow Satan and they will march against Jerusalem. Yet, the millennium is Christ's reign. This presents a big problem for millennialists, those who believe in a literal thousand-year reign of Christ. Is not Christ's reign the "kingdom of God?"

Nobody can "see" or "enter" the kingdom of God without being born again. Yet, during the millennium, there will be sinners in the kingdom of God who will reject Christ's salvation. Would not Nicodemus have understood the "kingdom of God" to be the Messianic reign? Christ's reign will extend all over the world. Therefore, the entire world will be the "kingdom of God." We should interpret Christ's words in the context of how Christ's audience (Nicodemus) would have understood. There will be sinners, who will march against Jerusalem and against Christ, living on earth during the Messianic reign. Yet they will see and enter the kingdom of God, here on earth.

Apparently, we must make a distinction between the kingdom on earth, and the kingdom in heaven, even during Christ's reign. Those on earth that do not have spiritual bodies will not be able to "enter" the kingdom of God in heaven. But they probably will be able to see it from the outside. Unless one adheres to amillennialism, the only way to solve this problem is for Paradise, the New Jerusalem, to be in close proximity to the earth during the millennium. My guess is that it will be in orbit around the earth. All the people of the earth will be able to see the outside of it from here on earth. But only those literally "born again" of the Spirit, having received spiritual bodies, will be able to "enter" the kingdom and "see" it from the inside. Perhaps, however, we will be able to take pictures!

John 3:8 says, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." Taken literally, if you have a spiritual body you can literally "come and go like the wind," so that no one can tell where you come from or where you are going. Jesus demonstrated this after His resurrection with his spiritual body when he appeared in the middle of the locked room. So, literally speaking, this verse is a description of spiritual bodies. But figuratively speaking, this verse can be interpreted to mean the Holy Spirit leads us in ways that others don't understand.

John 3:12 says, "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" If the things Jesus told Nicodemus are only about a heavenly "born again" experience when we accept Christ, then what are the earthly things of which Jesus was speaking? Instead, the "born again" event is an earthly thing that Nicodemus did not believe. The earthly things are about the literal kingdom of God that will come, and the literal "born again" event when the earth gives birth to the dead.

The heavenly things are the spiritual aspects of what it takes to walk the path of righteousness. But even though the heavenly aspects of becoming a "new creature," or a "new self," can be seen in the passage, the things Jesus told Nicodemus up to this point are only earthly things, according to this verse. So Jesus is really focusing on the earthly resurrection that comes on the "last day," before the literal and earthly kingdom of God.

Jesus spoke of "seeing" the kingdom only this one time in John chapter 3, which is the main chapter that evangelicals use. It's the chapter in which Jesus said that if you believe on Him, then you will have everlasting life (John 3:16). Elsewhere, Jesus spoke often of "entering" the kingdom. Jesus spoke of "inheriting" the kingdom only once, in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:34).

Paul, however, never mentions "entering" the kingdom. Paul seems to have preferred the term "inheriting" the kingdom over "entering" the kingdom. The word "inherit" much more relates to Israel "inheriting" the promise of Abraham. In other words, "inheriting" the kingdom is much more suggestive of the exclusive relationship that Israel believed they had with God. The word "inherit" seems to make more of a distinction between Israel and the nations. Perhaps that's because Paul's audience was mostly Gentile, and he wanted them to believe they are a part of true Israel. Jesus was addressing Jewish people who believed that anyway. In any case, Paul never speaks of "entering" the kingdom.

3.7) A Survey of Verses About Entering and Inheriting the Kingdom

Let's do a survey of verses where Christ speaks of entering the kingdom. We will also include Paul's words about inheriting the kingdom. As we will see, most of these verses require a large journey toward holiness in order to enter or inherit the kingdom. Will this study say that you must overcome sin before you die in order to avoid the punishment of hell? A study of what Christ said about entering the kingdom, ignoring Paul's words, would seem to indicate this is the case. It's only through Paul's words that we find a gospel of Grace, which depends solely on faith in Christ's salvation, in order to avoid the punishment of hell. Did Jesus and Paul teach different gospels? Did Jesus teach salvation by works while Paul taught salvation by faith alone?

Jesus told believers to seek the kingdom of God and righteousness.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 7:21 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 19:23-24 Jesus said to his disciples, "Most certainly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. (24) Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

Matthew 21:31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into the Kingdom of God before you.

Matthew 23:14 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you don't enter in yourselves, neither do you allow those who are entering in to enter.

Acts 14:21-22 When they had preached the Good News to that city, and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, (22) confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many afflictions we must enter into the Kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Or don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, (10) nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor extortioners, will inherit the Kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 15:50 Now I say this, brothers, that flesh and blood can't inherit the Kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, (20) idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, (21) envyings, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Under a two-type system of heaven or hell when you die, these verses (above) would say you have to overcome sin in order to enter heaven and be saved. Under the three-type New Wine System, these verses would only be talking about the foolish becoming wise by overcoming sin and maturing in righteousness.

However, what about the following verse? Would it be saying that if you don't overcome sin before you die, that you will go to hell?

Mark 9:47 If your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out. It is better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the Gehenna of fire,

If death is the end of the journey, then such would be the only conclusion. If you are continuing to sin, you should pluck your eye out. Or perhaps you could sidestep the verse by inventing two types of sin. But Scripture does not teach two types of sin. In order for the New Wine System to work, entering the kingdom must be entering the New Jerusalem in heaven. And some people will need longer than this age to complete the journey.

But it's clear that Jesus was placing much more emphasis on becoming holy in order to enter the kingdom (New Jerusalem), whereas Paul taught that we are all on that journey of righteousness, and that salvation is by faith. Jesus seemed to be saying that the alternative is the punishment of hell. But the message of hell was directed primarily at the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. They were in danger of losing their reconciliation by deliberately rejecting Christ. Paul, on the other hand, was talking to people who had no knowledge of Christ and therefore could not deliberately become Christ's enemy. Most of Paul's audience was not in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. Paul's message was to build the body of believers, whereas Jesus' message was to build the holiness that is necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven, which is the New Jerusalem.

The difference between Jesus and Paul is that Jesus is the Messiah and Paul is simply a witness of the Messiah. Jesus is the King. It's one thing to refute and disbelieve a witness of the King. It's quite another thing to refute and disbelieve the King himself. Also, Jesus performed many more miracles than Paul, and the miracles of Jesus were much more public. Attributing the miracles of the Holy Spirit to Beelzebub is unpardonable. While Jesus preached, the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand because Jesus is the King. After Jesus arose and ascended to heaven, the earthly Kingdom of Heaven was no longer at hand. It would have to await the second coming.

Assuming death is not the end of the journey, what will be the message when Christ returns? The message will be more like that of Jesus and less like that of Paul. The message will be that you must overcome sin in order to enter the New Jerusalem. If not, you will die the second death and wind up in the lake of fire. In other words, with the literal kingdom present, with the King of Kings physically present here on the earth, the emphasis of the message becomes that of holiness. When the kingdom is in our hearts, but is not yet in the world, the message is to have faith in Christ for salvation, and to build the body of believers.

In the age to come, holiness becomes more and more the way to avoid the lake of fire. When the King of Kings was physically here, the literal earthly kingdom was forcefully advancing (Mat. 11:12). The earthly kingdom was much more at-hand. But the Jewish leaders were not ready to reign with Christ. When Israel rejected the Messiah, the earthly kingdom was delayed until a time when Christ would have people from every nation, tribe, people, and language who will have overcome sin in order to reign with Christ. Today, the kingdom is in our hearts and we await the age to come. When Christ was physically here, the message was the same as it will be when Christ returns.

3.8) The Woman About to Give Birth

Let's go back and review again the "born again" symbolism that begins with Isaiah 26:17-21. Verse 19 (NIV) says, "But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You, who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy." This is the resurrection. Verse 17 speaks of the woman with child who is about to give birth. She cries out in pain. Verse 19 says, "The earth will give birth to her dead." In verses 17 and 18, Isaiah compares the woman to Israel. So the woman is Israel. But he says Israel cried out in the pain of childbirth, and was only able to give birth to wind. Giving birth to wind means exactly what you visualize when you think about it. Isaiah is a book of poetry. Giving birth to wind is a poetic way of saying Israel gave birth to nothing.

Isaiah 26:17-19 ESV Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O LORD; (18) we were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen. (19) Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

Of course we know that through Christ, the woman (Israel) will bring salvation to the earth. In this poetic analogy, it's the earth, or the Creation that brings this birth. In reality the Holy Spirit will give birth to the dead. But in a poetic way, Isaiah is showing that this will be like a new act of Creation.

The same symbolism can be found in Isaiah 66. Don't miss the pregnant-woman symbolism, which indicates this verse is talking about the resurrection. Also, don't miss the resurrection of Christ. Compare this with the woman who is about to give birth in Revelation 12.

Isaiah 66:7-9 NIV "Before she goes into labor, she gives birth; before the pains come upon her, she delivers a son. (8) Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children. (9) Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?" says the LORD. "Do I close up the womb when I bring to delivery?" says your God.

Zion (or Israel) is in labor. So the woman is Israel. Before the birth pains, she brings forth a male son. This is Christ. Christ is the firstborn of Israel (Rom 8:29, Col 1:18, Heb 1:6, 11:28, 12:23, Rev 1:5). According to this verse, Christ was resurrected into a spiritual body long before the birth pains of the woman. It's interesting that Luke 2:7 and 2:23 brings out the fact that Jesus was the firstborn of Mary. Jesus is the firstborn of Mary in his original physical body, and is the firstborn of Israel in his spiritual body.

In the end-times, the birth pains appear as a sign of Christ's return. The birth will come forth in a single day. In "one day," those who are dead in Christ will rise into a spiritual body, and those who are still alive will be changed into spiritual bodies. This is the new birth. Notice also that the "earth [is] caused to bring fourth in one day." This is like the earth giving birth to her dead in Isaiah 26:17-21. The new birth is a new creation.

If we are spiritually born again, we are new creatures (2 Cor 5:17, Gal 6:15). Some translations say we are new creations. The Greek word is the same as in Mark 10:6, 13:19, Rom 1:20, 2 Peter 3:4, and Rev 3:14. It's the same word as God's Creation. We are new creatures from the perspective that our hearts are being changed. But this is in preparation for us literally becoming new creations in new spiritual bodies. In this we see the tie back to the verses in Isaiah. When we are resurrected, or when we are changed to new spiritual bodies, it's an act of a new creation. The earth gives birth to her dead.

In Matthew 24:7-8, Jesus again uses the symbol of the woman in labor. He begins to give the signs of his return. He said, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains." When Christ returns, the resurrection occurs. The earth will give birth to her dead. This is a tie back to Isaiah. It's interesting to note how Jesus ties the birth pains to earthquakes. This idea is that the earth itself groans and is about to give birth.

In Romans 8:18-25, Paul relates the groaning of the Creation to the redemption of our bodies. This passage is talking about the time when the curse will be removed from the Creation, and when we will receive spiritual bodies. We are not actually "revealed" as sons of God until we receive spiritual bodies (Romans 8:16, 8:19, and 8:23). Those mature in Christ will become sons of God. This is literally fulfilled at the resurrection (Luke 20:36). We are literally "born again" by the Holy Spirit. So at that time, we become literal sons of God. This passage, like Isaiah 26:17-21, depicts the Creation as giving birth. In Isaiah, the

“earth gives birth to her dead.” It all stems back to this original passage in Isaiah. What’s interesting about this passage is that Paul equates our bondage to decay with the Creation’s bondage to decay. The Creation was subjected to decay because of Adam. The Creation will be liberated due to Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:3, Paul speaks about the Day of the Lord. He says the day will come upon people suddenly. They will be saying “peace and safety.” But sudden destruction will come on them, like the birth pains of a woman, and they will not escape. The Day of the Lord is the entire millennium. Paul is relating the coming of the Day of the Lord with the birth pains of the woman. The resurrection is on the “last day” before the “age to come.” Right up to this time, the people of the world will be “eating, drinking, and giving in marriage.” Then “sudden destruction” will come on them and they will not escape. Therefore, this reference to birth pains of a woman is a reference to the resurrection.

In Revelation 12:2, John speaks of the woman who is about to give birth. Back in Isaiah 66:7-9, quoted earlier, we saw that the woman has already given birth to her firstborn, which is Christ. Likewise, in Revelation 12:4-5, we see the birth of Christ. These verses certainly seem to suggest the birth being spoken of is Christ’s physical birth, with the woman being Mary. The story of Herod killing all the children in Bethlehem would seem to be an aspect of these verses. But is the woman Mary? In verse 17, we see that the dragon went to make war against the rest of her offspring, those who obey God’s commandments and who hold the testimony of Jesus. Are we all Mary’s offspring?

Catholics may believe that Mary is our mother. But verse 1 says the “woman [is] clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.” This is from Joseph’s dream (Gen 37:9). The twelve stars are the twelve tribes of Israel. So the woman is Israel. The Israel gives birth to Christ as firstborn. This is Christ’s resurrection. Then she gives birth to many of his brothers (Rom 8:29). This parallels the woman in Isaiah 66:7-9, quoted earlier.

The woman is also identified as Israel back in the original passage of Isaiah 26:16-21. Verse 18 says, “We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world.” In other words, the purpose of Israel is to give birth to the people of the world. But Israel herself had only given birth to wind (nothing.) The true Church is the true Israel. In the millennium, true Israel will be “born again” into spiritual bodies and will lead many in the nations to righteousness. Thus, Israel will give birth to the world in the millennium.

3.9) The Firstborn from the Dead

Christ is the firstborn from the dead. If the term "born again" is to be interpreted literally, and refers to the resurrection, then "first born" would mean the first to be resurrected. Christ was not the first person to be brought back from the dead. Lazarus was brought back from the dead. But Lazarus still had his same body. So you could not characterize the resurrection of Lazarus as a literal birth. However, Christ received a new body that can live forever. So the resurrection of Christ was literally a birth. Christ was the first to receive a new spiritual body. Thus, Christ was the first person from the dead who was "born again." Both Paul and John tell us that Christ is the firstborn from the dead.

Colossians 1:18 He is the head of the body, the assembly, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Revelation 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us, and washed us from our sins by his blood;

Also, consider the fact that we will also be "born again," and thus we will all be younger brothers of Christ. Even Christ's father David will be his younger brother after the resurrection.

Romans 8:29 For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Our new spiritual bodies will be born entirely from the Holy Spirit. That means we will no longer have the bodies of flesh that we received from our natural parents. We will have new spiritual bodies from the Holy Spirit. Thus, God will be our literal Father, not just our spiritual Father. And Christ will be our oldest "brother."

When it's understood that Christ is the firstborn from the grave, there is new understanding as to why Christ is the "Son of God." It's true that Christ was born of a virgin, and thus his biological Father is the Holy Spirit. This makes Christ be the Son of God in one sense. But the primary reason for Christ being the Son of God is the resurrection. Consider these verses in Hebrews.

Hebrews 1:5-8 For to which of the angels did he say at any time, "You are my Son. Today have I become your father?" and again, "I will be to him a Father, and he will be to me a Son?" (6) Again, when he brings in the firstborn into the world he says, "Let all the

angels of God worship him." (7) Of the angels he says, "Who makes his angels winds, and his servants a flame of fire." (8) But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your Kingdom."

These verses in Hebrews contain several quotes from the Old Testament. They are all in context of the coming Messiah.

Psalms 2:6-8 "Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion." (7) I will tell of the decree. Yahweh said to me, "You are my son. Today I have become your father." (8) Ask of me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession.

Why did Christ become the Son of God "Today?" Was not Christ always the Son of God? The emphasis here is on the coming kingdom, when Israel will rule the nations. Christ became God's Son when Christ was "born again" into a Spiritual body. In this sense, Christ was the firstborn of God. And again, this verse in Hebrews states that Christ is the firstborn. So in that context, Christ is the firstborn of God. Again, as it says in Isaiah 26:19, "the earth will give birth to her dead." Before Israel was in labor she gave birth, as it says in Isaiah 66:7-9. Therefore, Christ is the firstborn of Israel. But there is another twist to all of this. Israel is the firstborn of God.

Exodus 4:22-26 You shall tell Pharaoh, "Thus says Yahweh, Israel is my son, my firstborn," (23) and I have said to you, "Let my son go, that he may serve me;" and you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn." " (24) It happened on the way at a lodging place, that Yahweh met him and wanted to kill him. (25) Then Zipporah took a flint, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet; and she said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me." (26) So he let him alone. Then she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.

Here we see all the connections. Israel is God's firstborn. But what does that mean? The purpose of Israel is to bring about the redemption of man and thus save us from the grave. This was seen back in Isaiah 26.

Remember that Isaiah 26:17 speaks of a woman with child, about to give birth, who cries out in her pain. Isaiah compares this with Israel, whose task it was to bring salvation from sin and death into the world. But Israel only brings birth to wind (verse 18). Yet Isaiah prophesies (verse 19) that the dead will live. Their

bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy. The earth will give birth to her dead.

Christ is a "bridegroom of blood," giving his life for our sins. He is resurrected on the third day, and thus becomes the firstborn from the dead. He is the firstborn of Israel. And Israel is the firstborn of God. Therefore, all who are in Christ are in Israel, and Christ will become be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:29, quoted above.) But at the same time, all who are in Israel are firstborn, because Israel is firstborn. This can be shown in Hebrews.

Hebrews 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable multitudes of angels, (23) to the general assembly and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, (24) to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better than that of Abel.

Christ is the firstborn of the God (Hebrews 1:5-8, quoted above.) And Israel is the firstborn of God (Exodus 4:22-26, quoted above.) Therefore, Christ is Israel. All who are in Christ are firstborn, and thus all who are in Christ are Israel.

The Messiah is Israel in the same way that the King can be considered the same as the Kingdom. All who are in the kingdom of Israel are firstborn. Thus all who are in Israel will be born again with Spiritual bodies so they can enter (or inherit) the kingdom. And that kingdom is the heavenly Jerusalem (Paradise) that will be in orbit around the earth when Christ, bringing the kingdom to the earth.

With all of Israel being the firstborn, and Israel ruling over the nations, it means that the people of the nations will also have the opportunity to become born again and inherit Spiritual bodies. The people of Israel are simply the first, after Christ, to become sons of God.

Romans 8:22-24 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. (23) And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (24) For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

Jesus was the firstborn from the dead. Thus, Jesus was "born again" at the resurrection, on the third day. Jesus Christ is Israel. Therefore, Israel is also the firstborn from the dead. As we will see in section 3.11 below, the people of Israel, will also be "born again" on the third day, according to the Scriptures.

The Church does not replace Israel. Since Christ is Israel, all who are in Christ are in Israel. Gentiles are grafted into the vine of Israel, which is Christ. When Christ returns, he will reign over the nations. And those who are in Christ during this age will reign with Christ as priests and kings. Thus we are all Israel, whose purpose is to reign over the nations, bringing righteousness to the nations.

3.10) Out of Egypt I Called My Son

Today, we do not have many monarchies. We have systems of government in which there are high offices, such as president. But the president does not have absolute authority. So the president is not considered to be the same as the country. The congress makes the laws. But with a king, his word is the law. Thus, a king is not distinguished from the kingdom. The law of the government is the word of the king. When this is the case, the king can be considered to be the same as the kingdom. Christ Jesus is the King of the nation of Israel. The Messiah is Israel, which is simply a kingdom. But the kingdom of Israel is a special kingdom in that it will rule over all the nations of the world.

The fact that Christ is Israel makes several otherwise difficult verses easy to understand. In trying to show that Jesus is the Messiah, Matthew quoted Hosea.

Matthew 2:14-15 He arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt, (15) and was there until the death of Herod; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Many theologians have pointed out that Hosea was talking about Israel, not the Messiah. And Hosea was talking about a past event. He was not prophesying a future event about the Messiah. Thus they considered Matthew to have interpreted Hosea's words very much out of context.

Hosea 11:1 "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

However, when you realize that the Messiah is Israel, then Matthew's statement makes a lot more sense. If it was commonly understood that the Messiah and Israel

are one and the same, then it would logically follow that because God had called Israel out of Egypt, then it would naturally follow that God had also called the Messiah out of Egypt. After all, how can you call a nation out of Egypt without calling its King out of Egypt? The fact that the King came out of Egypt many years later only shows that Israel is really God's work in progress. Israel itself is the promise of Abraham. Israel itself is a promise that God made through the covenants. Israel itself has not yet been fully birthed.

Israel is not simply a nation among nations. Israel is the nation that rules all other nations. And yet it's also recognized that Israel was once a slave to Egypt. The fact that Israel does not yet literally rule over all the nations does not matter to the Hebrew mindset. God has stated it. Therefore it will come about in the future, just as sure as anything that has happened in the past.

It's the same concept as being saved. We are saved from the grave. And yet literally, we still die. But we state we are saved in the past tense because God has paid the price and stated that we will be resurrected. In the Hebrew mindset, that which has not yet happened, but is sure to happen, can be stated in the past tense.

Romans 4:17-18 As it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations." This is in the presence of him whom he believed: God, who gives life to the dead, and calls the things that are not, as though they were. (18) Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "So will your seed be."

Notice the past-tense verb of "I have made." God "calls the things that are not, as though they were." God also "gives life to the dead" (present tense.) And yet the resurrection is still in the future. We are saved, by God's word. And yet we still die. But by God's word we will be raised from the dead. So we are "saved" in the past tense.

Likewise, Israel is the nation that rules over all other nations. The Messiah is the King of Israel. It has not as yet been literally fulfilled. But we can say Christ is the King of all nations, and that Israel reigns with Christ. Likewise, Hosea could say, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt," and yet just as much be speaking about Christ being called out of Egypt in Hosea's future as the people of Israel in his past.

3.11) Resurrection on the Third Day, in Old Testament Scripture

Many Christians today do not know where in the Old Testament it talks about the Messiah suffering, dying, and then being raised on the third day. But that's exactly what Jesus showed his disciples in the Scripture, after the resurrection.

Luke 24:44-46 He said to them, "This is what I told you, while I was still with you, that all things which are written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me must be fulfilled." (45) Then he opened their minds, that they might understand the Scriptures. (46) He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day."

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

The fact that the Messiah had to die for our sins can be argued from Isaiah 53. "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" (ESV Isaiah 53:5). (Notice the past-tense verbs?) But where in the Old Testament does it say the Messiah would rise from the dead on the third day?

Hosea 6:1-6 NIV "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. (2) After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. (3) Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth." (4) "What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. (5) Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you. (6) For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

Is Hosea saying the Messiah will be restored on the third day? Or is he saying Israel will be restored on the third day? Literally speaking, Hosea is talking about Israel. But just as Hosea 11:1 can also be about the Messiah, Hosea 6 can also be about

the Messiah. The Messiah is Israel because he is the King of Israel. Gentiles who are in the Messiah (Christ) are grafted into Israel, because Israel is the Messiah.

Just as God's firstborn son, Israel, was called out of Egypt, God's firstborn Son, the Messiah, was called out of Egypt. Likewise, just as Israel will be raised on the third day, the Messiah was raised on the third day. When it's understood that Israel is the Messiah, it's easy to see that this passage is talking about both. Israel, at the time of Moses, had to be called out of Egypt so that the Messiah could later be called out of Egypt. Likewise, the Messiah had to die and be raised on the third day in order that Israel can also be "torn to pieces" and raised on the third day.

How did the Jews interpret these "days?" Did they really believe they would be broken to pieces and then restored two 24-hour days later? Actually the Jews believed in the concept that with the Lord a day is a thousand years.

Ancient-text evidence for this is found in the Talmud Sanhedrin, Folio 97a. Here we find the millennial week itself. Here we see that the days of Psalm 90:4 are being interpreted as a literal thousand years. Also the days of Hosea 6:2 are being interpreted as a literal thousand years. Bottom line is that there was a strong association at that time with God's days being a literal thousand years.

R. Kattina said: Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate, as it is written, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. Abaye said: it will be desolate two [thousand], as it is said, After two days will he revive us: in the third day, he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

It has been taught in accordance with R. Kattina: Just as the seventh year is one year of release in seven, so is the world: one thousand years out of seven shall be fallow, as it is written, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day, and it is further said, A Psalm and song for the Sabbath day, meaning the day that is altogether Sabbath — and it is also said, For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past.

The Tanna debe Eliyyahu teaches: The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand there was desolation; two thousand years the Torah flourished; and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era.

Naturally, thinking the Messiah would come soon, they believed the Messianic Age would be the fifth and the sixth millennial days since Adam. Thus, the first and

second day would have been two thousand years of the Torah (since Moses). However, the Messianic age was delayed because they failed to recognize Christ.

With this delay of the kingdom, the passage in Hosea 6 can just as easily be interpreted as two thousand years since the first coming of Christ. The Messiah was crucified and raised up on the third day. Likewise, Israel will be raised up on the third millennial day. Again, this just goes to show that the Messiah and Israel are the same. Therefore, Jesus could easily teach his disciples from the Scripture saying, "It is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day" (Luke 24:46, quoted above).

Luke 13:31-35 NIV At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." (32) He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'" (33) In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day--for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! (34) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (35) Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Was Jesus strictly talking about the crucifixion and this own resurrection? Or was he also talking about the resurrection of Israel? If this is only about the crucifixion, then why would the two days in the grave be referred to as "today and tomorrow?" And was Jesus really casting out demons and healing the sick during those two days? Yes, he was paying the price for this to happen. So figuratively, it was happening while Christ was in the grave. However, literally speaking, the demons have been cast out and the people have been healed of their diseases for the past two thousand years. Then, when Christ returns, he will reach his goal.

Also, notice the direct tie to the fact that Israel, as a nation, would be scattered. Israel's house (Jerusalem) was made desolate. And Christ will not return until the Jewish leaders say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," thus recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. So again, this passage is talking about the two thousand years between Christ's first coming and the second coming. Christ was crucified and raised on the third day in order that Israel can also be raised on the third day. Gentiles, who are in Christ, are grafted into Israel, which is the Messiah.

3.12) Living the Life of an Heir

With this understanding of Israel, we can understand a little about living under the law or living under grace as an heir of the kingdom. The word of a king is the law of the kingdom. The young son of a king, as he is growing up, must obey his father's laws just like any other person living in the kingdom. An immature son, even after growing up, does not earn the respect (favor/grace) of the king. So he remains under the law of the kingdom. But when the son matures, and is devoted to carrying out the wishes of his father the king, he is no longer under the strict rule of the law. He keeps the spirit of the law naturally. But his main purpose in living is to carry out the will of his father. He is no longer judged by the letter of the law.

Certain ordinances, which are designed to bring the people into obedience to the king, become unnecessary for the son of the king to keep. One can even argue that for the mature son to bother keeping these ordinances could even be a detriment to the son from simply doing the will of his father. The rules themselves become one's life, instead of the desire to please the father.

The love of the son for his father also becomes a love for the people of the kingdom, whom his father also loves. So the son's purpose in life becomes all about helping the people of his father's kingdom. At this point, the son is living under the respect/favor/grace of his father, and is no longer living under the law of his father. There is freedom from the law, but the love that brings that freedom compels the son to live a life that is not for self, but entirely motivated towards the good of the kingdom and its people.

Matthew 12:3-6 NIV He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? (4) He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread--which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. (5) Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? (6) I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.

As far as grace is concerned, everything changed at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit now comes to all believers as we ask. This became possible because there is now one person who is qualified to fulfill the promise of Israel. Jesus is the king of Israel, so the kingdom of Israel now exists. After Christ's resurrection, Christ became the firstborn of Israel. And thus Israel is also the firstborn Son of God. The kingdom is here in our hearts. And it will be literally here in the world when Christ returns.

3.13) What Does It Mean To Literally Enter the Kingdom?

Jesus often spoke of what it takes to enter the kingdom. These teachings were always aspects of holiness. Paul preferred the term “inherit the kingdom.” Paul’s term can be easily understood in that Israel would inherit the promises of Abraham when the Messiah comes. Paul wanted Gentiles to understand that those who are in Christ will also inherit the promises of Abraham.

Jesus, on the other hand, more often used the term “enter the kingdom.” What does it mean to “enter the kingdom?” Traditionally, the terms “born again” and “enter the kingdom” have been understood to be spiritual terms. The kingdom is in our hearts, and we spiritually enter a spiritual kingdom. Traditionally, we are spiritually “born again” when we accept Jesus Christ as Savior (or when we are baptized as an infant.) Therefore, the traditional understanding of “entering the kingdom” would be along the same spiritual lines.

If, however, the term “born again” is to be interpreted more literally, and refers to the literal resurrection, then the term “enter the kingdom” should also be interpreted more literally. Also, note that we will literally “inherit the kingdom” when Christ returns. So what does it mean to literally “enter the kingdom”? Let’s take a look at Revelation.

In Revelation 21 and 22, we have the description of the New Jerusalem. Its shape is like a cube, with length, width, and height all being 12,000 stadia (Rev 21:16). There are 600 stadia in 1 degree of latitude at the equator. This works out to be 608.7 of our feet per stadia. (There were 600 Greek-feet in a stadium.) Using our measurement of feet and miles, the New Jerusalem is thus $12,000 \times 608.7 / 5280 = 1383.41$ miles (2226.26 km) on a side. This is huge.

Many scholars have not wanted to interpret this as being literal, because it’s too large for them to believe it would be literal. But nothing is impossible for God. The millennialists, on the other hand, have often interpreted this size to be literal. However, millennial traditions have placed the New Jerusalem as only appearing after the new heavens and the new earth, after the 1000 years.

Consider the possibility that the New Jerusalem may be seen during the millennial reign of Christ, or even before. Revelation 21:9 says the New Jerusalem is the Bride, the wife of the Lamb. Given this name and description, and given its tremendous size, would it not be the location of the wedding feast? The Bride becomes the Wife at the wedding feast. Therefore, the New Jerusalem should be here at least by the start of Christ’s earthly reign.

Revelation 21:9-10 ESV Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." (10) And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

This verse sounds very much like the start of a new major part of Revelation. In other words, it should be the start of a new chapter. Compare this with verse 4:1, where John is told to "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." This verse towards the end of Revelation could easily be interpreted as a break from chronological events. Now consider this verse in John:

John 14:2-3 ESV In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

What kind of house has enough rooms for the entire wedding banquet of the Bride? The New Jerusalem is big enough to house billions of people. But no one who continues to sin will be able to enter.

Revelation 21:27 ESV But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 22:14-15 Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. (15) Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Many millennialists have wondered at the possibility of sinners that are outside the New Jerusalem. If this is after the Great White Throne Judgment, and after those not in the Book of Life have been cast into the lake of fire, then why would there still be sinners outside the New Jerusalem? However, this verse makes more sense if the New Jerusalem is to be here during the millennium.

This is what Jesus meant when he said you must be born of the Spirit in order to "enter" the kingdom of heaven. You must have a spiritual body in order to "enter" the New Jerusalem. Only the Bride of Christ will be able to enter.

However, those of the nations resurrected with natural bodies can still live on earth during the millennium. The New Jerusalem will simply be orbiting the earth. They will be able to see the outside of it, but they will not be able to “enter” it unless or until they mature in Christ and receive spiritual bodies.

Revelation 21:23-25 The city has no need for the sun, neither of the moon, to shine, for the very glory of God illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb. (24) The nations will walk in its light. The kings of the earth bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. (25) Its gates will in no way be shut by day (for there will be no night there).

The New Jerusalem is a cube. Light will be inside the city. Being in orbit, there is no night. (Night occurs only on earth as the earth rotates.) The verse says, “By its light will the nations walk.” Old Jerusalem, on the earth will be capitol city of the world. But the home for the rulers of the world will be the New Jerusalem.

As Jesus says that he is coming quickly, and that his reward is with him.

Revelation 22:12 "Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work.

Why is the reward singular? If it's a different reward for each of us, according to our works, then would not the "reward" have been plural? To see the reward, look at the context. The reward, when Christ returns, is the New Jerusalem.

Each of the seven letters to the seven churches has a promise to those who overcome sin. Basically, each of these promises are various aspects of inheriting the kingdom. One of the promises mentions the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 3:11-12 I am coming quickly! Hold firmly that which you have, so that no one takes your crown. (12) He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will go out from there no more. I will write on 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 own new name.

This event, of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, is in the direct context of other events that are understood to happen at the time of Christ's return. Our rewards are given to us when Christ returns. And Christ's return is explicitly mentioned in these verses. The evidence would indicate, therefore, that this happens when Christ returns, not after the millennial reign.

Chapter 4

Problems Solved by the New Wine System

We must read Scripture the way the ancient Jews would have read Scripture. But being a natural descendent of Abraham, in and of itself, does not make you part of the true Israel that will rule the nations. You must also have faith in the true Messiah. And Gentiles who have this faith in the true Messiah are grafted into the vine of Israel. (See chapter 18 of this book for the reasons why the true Israel is the same as the true Church.) The ancient Jews were right about (the true) Israel being the “chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9, Exodus 19:5-6), who will rule the world in the Messianic age to come. This is a core belief of ancient Jewish eschatology.

The seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation each gives a reward for those who overcome sin (mature in Christ). One of these seven rewards, given in Revelation 2:26-27 says that those who overcome sin will reign over the nations. The Church will literally reign over everyone else in all the nations.

Revelation 2:26-27 He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. (27) He will rule them with a rod of iron, shattering them like clay pots; as I also have received of my Father:

This verse quotes Psalm 2:8-9, which is a prophecy of the Messiah ruling the world in the Messianic Kingdom to come. The Greek word used here for “rule” means to shepherd.

Psalms 2:6-11 "Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion." (7) I will tell of the decree. Yahweh said to me, "You are my son. Today I have become your father. (8) Ask of me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession. (9) You shall break them with a rod of iron. You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (10) Now therefore be wise, you kings. Be instructed, you judges of the earth. (11) Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

How would the ancient Jews have interpreted this Psalm? Is there any doubt they believed Israel will literally rule the world, here on Earth? This Psalm is the verse that John quotes, saying those who overcome sin will be given authority over the nations. The verse in Revelation quotes the verses in Psalm. And the verse in

Revelation is explicitly written to a church, not to national Israel. The New Wine System is all about interpreting Scripture the way ancient Jews would have interpreted Scripture, with the Church being Israel.

Exodus 19:3-6 Moses went up to God, and Yahweh called to him out of the mountain, saying, "This is what you shall tell the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: (4) 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself. (5) Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine; (6) and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

Peter quotes this Old Testament verse:

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

How would ancient Jews have interpreted this Old Testament verse? When Peter quoted the verse, he was applying it to the Church. The New Wine System is all about interpreting Scripture the way ancient Jews would have interpreted Scripture, with the Church being the Israel.

Peter even addresses the Church as "living as foreigners in the Dispersion" (1 Peter 1:1). James addresses the Church as the "twelve tribes which are in the Dispersion" (James 1:1). Israel is God's chosen people. The Church is God's chosen people. Israel is the elect. The Church is the elect. The Church is Israel. Gentile believers are grafted into Israel.

Those who are a part of true Israel will be raised with spiritual bodies. The second death has no power over them (Rev 2:11, 20:6, 20:14, and 21:8). "They will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him one thousand years" (Rev 20:6). Israel will include Gentiles from every "nation, tribe, people, and language" (Rev 7:9). Everyone living in all the nations will have fully sanctified rulers over them from their own nations, tribes, peoples, and languages.

4.1) Seven Major Problems of Scripture Solved

This same application of Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church solves seven major problems of Scripture, which have divided the Church over the centuries. Most of the New Testament was written by Jews. The New Wine System literally interprets Scripture along the same lines as the Jewish eschatology system of that day. The Jewish New Testament authors applied Old Testament prophecies about Israel to the New Testament Church. If we do the same, then these seven major problems of Scripture are solved.

1. Calvinism vs. Arminianism (election vs. free-will). Solving this major Church divider without the use of paradoxes, or two sides of the same coin.
2. Salvation is a free gift. But inheriting the Kingdom requires lots of work. Solving the friction between grace and holiness verses.
3. Does salvation require fruits of the Spirit? Solving the friction between Lordship Salvation and Free Grace Theology.
4. The millennium as a free-grace alternative to purgatory. Solving the differences in salvation verses between Catholicism and Protestantism.
5. Would a loving God have a merciful plan for our loved ones who have died having never heard or understood about Christ?
6. Jewish eschatology provides Scriptural evidence that children who die young do not go to hell.
7. Amillennialism vs. Premillennialism. Scriptural evidence for the purpose of Christ's Messianic reign. The millennium is the climax of God's plan of redemption for all generations.

Some aspects of these seven problems were covered in chapter 1 of this book. In that chapter we saw a chart of holiness verses that speak about inheriting the kingdom. The chart shows opposing free-grace verses that deal with salvation. By separating the reward of inheriting the kingdom from the free gift of salvation, the New Wine System solves this traditional problem of Scripture. (Problem 2 above.) The struggle between holiness verses and free grace verses can be found at the root of the old church division between Wesleyans and Calvinist Reformed theology.

Today, there is a very similar division happening between lordship salvation and free grace theology. (Problem 3 above.) Many of the same issues are discussed. But the lordship salvation debate is more focused on whether discipleship is required for salvation. Can one be saved without really being a disciple of Christ?

The free grace advocates say yes. The lordship salvation advocates say no. And of course the New Wine System solves this problem of Scripture. Everyone is reconciled because it's a free gift. The foolish will be resurrected and thus saved from death. The wise, who are the true disciples of Christ, will be rewarded by inheriting the kingdom during the millennium.

In chapter 13 of this book we will look at the issue of lordship salvation vs. free grace theology in much more detail. We will see very convincing quotes from both sides of the issue. And of course, the New Wine System solves the debate.

In chapter 1 we also saw how the New Wine System deals with the death of infants, children, and the mentally ill. Traditional Protestant systems of interpretation must include an exception known as the age of accountability. Protestants claim sola scriptura, or "by scripture alone." This demands that we accept only the doctrines that can be directly found in Scripture, or that are indirectly deduced through valid logical deductions or deductive reasoning from Scripture. But the doctrine of the age of accountability is not found in Scripture, and it cannot be deduced based on the traditional systems of interpretation. (Problem 6 above.) The New Wine System, on the other hand, needs no exception for children. The system uses direct evidence from Scripture to show that everyone will be resurrected unless they harden their hearts against Christ.

This chapter covers the problems of election vs. free-will. Election vs. free-will is all about Calvinism vs. Arminianism. (Problem 1 above.) Later on, in chapter 12 of this book, we will look at the problems of Calvinism more closely by going through each of the five points of Calvinism.

In chapter one we also covered Christian Universalism. Christian Universalism is an attempt in dealing with the problem of those who die, having never heard or understood about Christ. (Problem 5 above.) Verses that say everyone is saved are used to argue everyone will be saved, even if they repent while in hell. The biggest problem with everyone being saved is it would mean nobody has the free-will to reject Christ. Is torture in hell until they give up and repent really in line with God's nature? The New Wine System provides a free-grace alternative. The unjust are resurrected and allowed to live until it becomes obvious they will never truly repent and truly desire to overcome sin in their own free-will.

This chapter will also cover a number of minor problems of Scripture, solved by the New Wine System, that have not divided the church over the centuries.

4.2) The Elect are Those Who Inherit the Kingdom

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth (Mat 5:5). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 that neither the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers will “inherit” the kingdom of God. But the greedy and the drunkards, if they have not rejected Christ, can be resurrected and thus see the kingdom of God. If they then put their faith in Christ, the saints who “inherit” (rule) the kingdom will be able to lead the greedy and the drunkards into holiness. The key difference here is “inheritance.” Those who inherit will rule over those who don’t.

Flesh and blood cannot “inherit” the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). Only those with spiritual bodies will own the kingdom. But flesh and blood can live in the nations. They will live a long time, perhaps even a thousand years. But some will be considered cursed and die (Isaiah 65:20).

The idea of inheriting the kingdom comes from inheriting the promise given to Abraham. If we are in Christ, then we are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise that was given to Abraham (Gal 3:29). Paul said, "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (Gal 3:8-9).

Gentiles are justified by faith, and every Gentile who walks as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), and has an [agape] love for Christ, is a part of the true Israel. But does this mean that carnal Gentiles who do not mature in Christ are also Abraham’s children and heirs of Abraham’s promise? I don’t think that either Abraham or Paul understood that every last person living on the earth during the Messianic reign would be a child of Abraham. Christ (the seed of Abraham) becomes a blessing to all the nations (Gen 18:18). Those who are in Christ are a part of that seed, which is a blessing to the nations. Then, those who mature in Christ during the millennium will eventually receive eternal life along with true Israel.

The New Jerusalem has twelve gates. Each gate has a name for one of the twelve tribes of Israel. There are no gates for Gentiles. Until the millennial reign of Christ is completed, the nations are blessed by the promise. But the nations are not heirs of the promise. Again, this would have been Jewish thinking at the time of Christ. Those who are heirs of the promise are the “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession” (1 Peter 2:9, Exodus 19:5-6). This “holy nation” does not include the nations of the world. Currently, the elect are ambassadors to those nations (2 Cor. 5:20).

“Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for [Christ's] sake, will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life. But many will be last who are first; and first who are last” (Mat 19:29-30). So those who truly [agape] love and serve Christ now, and walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9), will “inherit” first. They will rule over the rulers of today. They will be the saints, which means “holy ones.” Those who put their own lives first will not “inherit.” “God [has] chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to “inherit” the kingdom which he promised to those who love Him” (James 2:5).

Paul’s letters to the Corinthians are letters to the problem-ridden church. They are not mature in Christ, yet they are saved. In 1 Corinthians 14:33, Paul speaks of the “congregations of the saints” to be like they should be, not like they are. In other words, Paul is not saying they are all saints already.

The saints (holy ones) will rule in the millennium. 1 Corinthians 6:1-2 speaks about the saints. Paul is saying that people in church should take their disputes to the saints instead of the court. This would seem to elevate the status of sainthood to be those who are mature in Christ. Also, in verse 2, Paul says the saints will judge (rule) the world. Those who are saved will be alive in the millennium. But those who are saints will rule and judge over those who are simply resurrected.

At the end of the millennium, the Lamb’s Book of Life is opened. God says, “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (Rev 21:7). But he who continues to sin will die the second death, and will be thrown into the lake of fire (verse 8). After the Great White Throne Judgment, everyone will either “inherit” or they will die the second death.

Revelation 21:8 But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Without the millennium, there is no chance for carnal Christians who die to become mature. Without a real requirement of righteousness, sanctification becomes unneeded and meaningless. But with the thousand-year reign of Christ placed between the last-day resurrection and the final Judgment, the requirement of entire sanctification can be made for everyone who is to be eternally saved. Those who mature in Christ before Christ returns will be priests and kings over those who don’t (Rev 1:4, 2:26-27, 5:10, 20:6).

4.3) Problem Solved: Election (Israel) vs. Free Will

There is a dichotomy of verses in Scripture that has caused many divisions in the churches. It's the controversy of election vs. free will. The controversy is also known as Calvinism vs. Arminianism. Calvinism holds that before we are even born, God predestines each of us to be eternally saved or eternally condemned. Those who are to be saved are the elect. This doctrine goes back to Augustine who developed the doctrine in response to Pelagius' concept of human innocence and moral freedom. (Pelagius was a Roman moralistic monk.) The Catholic Church adopted everything said by Augustine, almost to the point of considering Augustine's doctrines to be Scripture. Luther was also a big fan of Augustine. Luther and Calvin held strong views of predestination.

James Arminius (1560-1609) was a Dutch pastor and theologian who had been taught the Reformed position of predestination. But Arminius came to believe there are problems with Calvinism. First, it makes God the author of sin. Secondly, it does away with genuine human freedom. If we are not free to make, or not make, the decision to follow Christ, then how can those who don't be held morally responsible for not following Christ? John Wesley (founder of the Methodists) followed the teaching of Arminius.

Arminianism holds that election is on the bases of foreknowledge. "For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). In other words, we have the freedom to follow Christ or not, but God knows in advance what decisions we will make. Arminianism holds that Christ died for all men. "If I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). (Also see: 1 Tim. 2:4, 6, Rom. 5:18, Rom. 11:32, 1 Tim. 4:10, 2 Peter 3:9, Titus 2:11, 2 Cor. 5:19, and John 3:16-17). Arminianism holds that salvation is a choice that can be made by anyone (Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:34-35, Romans 1:16, Hebrews 5:6, and Rev 22:17).

On the other hand, Calvinism puts emphasis on God's sovereign grace and on man's totally depraved nature. Calvinism holds that it's God's choice, apart from any foreseen merit or faith within man. "You didn't choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit" (John 15:16). Calvinism holds that God's choices have nothing to do with our choices. "But God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong; and God chose the lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised, and the things that are not, that he might bring to nothing the things that

are: that no flesh should boast before God" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). Calvinism holds that God's choices were made before Adam sinned, and before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

It's possible to rectify this dichotomy of verses by reading the verses like the way ancient Jews. The truth hides in the middle. Ancient Jews understood themselves to be the chosen nation. At the coming of the Messiah, Israel would lead the nations into righteousness. Many of them believed that they were chosen simply because they were descendants of Abraham (Matthew 3:9, Luke 3:8, and John 8:39). But Jesus and Paul made it clear that being Abraham's natural descendant does not make you one of the chosen few (John 8:44, Romans 9:6-8).

The chosen few are those who enter through the narrow gate of holiness (Matthew 7:13). The chosen few are those who grow into the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13-15). These verses of Scripture, read the way an ancient Jew would have read them, would still be understood to mean that those who are chosen, during the Messianic kingdom, will lead the world into righteousness. The countless number, from every nation, tribe, people, and language are still the chosen few. During the Messianic Age, the few will rule over the many.

The wise are the chosen few, who inherit the kingdom. They are the elect. The foolish (or carnal) middle group will not inherit, but they will be resurrected and have the opportunity to decide to follow Christ during the millennium. They are not the elect. But they will still have opportunity to be saved by the blood of Christ. Thus, with three types of people in the grave, there is no dichotomy of verses with regard to election vs. free will. The truth hides in the middle.

The ancient Jews were surprised to see Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit, which was a clear sign of being chosen (Acts 10:45). Gentiles can be fellow heirs of the promise to Abraham (Ephesians 3:6). But this new revelation would not change the fact that those grafted into the vine are part of Israel, and will lead the nations into holiness. God doesn't predestine anyone to be condemned. God does, however, choose the teachers who will lead the world into holiness during Christ's earthly reign. Those who are chosen by God are the saints.

Paul said, "We have set our trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim 4:10). So God is the Savior of all people. But there is a special salvation for the elect, who have an [agape] love for Christ, and who walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9). The saints are saved with spiritual bodies, which is the higher and permanent form of salvation. Only

spiritual bodies have eternal life. Others will follow and get permanent spiritual bodies later. The death of Christ draws all men to Christ (John 12:32).

James said, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created" (James 1:18). So the chosen people of true Israel are the firstfruits of all men. Also see Jeremiah 2:3 and Romans 8:23. We have the firstfruits of the Spirit and groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoption as sons, which is the redemption of our bodies. Being firstfruits, means there will be many more to follow in the final harvest.

The Church is also the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23). How can the Church be the firstborn if there are not also others who will follow? This verse also says our names are written in heaven. We are firstborn of those written in heaven. This is the Book of Life. Everyone is written in heaven unless and until they reject Christ. The elect are the firstborn of those written in heaven.

Hebrews 12:22-23 But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable multitudes of angels, (23) to the general assembly and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

In chapter 7 of this book we will see why the Book of Life contains more names of people than simply the elect. In other words, the firstborn were chosen by God. The Church of the firstborn is the elect. But those who will follow in the millennium, and those who are carnal Christians today, will accept Christ as Savior by their own choice. Again, if everyone in the Church is firstborn, then there must be a much greater multitude to follow who are not first.

Arminianism holds that if we are not free to make, or not make, the decision to follow Christ, then we cannot be held morally responsible for not following Christ. If this is true then it also follows that those who have never heard about Christ's free gift of salvation, or who have been deceived about the nature of that gift, can also not be held morally responsible for not following Christ. Therefore, Satan must be locked up during the Messianic reign of Christ so that he cannot deceive the nations (Rev 20:2). But those who choose to harden their own hearts, so they can no longer hear Christ's voice, or deny the miracles of the Holy Spirit, will have no excuse at their judgment.

4.4) The Sovereignty of God and Election

The biggest argument of Calvinism (election) over Arminianism is the sovereignty of God. There is one clear truth of Scripture. In our fallen state, nobody will come to Christ unless the Father draws him.

John 6:44-45 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day. (45) It is written in the prophets, "They will all be taught by God." Therefore everyone who hears from the Father, and has learned, comes to me.

From this truth, the Calvinist observes that people die without hearing about Christ, and have thus not been drawn to Christ by the Father. The Calvinist assumes, from centuries of amillennial training, that death is the point of final judgment. The Calvinist assumes that death is the end of the journey. The Calvinist assumes that final judgment is not a thousand years after the resurrection. (Luther, Calvin, and all the mainstream churches, both Catholic and Protestant, were amillennial during most of church history. They did not believe in a literal millennial reign of Christ.) Since people have died without knowing about Christ, the Calvinist assumes the Father has not drawn all men to Christ.

Scripture clearly teaches that those in the Church (or Israel) are elected by God. Thus, the Calvinist argues that God, being GOD, has the right to pick those he is going to save. This is known as the Sovereignty of God. Nobody deserves salvation. However, God has chosen to draw some of us to Christ so that some of us will be saved. Nobody can be saved without being drawn to Christ by the Father.

God is without doubt sovereign. God does have the right to choose whom he will draw to Christ. However, would the sovereignty of God be in question if God's plan is to draw all men to Christ?

John 12:32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Christ will draw all people to himself. Does this mean that everyone will be saved? Not if God, in his sovereignty, has given everyone the free choice to accept or reject Christ after they are drawn to Christ. It was only because of the sovereignty of God that Adam had the free will to choose between the two trees. God draws all people to Christ. This drawing does not automatically produce salvation for all.

Anyone can choose to reject Christ after they have had God's revelation about Christ. God does not choose whether we would commit this unpardonable sin. If

God did choose who would commit this unpardonable sin, it would make God be the author of that unpardonable sin.

Some people have argued that the “draw” of John 6:44 means to compel by irresistible authority. In other words, some argue that when the Father draws people to Christ, that this Greek word is not a wooing, but is irresistible. One Calvinist making this argument pointed out that Acts 16:19 uses the same word, where the crowd seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. Several other examples of this Greek word were also used.

However, the “draw” of John 12:32, quoted above, also uses this same Greek word. The Greek word means to draw, attract, or drag. There may be contexts where the dragging is just about impossible to resist. However, the verse in John 12:32 is about the exact same subject as John 6:44. God is able to draw all people to himself because of the crucifixion. Some are drawn in this age. Some will be resurrected and then drawn in the age to come.

The drawing is very compelling, especially when physical evidence of Christ’s Lordship is personally seen. However, with our free-will, those with selfish motivations can still choose themselves over Christ. They still have Adam’s choice of making themselves to be like God, choosing for themselves what is good and what is evil. Or they can choose to live for Christ.

The election verses are not talking about salvation, but about being in Israel. Those in true Israel are not the only ones saved. Romans chapter 9 is an important chapter that talks about election. This is the primary text used by Reformed preachers and teachers when teaching Calvin’s election. In the context of this chapter, Paul is wrestling over why Israel had rejected the Messiah. The conclusion is that not all Israel is Israel (Romans 9:6). Paul then uses the example of Jacob and Esau to prove God’s election. The choice of Jacob or Esau was made before the twins were even born, before either had done good or bad.

Paul includes in his quotes the fact that the older (Esau) will serve the younger (Jacob) (Romans 9:12). Is this Paul’s way of talking about salvation? Do those who are not saved serve those who are saved? However, from the ancient Jewish perspective, in a discussion about Israel, it can be said that the nations of the world will serve Israel. Israel will rule the nations. Therefore, Esau will serve Jacob. Of course Paul immediately makes it clear that Gentiles are elected as well as Jews (Romans 9:24-26). Therefore, election is not just talking about salvation.

4.5) Problem Solved: The Gospel of Jesus VS. The Gospel of Paul

The gospel of Jesus is often seen as being quite different from the gospel of Paul. Some even claim that the gospel of Jesus was for an old dispensation and that it changed at the cross. One dispensational pastor, who is a friend of mine, says he interprets the words of Jesus "through the lenses of Paul." In other words, he reinterprets the words of Jesus using his interpretation of the words of Paul. A better approach is to interpret Paul in the context of the words of Jesus.

Books have been written about the difference between the gospel of Jesus and the gospel of Paul. The apparent differences between Jesus and Paul has a lot to do with overcoming sin and whether or not it's needed for salvation.

Matthew 5:19-22 Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. (20) For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. (21) "You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, 'You shall not murder;' and 'Whoever shall murder shall be in danger of the judgment.' (22) But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna.

Matthew 5:29-30 If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna. (30) If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna.

Matthew 5:48 ESV You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. (14) How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' (23) Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'

Jesus characterizes the kingdom of heaven as being purchased by the merchant who sold everything he had to buy it. Paul says that salvation is a free gift.

Matthew 13:44-46 "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and hid. In his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. (45) "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a merchant seeking fine pearls, (46) who having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Jesus said it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Paul says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that he was raised from the dead then you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

Matthew 19:23-24 Jesus said to his disciples, "Most certainly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. (24) Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

Jesus says you must renounce everything you have if you are to be his disciple.

Luke 14:26-33 "If anyone comes to me, and doesn't hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can't be my disciple. (27) Whoever doesn't bear his own cross, and come after me, can't be my disciple. (28) For which of you, desiring to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and count the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? (29) Or perhaps, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, everyone who sees begins to mock him, (30) saying, 'This man began to build, and wasn't able to finish.' (31) Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes

against him with twenty thousand? (32) Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an envoy, and asks for conditions of peace. (33) So therefore whoever of you who doesn't renounce all that he has, he can't be my disciple.

All this confusion stems from the assumption that all believers are true disciples of Christ and that salvation is equivalent to inheriting the kingdom. When a believer sees that he is not living up to the standards that Jesus sets for being a disciple, or for inheriting the kingdom, he begins to focus on the words of Paul. All this confusion stems from the belief that everyone's final destiny for eternity is determined at the time of death. But for God, death and the grave are not obstacles. These are obstacles that we have placed on God. The wise will inherit the kingdom. But the foolish still have the opportunity to accept Christ as Savior and to mature in a discipleship relationship after the resurrection. Believers who have not matured are not automatically doomed for hell. But neither will they inherit the kingdom.

The gospel of Jesus is undeniably that of a journey. Paul also speaks of salvation as being a journey. But the many Protestants, especially conservative evangelicals, usually interpret the words of Paul as saying that salvation is simply a decision for Christ. The Calvinist will say, "Once saved always saved." You can point out that salvation is justification, sanctification, and then glorification. And sanctification is a journey. At that point one pastor I know revised his assertion and said, "Once justified always justified." This Calvinist and Reformed view also asserts that it's impossible to completely overcome sin.

All this is based on Paul's teaching of justification by faith, which of course is true. When we profess faith in Christ we are justified and credited with righteousness. But the need to make good on that credit is questioned. It's said that only happens in heaven. The Scriptural argument for this is usually along the lines that we have moral bodies that are physically corruptible. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53) at the resurrection. This mortal aspect of our bodies is said to be spiritually corruptible and cannot stop sinning. Also, Paul's expressed experiences with his difficulty of overcoming sin are interpreted as stating an impossibility. Once this interpretation of Paul's words becomes established, the contradictory words of Jesus become reinterpreted through the lenses of Paul.

Then, the conservative evangelical must consider the words of John's first letter. "Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him" (1 John 3:6). "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning

from the beginning. To this end the Son of God was revealed, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). "Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, because his seed remains in him; and he can't sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). "We know that whoever is born of God doesn't sin, but he who was born of God keeps himself, and the evil one doesn't touch him" (1 John 5:18).

At this point, many conservative evangelicals start talking about two kinds of sin. Some sins should not be done by Christians. Others are unavoidable, they say. And then they will start listing some sins that they personally are able to avoid. They list sins that are done on the outside. But they usually don't list sins of the heart such as enmity, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, and drunkenness. But these sins are explicitly listed by Paul in saying those who do these things will not inherit the kingdom (Galatians 5:19-21). Even lust becomes acceptable as long as it doesn't become adultery. But what does Jesus say? The Pharisees were very good at appearing righteous on the outside. But Jesus said that "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

At this point many will say I'm preaching salvation by works. No, we are saved by faith alone. Salvation includes justification, sanctification and glorification. We are justified and credited with righteousness when, by faith, we become a believer. We are also sanctified by faith. This means that we have faith in God to change us on the inside through the Holy Spirit. This faith is not just a belief. It's a faith that includes work, because faith without works is dead. As we do the works of the Father, out of love for God and our neighbor, the Holy Spirit fills us and empowers us to carry out the Father's will. As we do the works, the Holy Spirit changes us on the inside. So even sanctification is a free gift from God. But if we don't have faith in God to sanctify us, we will grieve the Holy Spirit and we probably will not be able to overcome sin in this lifetime. We can't change ourselves. That is self-righteousness. When salvation is really understood to be a journey of faith, then the gospel of Jesus and the gospel of Paul come into perfect harmony.

We are to be the light of the world. But statistics have shown the moral actions of professing Christians is not much different than that of the world. Jesus and Paul really are preaching the exact same gospel. But the gospel of the kingdom is not a popular gospel because it's incorrectly assumed that the foolish will burn in hell. For most Christians, the true gospel of the kingdom is a very difficult pill to swallow. Overcoming sin is seen as impossible because it's rarely understood that it happens by faith alone as we do the works. It happens out of true love for God and for our neighbors; the kind of love that requires actions.

4.6) Problem Solved: The Seemingly Harsh God of the Old Testament

If God shows mercy to all, and desires everyone to be saved, then why did God command the people to destroy the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites (Deuteronomy. 20:17)? Verse 18 of Deuteronomy says, “That they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods.” But did they know any better? Why had God revealed himself to the Hebrews and not to these other nations? Why did God command that some of these other nations be destroyed without giving them a chance to learn about the one true God? Can this be considered cold-hearted election? What if God knew that Abraham’s children would be a blessing to all nations, including these, after the resurrection? But for God to carry out His plan, God must first cultivate a holy nation that will reign with Christ during the Messianic kingdom to come.

Why did God command the death penalty for working on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:15)? Could it be that God considered the teaching of holiness to Israel to be more important than their lives? Those who broke this law can still be raised and live in the millennium. The important thing was to teach holiness to a holy nation so they could reign with Christ during the millennium. A holy nation is needed to bring holiness to the entire world. So from God’s perspective, it matters not if some people must rest for a while in Sheol until the resurrection.

Why does God allow cruelty and injustice? Why is there so much pain in this world? We have not been seeing the big picture.

4.7) Problem Solved: Failure to Lead Our Loved Ones to Christ

I’m adding this section just as I’m finishing the second edition of this book. A few weeks back, a very close friend of mine told me his younger sister had died. She is survived by a husband and three teenage children. Her liver had been failing, and the doctor had given her perhaps six months to live.

For the sake of this story, let’s call my friend Tim, and his sister Susan. Tim is a Christian and is active and involved in his church. He accepted Christ, however, as an adult. Tim had not grown up in a Christian family. His sister Susan was not a Christian.

During the time when Susan was sick, Tim and other Christians started to talk to Susan about Christ. She developed some interest and asked Tim to buy her a Bible. She wanted one of those that didn’t have all the “thee’s” and “thou’s”. So

Tim bought her an NIV. But she unexpectedly got worse died before Tim could give it to her. Susan had not made a profession of faith in Christ.

Tim noticed how carefully the pastor chose his words at the memorial service. Pastors, he said, know how to choose words that comfort the family and yet avoid the issue of whether she has gone to a better place.

How would it make Tim feel, if he believed his sister is eternally in hell, and would be eternally in heaven if he had been perhaps one week earlier in his witness? In these situations pastors tend to revert to phrases like "God knows best." And "God will do what's right." But according to most pastors' trained doctrines, those who die without professing Christ are in hell.

Wouldn't it be great if pastors could have a sound doctrine, based on the literal interpretation of Scripture, which would be in agreement with what they tell the bereaved? The New Wine System solves this problem. We should not have to bear the guilt of anyone's eternal standing with God.

4.8) Every Knee Will Bow

On the last day, everyone who has not taken the mark of the beast, or who has not committed an unpardonable sin, will be raised from death. Those who take the mark of the beast, during the great tribulation, will not be raised (Rev 20:4-5). The mark of the beast is taken only by those who harden their hearts against Christ. It's a time of world-wide rebellion against Christ (2 Thess. 2:3). Many people will harden their hearts even more at that time.

Toward the end of the great tribulation, there will be very few carnal (or undecided) Christians. Persecution has a way of making the Church pure. At the end of the age, the wheat will be separated from the tares (Mat.13:24-42). Because of this persecution, Revelation speaks of all the Christians as saints. Those who stand firm to the end will be saved (Mark 13:8-13, Rev 13:10, 14:12). They will be saints and will rule in the millennium (Rev 20:6). But those who receive the mark of the beast will not be saved. They will not be raised from the dead.

Almost everyone, from all generations, will be raised on the last day. Jesus said, "He who rejects me, and doesn't receive my sayings, has one who judges him. The word that I spoke, the same will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). These who harden their hearts and reject Christ will not be raised. But everyone else, even those who have not yet accepted Christ, will be resurrected and will have the opportunity to accept Christ and to grow into Christ's maturity.

When Christ returns, all the nations of the earth will see the sign of Christ in the sky (Matthew 24:30). The nations of the earth will mourn (Matthew 24:30). Does this not sound like the experience of a new Christian when he first repents and asks Christ to be his Lord and Savior?

Revelation 1:7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, including those who pierced him. All the tribes of the earth will mourn over him. Even so, Amen.

Literally speaking, those who pierced him would include the actual people involved in the crucifixion. According to Mark 14:62, even Caiaphas the high priest will see Jesus coming in the clouds. Caiaphas later died, so he must be resurrected before he can witness Jesus coming in the clouds.

Romans 14:11 For it is written, " 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'to me every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess to God.' "

Philippians 2:9-11 Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; (10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, (11) and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This verse is sometimes interpreted as a forced bending of the knee. But looking at this verse the way an ancient Jew would look at it, every knee will bow in true reverence to the Messiah. Those who really repent of their sins will have been justified at the cross, and they can begin their paths of righteousness under Christ's rule. In Paul's verses about the bowing of every knee, Paul is quoting Isaiah. Be sure to read this the way an ancient Jew would have read it.

Isaiah 45:21-25 Declare and present it. Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has shown this from ancient time? Who has declared it of old? Haven't I, Yahweh? There is no other God besides me, a just God and a Savior; There is no one besides me. (22) "Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. (23) By myself have I sworn, the word has gone forth from my mouth in righteousness, and will not return, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. (24) They will say of me, 'There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh.' " Even to him shall men come; and all those who were incensed against him shall be disappointed. (25) In Yahweh shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.

This is what Paul was quoting. All the ends of the earth will look to Christ and be saved. Every knee on the earth in all the nations will bow to Christ and confess Him as their Savior. With just the portion that Paul quoted, it's not clear that these knees who bow can still have salvation. But when we look at what he was quoting, it's obvious. They will be raised from death, and will be saved, but they "shall be ashamed" (KJV). However, the descendants of true Israel (Abraham), including all Gentiles who will have matured in Christ, will be found righteous. Then, they will lead the whole world into righteousness.

4.9) Problem Solved: Exposing Our Sins at the Judgment Seat of Christ

In 1 Corinthians 4:5, Paul discusses the judgment that awaits Christians. This verse speaks about bringing to light what is hidden in the darkness, and exposing the motives of men's hearts. What's confusing to some theologians is, why would Christians, who have been forgiven of all sins, be shamed, by having their sinful nature exposed for all to see? Are not our sins completely covered by the blood of Christ (Romans 4:7-8)? This has caused some confusion for many scholars.

The judgment seat of Christ is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 5:10 and in Romans 14:10. It's in these two verses that the Greek word *bema* is used, which is the same word used for the "judgment seat" of kings and rulers. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul is talking about his own death that would soon come. In verse 10 he speaks of the judgment seat where each one of us will "receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." In Romans 14:10, Paul says we should not judge our brothers for minor issues, because we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. But during this judgment, will Christ really shame us by exposing all our sins? Will he really "bring to light what is hidden in the darkness, and expose all the motives of our hearts" (4:5)?

I once saw a lady come up to the pastor in tears after he taught this will happen. He tried to phrase things a bit better, in hopes that she could accept this teaching. But the lady kept crying. Christ has forgiven us. Why would he then expose us?

Let's take another look at the passage, but this time let's view the passage in terms of the present age, the resurrection, the Messianic age to come, the final judgment, and then eternal life or the lake of fire. In the previous chapter (1 Cor. 3), Paul had been talking about building on the foundation of Jesus Christ and building toward the kingdom of the Messianic age. This is also in the context of the different teachers, such as Apollos and Paul. In the kingdom to come, our ministries will be judged. It's not a judgment of sin, although it's related to sin.

Some people try to build the kingdom with ministries that have motivations other than the simple love of Christ, the love of our neighbors, and his coming kingdom. These ministries don't bear the true fruit that builds the kingdom. The minister or teacher is saved, but with nothing to show for it. All his works are "burned up, [and] he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Cor. 3:15). Such a teacher or minister is like the wolf in sheep's clothing. He doesn't realize that he is not hearing from the Lord. The minister is saved because he has not committed an unpardonable sin. But the minister has not matured in Christ. The minister is foolish, and will have nothing to show for his works in the Messianic age.

This is not a matter of his sins being judged. It's simply that his works are burned up and he escapes as if through a fire. He has gone through the wide gate of destruction. But he is still saved. If the minister grows in Christ's maturity during the millennium, he will still be in the Book of Life at the Great White Throne Judgment. This is not to say that Paul is equating Apollos with a foolish teacher. He is simply saying that the church must draw teaching from different ministers, and try not to follow teaching that goes beyond what is in Scripture (1 Cor. 4:6). When Christ returns, the bad teachings will become apparent.

The judgment seat of Christ, (sometimes called the Bema Judgment Seat), is very much a natural judgment seat. Jesus will be the King of Kings. In ancient times, the kings were the judges. The King of Kings will reward his servants by putting them in charge of his cities. Some of us will receive greater rewards than others. It all depends on how we invest the talents that Christ has given us.

The judgment seat of Christ is not a time when Christ will shame us by exposing all our deep dark sins. 1 Corinthians 4:5 is still talking about the teachings of Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. Some ministries will bear fruit in the kingdom and some will not. The fact that 1 Corinthians 4:5 is still talking about different ministries can be seen in the next verse, where Paul mentions Apollos again.

Some people will argue the Bema Judgment Seat must immediately follow death, because of the context of 2 Corinthians 5:10. If Paul is really talking about a heavenly dwelling to which we go when we die, then this verse would strongly suggest that we must appear before the Bema Judgment Seat after we die and before the resurrection. However, I believe Paul is actually talking about the resurrection. Refer back to section 2.5, titled "Absence from the Body is Presence with the Lord," to see that Paul really was talking about the time after the resurrection.

4.10) Problem Solved: Why does Paul Excommunicate Sinners?

There are two verses (1 Cor. 5:5 and 1 Tim 1:20) in which Paul turns specific sinners over to Satan. Other verses in which Paul prescribes excommunication are Titus 3:9-11 for divisiveness, 2 Thessalonians 3:11-15 for free loading, 2 John verses 9-11 for false doctrinal teachings, and in 1 Corinthians 5:11 for various other sins. Perhaps someone who has been put out of the church will repent and come back. But in practice, excommunication generally makes the person even more hardened.

Did Paul really believe that turning a man over to Satan would lead to his repentance? I do not believe Paul thought kicking a guy out of the church would save him. He is not going to undergo the hardships of the world and then come begging back to the church. If anything, life in the church at that time was much worse than life in the world. In 1 Tim 1:20, the sin that causes the man to be turned over to Satan is a blasphemous mouth. Such a person will do fine in the world.

1 Corinthians 5:5 [You] are to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul turns the man over to Satan so that he may be saved on the Day of the Lord. Many people believe the “Day of the Lord” is a single 24-hour day. Instead, it’s the entire Messianic Age. With the Lord, a day is as a thousand years. It’s the “age to come.” Refer to section 17.9 for the Scriptural evidence.

With the Day of the Lord being the age to come, Paul was saying to turn the man over to Satan so that he could be saved after Christ returns. The man would not wind up being one of the elect. He is thrown out of the church for the sake of the purity of the church. We can see this in verses 6 and 7, where Paul speaks of the yeast of sin that can work its way through the batch of dough. The man can be saved after Christ returns and Satan is chained.

This verse, over the centuries, has caused commentators to scratch their heads and come up with some interesting theories. Adam Clarke believed that Satan was allowed to torment the guy’s body, and in so doing, God’s mercy remained, so that he would be saved. But he said no such power remains today. Matthew Henry brings up this possibility, and seems to portray it as other people’s opinions, not wanting to endorse it himself. Yet he endorses no other view.

Commentators seem to have trouble deciding whether destruction of flesh really means death. They just don’t see how the guy can die and still be saved. The

verse says nothing about torment. The man is delivered over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. That's death.

Would death or torment really lead to salvation? I thought that only the torment and death of Christ on the cross could lead to salvation. Or does the destruction of the flesh simply mean that the guy will eventually die a natural death? The flesh is destroyed so that the spirit may be saved. Theologians continue to scratch their heads over this one.

But with a Messianic Age to come, as Paul would have understood, it makes perfect sense. Paul wanted to allow the guy's salvation to wait on the age to come, instead of allowing him to corrupt the church at Corinth during this present age. The guy would die, be resurrected, and then he could be saved.

If people who are not in love with Christ are allowed to stay in the church, they may get to the point where they really do reject Christ. This could get their names blotted from the Book of Life. It is better that they leave the church, and be turned over to Satan. That way, they will still have opportunity for salvation in the Day of the Lord.

4.11) A Close Look at John 3:16, in Context

Let's take a close look at this most famous salvation verse. But this time, let's look at it in a broader context, from verses 14 through 20. Also, let's not restrict the time limits for belief, or unbelief, to the time of death. Let's allow for an age to come, where both the just and the unjust will be raised (Acts 24:15). Let's interpret the verse with salvation being a life's journey and not simply a moment's decision to believe.

In verse 16, John says those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life. For the unjust, the resurrection in the age to come is not eternal life. There is still the second death. Eternal life is given only to those who overcome sin through a personal (discipleship) relationship with Jesus Christ. That's the real meaning of "believe." The Greek word means faith, hope, and belief. We must follow Christ and become like Christ in order to receive eternal life.

Also, let's read the text as being about the world. It's not just about those few in the world who have the opportunity to believe during this age. As the passage says, it's about God's love for the entire world.

I'm using the NIV's translation of the second half of verse 17, because it's truer to the Greek. The WEB renders it as "but that the world should be saved."

Nothing in the Greek says “should.” Either the world is saved, or the world is not saved. There is no “should” applied to the saving of the whole world, and there is nothing in the Greek to say that some in the world are saved and others are not saved. In other words, most translations are influenced by the beliefs of the translators.

To say that the world is saved does not necessarily mean that each and every individual in the world is saved. It would, however, have to mean that at least a strong majority of everybody in the world is saved. Since the high majority of everybody in the world does not express belief in Christ during this lifetime, we can conclude that they will have that opportunity in the age to come. The New Wine System states that everybody is on the path of righteousness. We are all saved. But salvation can be lost if one hardens their heart and rejects the Light.

John 3:14-20 WEB As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (15) that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (17) For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, [but to save the world through him. NIV] (18) He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. (19) This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. (20) For everyone who does evil hates the light, and doesn't come to the light, lest his works would be exposed.

The Light has come into the world. Those who reject the Light are “judged already” (condemned) and they will not be resurrected. But what about those who have never seen or heard the Light? What about those who do not as yet understand the Light?

To be “judged already” means there is no longer opportunity for salvation. Those who have not as yet believed, because they have not yet heard or understood, are not yet condemned. Therefore, verse 18 cannot be talking about them. Verse 18 must be talking about those who refuse to have “faith, hope, and belief” in the Light that they see and understand. They do “not believe” the Light they see. They no longer hear the voice of Christ.

4.12) Concluding Thoughts for Part One of This Book

I believe we will see the return of Christ very soon. But will Christ return to a Church so vastly divided on issues of Scripture? Is it possible for the Church to come into agreement about the theological issues that have divided us? Most Christians would think it's impossible. But with God, all things are possible.

Would it be possible for all Protestants to see that election and free will are both true? If so, we don't need the historical denominational differences along those lines. Would it be possible for everyone to see that salvation is a free gift for everyone, yet we need to overcome sin to inherit the kingdom? This issue has also caused many Protestant denominational divisions. The truth hides in the middle.

Could it even be possible for Catholics and Protestants to get together, perhaps during the great tribulation? It's my belief that there will be a great awakening in the Church during the first half of the seven-year period of Christ's return. Could this awakening also bring unity? Could the Church once again be truly the One (Catholic) Church? (The word Catholic means One.)

Protestants need to realize that purgatory does fill a Scriptural requirement, and Catholics need to realize that the millennial reign of Christ is a much better alternative than purgatory. Without purgatory, there is no need to pray for the dead, and there is no need for indulgences. Catholics need to realize that salvation is a free gift for everyone, even for those who have not been baptized.

Protestants need to realize that you are not automatically a saint when you first profess faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is more like the Catholic view of a journey. Not everyone makes it to sainthood before they die. Catholics need to realize that the true list of saints is in heaven only, and that you don't have to be Catholic to be a saint. And Catholics need to realize the strong assurance of salvation that exists for anyone who trusts in Jesus Christ as their Savior. The truth hides in the middle.

Jesus prayed for unity in the Church. The Father tends to answer the prayers of Jesus. Could this be your prayer as well?

John 17:11 I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them through your name which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are.

Part Two

The Wise, the Foolish, and the Wicked

As we mature in Christ, we are advancing down the road of righteousness. This is the process of “working out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). The important point to remember is that the road of righteousness does not have to end at death. Death is not have to end one’s journey to holiness. The journey can continue through the millennium. The final judgment is not until the end of the millennium.

If this is true, then there must be three types of people in the grave. The wise are those who [agape] love Christ, and walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9), to overcome sin, before they die. The foolish are those who are still on the road of righteousness when they die. Some have not yet professed their faith in Christ. They are Christ’s lost sheep. But even Christ’s lost sheep can hear his voice. The wicked are those who have hardened their hearts and no longer hear Christ’s voice.

The purpose of Part Two of this book is to show these three types using Old Testament and New Testament Scripture about the resurrection. Three types can be seen in Daniel 12. By interpreting Matthew 24-25 in the context of Daniel 12, we can see the wise, the foolish, and the wicked in the Olivetti Discourse parables of Christ. Three types of people in the grave can also be confirmed by the way the Lamb’s Book of Life operates. And three types of people can be seen in the grave way back in Isaiah 26. This is the earliest text of the resurrection, which says the earth will give birth to her dead.

We will also be studying the book of Hebrews. The central theme of Hebrews is that it "is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt" (Hebrews 6:4-6 ESV). This then, is a warning to foolish (immature) Christians from turning against Christ and becoming wicked. You can forfeit your salvation. And if you do, you can't get it back again.

Chapter 5

The Olivetti Discourse

Matthew 24 and 25, often called the Olivetti Discourse, is considered by many as the best place to begin in Scripture when studying the end times. Books like Daniel and Revelation can be difficult to understand because they make use of visions. The interpretation of these visions can be very difficult, even when hints to the interpretation is given to Daniel by the angel and recorded in the book along with the vision. In stark contrast, the words of Jesus in the Olivetti Discourse come across as very straightforward and easy to understand.

Yet there is still a lot of debate with regard to the Olivetti Discourse. Thus, even the very basic starting point in the study of eschatology would seem to be riddled with disagreement. Many people want to stick with the Sermon on the Mount or Paul's letters and avoid any discussion about eschatology or the end times. But what if eschatology is the key to the proper understanding of the rest of Scripture? At this point most Christians would simply roll their eyes. In most any systematic theology text book, the chapter on eschatology is the last chapter in the book. Seminaries tend to have only one class on eschatology. And most preachers tend to avoid eschatology like the plague. The preachers who will talk about eschatology tend to only be dispensationalists. So those in the churches who are taught eschatology tend to get only one side of the debates.

The most important aspect of properly interpreting Scripture is to carefully consider context. Everyone knows how any writing, or even something verbally stated, can easily appear to have a very different meaning when it's taken out of context. Statements taken out of context have often been used to mislead the audience. But we tend to think of context as simply a broader view of the text we are reading. We try to not take a specific verse out of context. But can context also be culture? Can the context of New Testament Scripture be the Old Testament? After all, the Old Testament was their Bible. We should consider the words of Jesus and the disciples in the context of their own Bible.

To illustrate, consider the following true story. A Muslim lady asked my mother why we call Jesus "the lamb of God." Do we consider Jesus to be an animal? This was a good opportunity for my mother to explain a very important Christian teaching. If I say to a Christian that Jesus is "the lamb of God", it is understood that I'm not insulting Jesus by saying that he is an animal. But this is understood only because of the context of Scriptural background. Scriptural

background can dramatically change what is being said. Likewise, if we do not consider Old Testament Scriptural context when reading the New Testament, we can dramatically misinterpret the words of Jesus and his disciples, including Paul.

Some will argue that Paul was not speaking to Jews but was speaking to Gentiles. Thus, Old Testament context should not matter when interpreting the words of Paul. However, Paul was a Pharisee. He would have taught the churches that he started from his own background as a Pharisee. We do not have this original teaching. All we have are letters that he wrote to these churches after they had been taught. So again, our only hope of truly understanding Paul is to interpret his words in the context of the Old Testament.

Others argue that the New Testament is a New Covenant and has thus vastly changed. It's also argued that the Old Testament was not properly understood by the Jews. Thus, it is argued that "the Old Testament is reinterpreted in the light of the New Testament." It's true that many things changed under the New Covenant. But even the New Covenant was originally prophesied in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 31:31). Things like circumcision, animal sacrifice, attending religious festivals, and dietary laws were explicitly changed in the New Testament. But we should still interpret the New Testament in the context of the Old Testament.

The biggest area where the New Testament can be misinterpreted because of Old Testament context is in terminology. The term "lamb of God" must be understood in the context of Scripture. Likewise, terms like Hades, the kingdom of God/heaven, inheriting the kingdom, salvation, and grace are all common everyday words that have religious overtones which depend on Scriptural understanding to find their meaning. For example, the word 'grace' literally means 'favor'. But it has religious overtones. The Old Testament must be used in interpreting the meaning of 'grace.' The word 'Hades' literally means 'grave.' But we know from the Old Testament that it's not just a place for the decaying body. It's a place for souls to rest, both the just and the unjust, while they await the resurrection.

Except for the word 'grace,' all of these words are terms of eschatology. And they are common terms used in the New Testament. Thus, the culture of the New Testament Jews was very much centered on eschatology. They were looking for the coming Messiah, to establish the earthly Messianic reign, and to free Israel from being ruled by the Romans. Eschatology was by no means secondary in their religious understandings. When we read these terms in the New Testament, the meaning of these terms of eschatology must be interpreted in the context of their Scripture, which is the Old Testament. And if we do not interpret the New

Testament in the context of the Old Testament, the misunderstood meanings of these words can vastly distort the meaning of the New Testament just like the meaning of the "lamb of God" would be vastly distorted if not interpreted in the context of Scripture.

Many people will readily agree that the New Testament must be interpreted in the context of the Old Testament. But in practice, we all have the strong tendency to interpret the New Testament in the context of our own traditions. Have you ever wondered why there are so many different denominational differences in what we believe, and yet we all read the same Bible? Why are we all so convinced that the interpretations we grew up with are correct, and the systems of interpretations held by all other Christian groups are incorrect?

Jehovah Witnesses come to the door. And those of us who are more familiar with Scripture invite them in so that we can show them why they are in error. But these discussions about Scripture never lead a Jehovah Witness to question what they believe. That's because they are reading Scripture in the context of what they have been taught, and we read Scripture in the context of what we have been taught. Each is very convinced of our interpretation because each spends a vast amount of time studying Scripture. Each is convinced that the other is in error. That's because everyone tends to read the New Testament in the context of their traditions. And in so doing, they reinforce their own traditional beliefs.

For example, we read the Sermon on the Mount. This is considered to be a very basic teaching of Jesus. And the way this sermon is interpreted is very much like the entire New Testament is interpreted. In the Sermon on the Mount, we read that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, that we certainly will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). So how much righteousness do you need in order to be saved? But is entering the kingdom really the same as salvation?

Based on our tradition, we interpret entering the kingdom of heaven as going to heaven and not hell when we die. But the Jews didn't believe they went to heaven or hell when they died. Our interpretation of "kingdom of heaven" is based on our own traditions. But the Jews would have gotten this term from Daniel. The kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, is an earthly kingdom. Then, after interpreting this verse in the wrong context, we get into major disagreements between those who place more emphasis on Paul and salvation by grace alone, as opposed to those who place more emphasis on the words of Jesus and the need for holiness and Lordship or discipleship salvation.

Later in the Sermon on the Mount, we read that few find the narrow gate that leads life while many enter the wide gate that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). Since we are reading Scripture in the context of tradition instead of the Old Testament, we again assume Jesus is talking about going to heaven or hell when you die. So we assume that the gate to life is heaven and the gate to destruction is hell. Thus, we assume that destruction is damnation. However, much of the context of the sermon is about possessions and money. We are taught to store our treasures in heaven instead of devoting our lives to the earning of money. We are taught to not constantly worry about food and clothing. Yet even in the context of the sermon itself, we never even consider the possibility that the destruction of the wide gate could literally be the destruction of property. That's how strong tradition influences our interpretations. It's no wonder that there are so many doctrinal systems out there even when we all read the same Bible.

Everyone is very convinced that their interpretation is the only correct interpretation because everyone has answers for all the problematic verses. But people don't seem to realize that all the other doctrinal systems out there also have answers for every verse. The more people become familiar and gain knowledge about how to explain the problematic verses, the more those explanations seem to become obvious and simple to them. But to others outside of those traditions, those explanations seem to be far-fetched. It's very difficult to swallow one's pride, forget one's own traditions, and instead seriously consider how New Testament Jews would have interpreted New Testament Scripture. Remember, the Old Testament was their only Bible.

The New Wine System uses the "grammatical/historical" approach to interpreting Old Testament prophecy. Scripture is interpreted as literally as is reasonable with reasonable use of figurative or symbolic speech only when it's obvious that figurative or symbolic speech was intentionally being used by the author. The New Testament Church, however, is not separated from Old Testament Israel. The Church is grafted into Israel, making the Church be Israel.

This approach to the interpretation of Scripture is the fundamental principle of hermeneutics for the New Wine System. This approach, however, only works when Old Testament Scripture is interpreted in the same way that the original authors and audience would have done. To many this may sound like an obvious statement. But the concept of "reinterpreting the Old Testament in light of the New Testament" will often go as far as interpreting Old Testament eschatology in ways the original authors would have never conceived.

5.1) Preterism, Dispensationalism, and the New Wine System

There have been two major approaches for interpreting the Olivetti Discourse, and thus two approaches for interpreting eschatology in general. Unlike the New Wine System, both of these approaches are understood to be unimportant with regard to the interpretation of the rest of the New Testament. Thus, eschatology has been the last chapter in a book on systematic theology. First, we will review these two traditional approaches to eschatology using the Olivetti Discourse. Then we will take a new look at the Olivetti Discourse using the New Wine System.

'Preterist' means past fulfillment. The preterist tends to look at prophetic Scripture as having been fulfilled in the first century. The fall of Jerusalem by the Romans, in 70 AD, is seen as fulfillment of the Olivetti Discourse. At this point in time, the Old Covenant is completely passed away to be replaced by the New Covenant. (Old Testament and New Testament means Old Covenant and New Covenant. Some old Bibles were labeled in this way.) Thus, Israel is replaced by the Church. This is very traditional in church history, and is called covenantalism. The doctrine of the Church replacing Israel was the high majority view of both Catholics and Protestants for most of church history, up until dispensationalism began around 1830. The Church is viewed as a continuation of the system of covenants between God and Man. Thus the Church is a continuation of Israel.

The preterist sees prophecy as very allegorical. Almost everything is fulfilled in the first coming of Christ and in the Church. Everything is centered on going to heaven or hell when you die. So there is no need for a Messianic earthly reign of Christ. The Messianic age, a very central theme of Old Testament prophecy, is simply viewed allegorically as the Church age. When Christ returns, we immediately have the general resurrection and then the new heavens and new earth. Since the dead are believed to already be in heaven or hell, the general resurrection is seen as simply the start of eternity, perhaps with better bodies.

Dispensationalism is usually viewed as the opposite of preterism and covenantalism. The dispensationalist is a futurist. Prophecies are interpreted much more literally. There is a literal Messianic earthly reign of Christ. Old Testament prophecies about the Messianic age are interpreted in very much the same way as ancient Jews would have interpreted Scripture.

But dispensationalism was developed relatively late in church history. It was assumed that eschatology does not affect the rest of the New Testament. Thus, the traditional interpretation of the New Testament, as primarily being about going to heaven or hell when you die, was never questioned. Ancient Old Testament

Jewish eschatology, on the other hand, is not about going to heaven or hell when you die. In the Old Testament, both the righteous and the wicked go to Sheol. (Sheol means grave and is Hades in the New Testament.) Old Testament Jews believed that both the righteous and the wicked dead are in Hades and await the resurrection. It's about the resurrection of both the just and the unjust, followed by the Messianic earthly reign of the Messiah. In other words, ancient Old Testament Jewish eschatology is not very compatible with the traditional views of the New Testament. So how was this resolved?

How was this conflict resolved without the use of allegory and preterism? Dispensationalists believe the Church is a "parenthesis" between two dispensations of Israel. In other words, God's plan for Israel was put on hold during the age of the Church. Then God returns to his original plan for Israel. This allows the New Testament to be interpreted as being about a separate body of believers. The New Testament can be about Church without being in conflict with Old Testament eschatology. The New Testament is not interpreted in the context of the Old Testament, because it's about a different body of believers.

This "parenthesis" between two dispensations of Israel becomes the primary argument for the pre-tribulation rapture. The time of the great tribulation is seen as a time of transition between the world system of sin and the Messianic age to come. The Church must be removed from the world in order for this transition to take place. Thus, the Church goes to heaven as is traditionally believed. And Israel stays on earth just like Old Testament Jewish eschatology teaches. Of course there have been disagreements among dispensationalists as to whether these two bodies of believers are ever reunited. But the basic problem stems from trying to reconcile two very different systems of eschatology. One system says you go to heaven or hell when you die. The other says the dead are all asleep and await the resurrection. The dead, both the just and the unjust, will be resurrected to live here on the earth.

The New Wine System takes a different approach. The Church does not replace Israel. And prophecy is not interpreted using allegory and past fulfillment. But at the same time, the Church is not a "parenthesis" between two dispensations of Israel. The New Wine System simply allows the interpretation of the New Testament to be affected by Old Testament prophecy. In other words, the New Testament is interpreted in the context of the Old Testament, even if doing so challenges the traditional views of the New Testament. Under the New Wine System, the Gentile Church is grafted into Israel. We become a part of Israel. And Old Testament prophecy is literally fulfilled with all of Israel, both Jewish and Gentile.

5.2) Preterist and Futurist Views of the Olivetti Discourse

The Olivetti Discourse is the best place to start when studying eschatology. The debates between preterists and dispensationalists come about as a result of comparing Matthew's account with Luke's account. Because of their overall similarities, most scholars hold that it's the same discourse. The most noticeable difference in Luke's account is where Jesus says to watch for the armies to surround Jerusalem and to know that its desolation is near. The people are taken as prisoners to all the nations. This obviously happened in 70 AD when Rome destroyed Jerusalem. But in Matthew's account, Jesus says to watch for the abomination of desolation, spoken of by the prophet Daniel. Thus, the nature of the abomination of desolation becomes highly debated. If these are actually two accounts of the same discourse, then the abomination of desolation must have occurred in 70 AD.

Matthew 24:15-16 "When, therefore, you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Luke 21:20-21 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is at hand. (21) Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let those who are in the midst of her depart. Let those who are in the country not enter therein.

Should the abomination of desolation be considered as fulfilled in 70 AD? Or is the abomination of desolation a future event that will happen just prior to the second coming of Christ? This question is foundational to understanding the difference between the preterist and the futurist. (Preterism means past fulfilment.)

The first camp is preterism. The second camp is futurism. Futurists tend to lean toward a more literal and future interpretation of most Bible prophecy. Some futurists argue that Matthew 24 and Luke 21 represent two different discourses. Or some might say they are the same discourse but fulfilled twice. Some futurists believe that even Luke's account is strictly fulfilled in the future.

I believe Luke's account to be more about 70 AD. Matthew's and Mark's accounts are primarily focused on the future time just prior to the second coming of Christ. So they are two different discourses. This question becomes even more complex when one considers the question that was asked by the disciples. The entire Olivetti Discourse is in response to this question.

Matthew 24:1-3 Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way. His disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. (2) But he answered them, "You see all of these things, don't you? Most certainly I tell you, there will not be left here one stone on another, that will not be thrown down." (3) As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Did the disciples ask one question or two questions? The disciples asked, "When will these things be?" These things, by context, is the destruction of the temple that occurred in 70 AD. The disciples also asked, "What is the sign of your coming, and the end of the age?" Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples at that time. The destruction of the temple would have been perceived as very apocalyptic. They were assuming that the temple would be destroyed at the end of the age. And they were assuming that Christ would return at that same time.

Preterists argue that the destruction of the temple, or the Romans entering the temple, was the abomination of desolation. However, the disciples would have understood what Jesus meant by the abomination of desolation because they were Jews and observed Hanukkah. This is the celebration of the cleansing of the temple after the abomination of 168 BC. A statue of Zeus was set up by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The book of Maccabees calls the stone structure an abomination. And Daniel 11:31 prophesied the event calling it the abomination of desolation. Jesus was saying that the event of 168 BC will happen again.

The preterist will argue that the end of the age, the abomination of desolation, and the return of Christ did in fact happen in 70 AD. The futurist argues the disciples may have assumed the temple would be destroyed when Christ returns, but that Jesus was really talking about two separate times. But did Jesus intentionally allow the disciples to be deceived in this way? Some preterists go as far as arguing that to be a futurist is to require that Jesus lied to the disciples.

Another perceived problem is Jesus' statement, "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." This statement is given in both Matthew's account and Luke's account. Did all these things happen in the generation of Christ? Full Preterists will quickly point to this verse and say that Jesus has already returned, and that he returned in 70 AD. Futurists generally interpret "this generation" as the generation of the end times. But how can that be logically argued based on the text?

5.3) Two Generations

When we read Matthew 24, Jesus tells us to watch for the abomination of desolation, spoken of by the prophet Daniel. But when we look at the account in Luke 21, we get the preterist perspective. Instead of the abomination of desolation, it speaks of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, and its desolation being near. Obviously this was fulfilled in 70 AD.

The key to the problem is found in the original question. All of Matthew 24 and 25 was in answer to this question. The disciples were wandering through the temple, looking at the buildings. Jesus had just left the temple. The disciples caught up with him and called his attention to the buildings. Jesus said, "Do you see all these things?" He asked, "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (verse 2, NIV).

The disciples were in culture shock. The temple was the greatest and most important thing they had ever known. Its construction had started before they were born and was still under way. The construction of this temple was not finished until 64 AD, just six years before it was destroyed. From the disciple's point of view, its destruction must be the end times. The group went up the Mount of Olives. One would think that ask they walked, they were probably speechless.

"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will all this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'" (verse 3, NIV). "All this," that would happen, was the destruction of the temple. "Not one stone here will be left on another." This is one question. Another question is, "what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" There are two fulfillments to the prophecy. One is when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. The other is when Jesus returns at the end of the age. The prophecy is true about both times. I don't believe the disciples actually understood that they were asking more than one question. But prophecy is prophecy. God's word is God's word. You ask the question, you get the answer to the question(s) you ask.

In Matthew's account, Jesus gives this speech in private to the disciples, up on the Mount of Olives. If you read Luke's account, without letting Matthew's account influence what you read, the speech is given in the temple. Luke's account was a warning to the people in Jerusalem. Matthew's account is a private warning to the disciples and the Church.

In Matthew's account, we are told to watch for the abomination of desolation. In Luke's account, we are told to watch for the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies. Which one did Jesus say? If both accounts are of the same speech, then we have a problem of Scriptural accuracy. The text does not say, "the abomination of desolation which is the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies." That's not what the text says. One text says one thing, and the other text says the other thing. There are other examples of multiple accounts of the same event, as seen by different disciples. But the question of whether he said to watch for the abomination or for the surrounding of Jerusalem is a more than just different perspective of the same event. On the argument of Scriptural inerrancy alone, it must have been two different speeches.

So Matthew's account must be more about the end time generation. And Luke's account must be more about the generation of Jesus. In Luke's account, the statement "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" is our clue that the prophecy skips over time. It skips over the times of the Gentiles. From Luke's perspective, everything before this statement is about the generation of Jesus, and everything after this statement is about the end time generation.

The statement, "this generation shall not pass away," is applied to the adult generation of Jesus, and also to our adult generation today. Israel became a nation again in 1948, right after World War II. The baby boom generation that was born right after World War II had just reached adult age when Israel regained Jerusalem in 1967.

Basically, what we have here is a timeline as follows:

1. The adult generation of Jesus, that didn't pass away before 70 AD.
2. The time of the Gentiles, when Jerusalem would be trampled on by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled.
3. The baby-boom generation, born when Israel became a nation (1948), and as adults, saw the Jews regain Jerusalem (1967).

The statement, "This generation shall certainly not pass away until all these things have happened," is applied to both generations! And the time in between both generations is a continuation of the time of the Gentiles and the trampling of Jerusalem. If you were born after World War II, the baby boom generation, you should live long enough to see the return of Christ Jesus.

5.4) The Unknown Day and Hour

Many Christians have not studied the details of Matthew 24 and will not always recognize the verse, "When, therefore, you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)" (Matthew 24:15). But the vast majority of all Christians have heard, "No man knows the day or the hour." Dispensationalists use this verse to argue the pre-tribulation rapture, saying that it can happen at any moment. Preterists do not believe in a future great tribulation and reign of the antichrist. So they also believe the return of Christ can happen at any moment. Everyone is quick to argue that any anticipated date for Christ's return would have to be wrong. Yet Daniel seems to give the exact number of days from the abomination of desolation.

Daniel 12:11-12 ESV And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. (12) Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days.

Preterists have various theories for their interpretation of this verse, including some day-is-a-year theories. But the most obvious and straight-forward interpretation is in the context of verse 2, which is about the resurrection. From the abomination of desolation until the resurrection is 1290 days. Of course this is a futurist interpretation. But how does this square with "no man knows the day or the hour?"

Dispensationalists are quick to say that "no man knows" refers to the pre-tribulation rapture. And 1290 days after the abomination of desolation would be post-tribulation. So dispensationalists argue that men will know the day of the post-tribulation resurrection, but not the pre-tribulation rapture. Yet "no man knows" appears only five verses after the post-tribulation appearing of Christ (Matthew 24:31). And the text of Matthew 24 does not mention a pre-tribulation rapture. Thus, dispensationalists have a very big problem with context. "No man knows the day or the hour" of what? Well, Christ's return of course. But the only mention of Christ's return in the passage is post-tribulation. So how is "no man knows" reconciled with the 1290 days of Daniel 12? The answer can clearly be seen when Matthew 24 is interpreted in the context of Daniel 12.

As stated earlier at the start of this chapter, context can dramatically change the meaning of Scripture. Our examination of Matthew 24 in the context of Daniel 12 will illustrate a very big principle of the New Wine System. New Testament Scripture must be interpreted in the context of the Old Testament. The New Wine System is all about the application of Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New

Testament Church. When the New Testament is interpreted in its proper context, all the problems of Scripture which have divided the churches over the centuries simply disappear.

The disciples asked a question: "When will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" Jesus responds by saying:

Matthew 24:15-16 NIV "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand-- (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

The ESV puts the phrase "let the reader understand" in parenthesis. For this reason, the NIV was used. Most translations make "let the reader understand" be red-letter, indicating that these are words spoken by Christ. At least one translation makes the words black, indicating that Matthew inserted the words as a comment. But Mark has the exact same words in the exact same place. It's unlikely that Matthew and Mark both inserted the exact same comment.

Most people interpret the action that should be done "when you see" as fleeing to the mountains. But the more immediate thing that should occur "when you see" is "let the reader understand." This is generally interpreted like a parenthesis. But I think that's because Daniel 12 is not really taken into account. The Greek word in verse 16 means "then, at that time". In other words, I think Jesus was saying that when we see the abomination then the reader should understand. And, at that time, those in Judea should flee to the mountains. So it's really two things: understanding Daniel and those in Judah fleeing. This means that understanding about a specific thing written in Daniel does not occur until the abomination, or at least until the generation of the end times.

Most people don't think too much about "let the reader understand." Usually it's thought of as understanding of what event really is the abomination. But the problem with this view is that it's not taking into account what the reader is reading. Jesus cannot be talking about reading Matthew, because Matthew had not yet been written when Jesus said these words. He had to have been talking about the reader of Daniel. So we must look to Daniel in order to see what it is we hope to understand. And of course we look in Daniel at the places that talk about the abomination of desolation. In other words, this passage is crying out for being interpreted in context of Daniel.

Generally, at this point, people go to Daniel 9 and point out that the abomination is in the middle of the seven-year period. So they take it no further. But the vision of Daniel 10-12 speaks of the abomination twice. The first, in Daniel 11:31, had already been fulfilled in 168 BC. The disciples would have known about it because they celebrated Hanukkah. It was a statue of Zeus on the temple mount. And in the verse (above) in Matthew 24, Jesus says, "when you see standing in the holy place." So Jesus seems to be asking the disciples to watch for something that they would have understood. They were to watch for a statue on the temple grounds to happen again. This is helpful in understanding that Jesus was thinking more about Daniel 10-12 than Daniel 9. Daniel 11:31 is the only place in Daniel that records the prior abomination of 168 BC. The future occurrence of the abomination, in the very same vision, is in Daniel 12:11. Thus, it becomes clear that the vision of Daniel 10-12 is the vision of Daniel that should primarily serve as context for the interpretation of Matthew 24.

So far, this is probably nothing new. The point here is that we are on the right track of using Daniel 12 as background for Matthew 24. Now let's proceed to do just that. Also, Daniel 12:1 speaks directly about the great tribulation. So again, this chapter has many more parallels to Matthew 24 than does Daniel 9.

Remember that the disciples asked a question, "When will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" An almost identical question was asked in Daniel 12.

Daniel 12:6 NIV One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?"

What astonishing things? By context, it's the resurrection of verse 2 and some information about the age to come in verse 3. In other words, when learning about the resurrection, or the second coming of Christ, or the end of the age, the natural question to ask is, "When will it happen?" When the disciples asked the question, Jesus was simply making reference back to Daniel where the same question was asked! And both passages speak of the abomination of desolation as the major sign for which to watch!

But what is it in Daniel that we are to understand? In Daniel, the question was asked and answered! Here is the answer to the question about when in the future the resurrection will happen:

Daniel 12:7 NIV The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward

heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."

Most people scratch their heads, wondering how this answers the question as to when it will happen. Many theologians have even reinterpreted the question itself, forcing it to be something like how long will it take once it begins. That is done because the "time, times, and half a time" is interpreted as three and a half years. But that's not literally the question. And the literal question is much more what most people want to ask.

Daniel didn't understand the answer to the question. And over the centuries theologians misinterpret both the question and the answer, thinking they understand better than Daniel. Here is Daniel stating that he didn't understand, and the response given to Daniel:

Daniel 12:8-10 NIV I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?" (9) He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end." (10) Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.

Daniel was wise, but he didn't understand the answer to the question. He was not supposed to understand the answer. In other words, not even the wise will understand the answer until the time of the end. And the wicked will never understand. Only the wise, at that time, will understand the answer to the question. And the answer is specifically regarding how long it will be, from the time of Daniel, until the resurrection.

But the very next verse gives us the sign. At that point, the wise will know for sure how many days it will be.

Daniel 12:11-12 NIV "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. (12) Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

(Yet the previous answer to the question actually does answer the question, telling the wise how long it will be from the time of Daniel. The time, times, and half a time are talking about the millennial week - not three and a half years. And you

also have to understand verse 3 to see that "these astonishing things" includes the entire 1000-year reign. The power of the holy people is not broken until the 1000-year reign comes to a close.)

So, by context, the resurrection is 1290 days from the abomination. (The rapture is 45 days later because those who are alive have to "wait for and reach" the end of the 1335 days. But those who are dead don't have to wait.)

So the wise will know the day of the resurrection when they see the abomination. Again, Jesus said, "When you see the abomination ... let the reader understand." When the wise see the abomination, they will understand the answer to the question. They will know the very date of the resurrection. But the wicked will not know the day or the hour (time) of the resurrection.

Jesus said that not even the angels (currently) know the day or the time. That's because in Daniel, it was an angel that asked the question!

Those who unknowingly change the verb tense, and interpret Jesus words as "no man [will ever] know the day or the hour" are thus unknowingly putting themselves into the category of the wicked who will never understand the answer to the question asked in Daniel and later by the disciples: "When will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?"

With this contextual background, the parable of the wicked servant becomes much clearer. It's the parable where the wicked servant does not know the day or the hour when the thief in the night comes.

Also, this is where Jesus gets the terms, "wise" and "wicked" in the Olivetti Discourse of Matthew 24-25. Four parables are given in this same discourse, starting with the thief-in-the-night parable. Some parables use the term "wise" and "foolish". Others use "wise" and "wicked." Is Jesus really substituting "foolish" for "wicked" in some cases? Or can a distinction between "foolish" and "wicked" be understood from the Old Testament context of Daniel 12?

Daniel 12:2-3 ESV And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (3) And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

I switched to ESV here because the NIV uses the word "multitudes" for "many" in verse 2. The NIV is the only translation that does this. In the Hebrew, the word really does mean "many."

Many means not all. Many are raised to life. But not all are raised. Of those who are raised, some are raised to everlasting life. Others are raised to "shame and everlasting contempt."

Young's literal says they are raised to "reproaches--to abhorrence age-during". The Hebrew word for "reproaches" was often used to describe Israel. It's shameful, but forgivable. The Hebrew word for "abhorrence" is used only one other time in the Old Testament. It's in relation to the "worm that does not die", which is a metaphor for staying in the grave. It's not being forgiven. The "abhorrence" is everlasting. However, the "reproaches" is not stated as being everlasting.

Now, let's go back and read verse 3 again. (Back to the NIV):

Daniel 12:3 NIV Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Those who are wise will shine like the stars. The stars is often used to mean angels, even elsewhere in Daniel. In other words, the wise will have spiritual bodies that can glow like the bodies of angels.

Also, those who are wise lead others to righteousness. The Hebrew word for "wise" also means teacher. Who do they lead to righteousness? Who do they teach? Obviously they teach and lead the others who are resurrected to "reproaches--to abhorrence age-during". During this age to come, some will respond and submit themselves to Christ's reign and the teaching of the wise. Others will not and will wind up eternally in "abhorrence".

Thus, there are three types of people in the grave. Many are resurrected, but not all. The wicked will not be resurrected. (They "come to life" later on, after the age to come, to be cast into the lake of fire.) The wise and the foolish are resurrected. The wise will lead the foolish to righteousness. This winds up shedding lots of light on the parables of Jesus about the wise, the foolish, and the wicked. And it shows how the parables are grossly misinterpreted since they are not put into the context of the Old Testament.

Jesus also uses the term "foolish" in other places like the Sermon on the Mount. So the Sermon on the Mount is also grossly misinterpreted because of not understanding the context of Old Testament Jewish eschatology.

Jesus said that no one knows the day or the time (hour). In other words, the answer to the question was still sealed. But the wise reader of Daniel will understand at the time of the end. The wise reader of Daniel will know the very day of the resurrection when we see the abomination. It is 1290 days later (Daniel 12:11). We will be able to mark it on the calendar.

Jesus is not saying that no one will ever know. That's a different verb tense. He is just saying that no one knew at that time. The Greek word for "no one knows" only speaks of the past. Nothing is being said about the future. Here is Young's Literal Translation of the verse:

Matthew 24:36 YLT And concerning that day and the hour no one hath known -- not even the messengers of the heavens -- except my Father only;

Jesus said not even the angels knew the day. This comes from the fact that it was an angel who asked the question in Daniel 12. The wicked will not know of the day or the time (hour) but the wise will know when the day will come before it happens.

What about knowing the hour? Most likely Jesus was not speaking about a 60-minute hour. The terms "day and hour," in English, are usually seen as the specific hour of a specific day. But the point Jesus is making is that no one, at that time, knew the answer to the question. Not even Christ, at that time, knew when He would return. (He probably does know now.) The Greek word "hour" often means a time, not the hour of a specific day. For example, in John 2:4, Jesus said "My hour has not yet come." It's the same Greek word. Jesus was saying the time for his ministry had not yet come. The NIV translates the same verse as "My time has not yet come." Likewise, Matthew 24:36 could be translated as, "But no one hath known of that day and time, not even the angels."

The 1290 days prior to the resurrection can be considered as the "time" of Christ's return. It fits the context because in verses 15-29 Jesus speaks of the time of great tribulation. It's this entire time-period, of which he has spoken, that is in answer to the disciples' question. It's the entire time-period of the great tribulation that no one hath known when will come. The unknown day is the day Christ will appear in the clouds. The unknown hour is the time-period which precedes that day. When we see the time of the great tribulation, we will also know the day of the resurrection. It will be 1290 days after the "abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet" (verse 15 of this chapter and Daniel 12:11).

Matthew 24:3 Tell us, <u>when will these things be?</u>	Daniel 12:6b <u>How long</u> [from now] shall it be to the end of these wonders?
Matthew 24:14 and then <u>the end will come</u>	Daniel 12:9 until the <u>time of the end</u>
Matthew 24:15a When you see the <u>abomination of desolation</u> , which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet,	Daniel 12:11 ESV the <u>abomination that makes desolate</u> is set up, there shall be 1,290 days.
Matthew 24:15b standing in the holy place (<u>let the reader understand</u>).	Daniel 12:10b and none of the wicked shall understand; but <u>those who are wise shall understand</u> .
Matthew 24:21 NKJV For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.	Daniel 12:1 And there shall be a <u>time of trouble</u> , such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time.
Matthew 24:36 NKJV no one knows, not even the angels	An angel asked the question.
Matthew 24:42 NKJV you do not know on what day your Lord is coming	Daniel 12:8 I heard, but I didn't understand
Matthew 24:45 Who then is the faithful and <u>wise servant</u> ? Matthew 24:48 ESV But if that <u>wicked servant</u> says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' Matthew 24:50 The lord of <u>that servant</u> will come in a <u>day when he doesn't expect it, and in an hour when he doesn't know</u> it.	Daniel 12:8-10 I heard, but I didn't understand: then said I, my lord, what shall be the issue of these things? (9) He said, Go your way, Daniel; for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. (10) Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and <u>none of the wicked shall understand</u> ; but <u>those who are wise shall understand</u> .

Right now, neither the wise nor the wicked know the time of Christ's return. So we are told to watch and get ready. All generations are to expect the soon return of Christ in their lifetimes. But the wise know from Scripture that the great tribulation comes first. When Christians are persecuted, we tend to either abandon the faith, or we mature to the point where even our very lives are as nothing compared to our [agape] love of Christ. "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:9). Not all generations are persecuted. If, however, we hope and expect Christ to return in our lifetimes, yet we know that great tribulation must come first, we can mature in Christ, even without the great tribulation. As a matter of fact, we must mature before the great tribulation comes, or we may not be able to endure to the end. In this same context, Jesus says that those who endure to the end of the great tribulation will be saved (Mark 13:13).

Expectation of great tribulation helps us mature in Christ by pointing us to obedience. Doing the work of the Father is another way to mature. Spending lots of time in prayer with the Father, praying for holiness, also helps bring maturity in Christ. But most Christians today miss out on the blessing of reading Revelation (Revelation 1:1-3), and taking it to heart. Most Christians today believe they will either skip over the events of Revelation, or they water it down by saying the events of Revelation are only symbolic of tribulation in all generations.

5.5) The Wise or Wicked Servant

After giving the signs of his return, Jesus tells four parables that relate to his coming and the end of the age. First, Jesus tells us a parable about the thief in the night. The wise servant feeds his fellow servants at the proper time. The wise are mature in Christ. They have an [agape] love for Christ, and walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9). They feed others by leading them in the ways of Christ Jesus and helping them mature. Jesus says that when he returns, the wise servant will be put in charge of all his possessions.

This strongly implies that there are others who are not wise. But they are not wicked either. Being put in charge of all Christ's possessions is the same as being put in charge of Christ's cities (Luke 19:17-19). The wise will lead many to righteousness. Right now, the wise don't know the day of Christ's return. But we mature in Christ anyway. Those who mature in Christ now will have a great advantage over those who try and mature when the great tribulation arrives.

Then there is the wicked servant. He mistreats his fellow servants. He appears to be a leader in Christ's household. But he distorts Christ's teaching for his own

benefit. The wicked will not understand the answer to the question. The wicked servant will not know the day even at the time of the end (Matthew 24:42-44, 50, Daniel 12:10). The wicked servant is assigned a place with the hypocrites (Matthew 24:51). Jesus considered the Pharisees and teachers of the law to be hypocrites. They proclaimed to know God, but they denied the very works of God's miracles. They are therefore considered wicked.

Thus, Jesus is comparing the wicked servants during the entire Church age with the Pharisees and teachers of the law. He is saying that these leaders of both covenants use religion for their own benefits. They might understand some of God's truths. But their selfish motivations get in the way.

Throughout Church history, starting with the Gnostics, there have been wicked servants who have distorted Christ's teaching for their own selfish benefit. The wicked servant thinks that he knows Christ. He thinks he will be saved. But he will have the same fate as some of the Pharisees who knew that Jesus is the Christ because of the miracles, yet they plotted to kill him. Those who have been given an undeniable understanding of God's revelations, yet in their hardened hearts have rejected Christ's Lordship over their lives, commit the unpardonable sin. They will not be resurrected when Christ returns. It's all about a hardened heart so that you no longer hear Christ's voice. The wicked servant knew his Master was coming. Yet he beat his fellow servants.

5.6) Watch and Be Ready

This parable of the wise and wicked servant teaches that we must be ready, because we don't know when Christ will return. A careful examination of the parable, however, shows that it's the wicked servant that will not know the day or the time (verse 50). This is consistent with Daniel 12:8-11, in which it's only the wicked who will not understand when the time of the end comes. The wise will understand the answer to the question. The wise will know that the resurrection is 1290 days after the abomination of desolation (Daniel 12:11).

Getting ready for Christ to return is not simply a matter of professing faith in Christ for salvation. One can be saved, yet not be ready for Christ to return. The wise are ready, but the foolish are not. Getting ready for Christ to return involves overcoming sin and doing Christ's work to further the Kingdom. (This can be seen in the parables that follow.) Getting ready involves becoming wise in Christ. We must deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Christ.

5.7) Thief in the Night Symbolism

In this same parable, Christ's return is compared to a thief who comes in the night (Matthew 24:43). We will go through each of the uses of this symbol and see that the context of this symbol always echoes back to the parable's teachings. It's the wicked who will not know the day and time when Christ returns.

Knowing the day, for the wise, is equivalent to being ready for Christ to return. Being ready for Christ to return involves becoming wise, and not foolish. It's not just about professing Christ as Savior. It's about overcoming sin and being a full-fledged servant, doing the will of the Father, no matter the cost.

Also, we must keep in mind that Christ returns as a thief in the night only once. We must remember the context of this parable. Notice that the master of the house (Christ) returns like a thief during an unknown hour in the night.

Matthew 24:42-44 NKJV Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (43) But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. (44) Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Read the start of this parable carefully. Clearly, it's about the second coming of Christ. By the context of the passage, does the second coming of Christ happen at a "secret" time before the great tribulation? Or does the coming of Christ happen immediately following the great tribulation? The only coming of Christ that's mentioned in the context of this parable is the coming after the great tribulation. Just a few verses before this parable we read:

Matthew 24:27-31 NKJV For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (28) For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. (29) "**Immediately after the tribulation of those days** the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (31) And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

This is the only coming of Christ that is mentioned in the context. Therefore, the coming of Christ which is after the tribulation must be Christ's return as a thief in the night. The symbolism of a thief is not talking about an unknown time for the wise servant. It's talking about an unknown time for the wicked.

The wicked, even the wicked servants in the churches, will miss the signs and will not know when the great tribulation is underway. That's because it's not going to be great tribulation for the world. For the world, it will be a time of "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage," (verse 39), like the days of Noah before the flood. It's great tribulation for the true Church. The wicked, even in the churches, will wind up being part of the world, and will also be "eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." They, like the rest of the world, will be surprised at the coming destruction.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 - 5:4 NKJV (4:16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (4:17) Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (4:18) Therefore comfort one another with these words. (5:1) But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. (5:2) For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. (5:3) For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. (5:4) But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

The wise are not in darkness, that the day should surprise us like a thief. Notice that Paul speaks of Christ returning as a thief in the night in the same context as the rapture verse, which is about Christ returning in the clouds with the angels, the trumpet sounding, and our being gathered to him. This is a very similar description that we read in Matthew 24:27-31. Paul makes it clear that it's not the righteous that will be caught unaware. It's the people of the world who will be saying "peace and security." And Jesus said the same thing about the unknown day and time. He said it would be like the days of Noah. The world did not know when the rains would come. But Noah and his family (the wise) knew the day and time when the sudden destruction that would come. They went into the ark before the rains began.

Matthew 24:36-39 NKJV "But of that day and hour [time] no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. (37) But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (38) For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, (39) and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

When does Christ return as a thief in the night? As we have shown, it's not a "secret" coming before the great tribulation. This is verified by the following use of the thief in the night symbolism:

Revelation 16:15-16 NKJV "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." (16) And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

This verse is after the sixth bowl of wrath, before Armageddon. As Matthew 24 teaches, Christ returns as a thief in the night (verses 42-44) after the great tribulation of those days (verse 27-31).

Here is an earlier use of the thief in the night symbolism in Revelation. This is written to one of the seven churches in Revelation.

Revelation 3:3 NKJV Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour [time] I will come upon you.

The Greek word used here for "watch" is the same Greek word used for "watch" in Matthew 24.

Here again we see that watching and being ready is not about simply being saved. It's about holiness. Those who become wise, and not foolish, through maturity in Christ, are those who will not be caught by surprise at Christ's return. Christ is saying this to Christians, at churches, who have already professed faith in Christ for salvation. For those who remain foolish and do not repent, Christ will return as a thief in the night. Does this mean they lose their salvation? No, but as the following parable shows, they will not get into the wedding banquet. Jesus told this parable right after he told the thief in the night parable.

5.8) The Ten Virgins; Five are Wise and Five are Foolish

After the parable of the wise or wicked servant, Jesus tells us the parable of the ten virgins. The five virgins are wise and five are foolish. Notice that the foolish are not wicked. They are simply foolish. All ten wait for the bridegroom. All ten are asleep when the bridegroom arrives. But only the wise are “ready” to enter the wedding banquet. From the overall context of these two chapters, to be “ready” means you are mature in Christ. The wise walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9), and are able to enter the wedding banquet with their glorified bodies. The wise have an [agape] love for Christ. Only the wise are gathered into the clouds, at the rapture after the tribulation.

Traditionally, this parable has been associated with salvation. Many believe that only the wise virgins are saved. But in order to make this case, one would have to show why salvation is determined by the amount of oil that one has. The amount of oil is the only difference mentioned between the wise and the foolish. It’s not a matter of being asleep when Christ returns. Both groups are asleep when the bridegroom comes. The foolish have some oil, because their lamps are burning. But they do not have enough oil. The question then is, what does the oil represent? How much is needed?

If one believes the parable is about salvation, and if the oil represents faith in Christ, then one would have to ask how much faith is required for salvation. Again, the foolish have oil, but not enough. If the oil represents works, then those who believe the parable is about salvation would have to say that salvation is by works. The parable simply does not fit our doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

Or, one might believe the oil is holiness. Again, how much holiness is required for salvation? How much oil is needed for salvation? No matter how you interpret the oil, it must be something that comes in various quantities or amounts. If salvation is a free gift, the amount of oil that we have cannot be a measure of whether or not one is saved.

The better approach is to realize that the parable is not about whether or not we will be resurrected (saved from death). The parable is only about getting into the wedding banquet. The oil is the Holy Spirit. We are the light of the world. The oil of the Holy Spirit lights our lamps. As we do the works our Father gives us, we are filled more and more with the oil of the Holy Spirit, so that our light can shine. We need the Holy Spirit in order to do the Father’s works. Otherwise, we are simply doing our own works. Doing the Father’s works brings us a deeper

filling of the Holy Spirit, which brings about holiness. In other words, one very effective way to overcome sin is to do the works the Father has given us to do.

Those who make a continual practice of doing the Father's works are the elect. They are the saints. Those who are caught up in our day-to-day activities, required of us by the world we live in, are the foolish virgins. They will be saved because they believe in Christ to save them. And they do some works, and receive some of the oil of the Holy Spirit. But when Christ returns, they will not have enough. This oil is something the foolish will not be able to ask the wise to give them. It's not that their works are payment for getting into the wedding banquet. It's that the works produce holiness in us because we get filled with the Holy Spirit. We must be "completely sanctified" (1 Thess. 3:13, 5:23) by the time of Christ's return in order to get into the wedding banquet.

Salvation is a free gift. But to inherit the kingdom requires a lot of work. A lot of oil is required to inherit the kingdom. That's why in the parable, the wise say the foolish must go to the market to buy more oil. No, we can't literally buy the Holy Spirit with money. We can't buy holiness with money. And we certainly can't buy salvation. But we can do the works of holiness. Just as we work for money, we work to get holy. These must be works that we do out of joy, because we love the Father and we love our neighbors. Doing the Father's work brings the Holy Spirit to help. As we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we overcome sin. Doing the Father's work causes us to overcome sin and to become holy. Therefore, the parable depicts the oil as costing money.

The wise are the elect. The wise are the saints. But the foolish are still saved. The foolish virgins wait for the bridegroom. They have called on the name of the Lord to save them. They believe in Christ. They believe that Christ was raised from the dead. And they confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord. Hence, they are saved (Romans 10:9). But they don't get into the wedding banquet. They are saved, but they are not saints. They do not inherit the kingdom.

Jesus tells the foolish, "I don't know you. Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour [time]" (Matthew 25:12-13 ESV). This is not to say they go to hell. That's simply an assumption that has been made out of the belief that death is the end of the journey, sealing his or her fate. For Christ to say, "I never knew you," is simply to say you have not developed a discipleship relationship with Christ, to become like Christ. He knows us as we get to know Him.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' (23) Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'

This is another case where Jesus said, "I never knew you." Those who will say "Lord, Lord" are foolish virgins. These ministers prophesy in Christ's name. That simply means they preach the Gospel. They preach in the name of Jesus. They even seem to do many mighty works in Christ's name, such as casting out demons. Surely they believe that Christ was raised from the dead. Surely they profess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord. So they are saved, but Jesus never knew them.

They are surprised that Jesus says, "I never knew you." Therefore their belief in Christ is honest. They really do believe they will be in the wedding banquet. But they do not mature in Christ. Does Christ deny salvation to those who honestly believe in Him, but because they are deceived, they don't mature in Christ? They will be resurrected (saved from the grave.) But they will not be able to enter the wedding banquet. They will be surprised that they will not inherit the kingdom.

Jesus tells the foolish virgins to watch because we do not know the day or the time. To watch for Christ's return is to believe that he can return in our lifetimes. But this entails firm knowledge that the great tribulation must come first. Otherwise, the hopeful watch does not develop maturity. Many of the foolish virgins today believe that Christ will come in our lifetimes. But they don't believe the great tribulation must come first. So their watching does not produce maturity. Those who believe in the pre-tribulation rapture think they will be able to skip over the coming great tribulation.

Others, who don't believe in the millennium, generally also do not believe in the literal interpretation of Revelation. They believe that Christ could return at any moment, without the reign of the antichrist. So again, their watching does not produce maturity. This is not to say that no one who believes these doctrines will mature. Maturity primarily comes from the sanctification of the Holy Spirit as we seek to obey the depths of the Ten Commandments, which is to love God and to love our neighbors. This is primarily accomplished by doing the works that the Father has for us to do out of love. Thus, maturity comes from working in God's purpose for our lives. We must walk as Jesus walked.

5.9) The Parable of the Talents

Next, Jesus tells us a parable about three servants who are given talents. The number of talents given is according to their abilities to generate more talents. The servant with five talents and the servant with two talents are both rewarded by being put in charge of many things. The servant given one talent does not invest the talent, and winds up being condemned when Christ returns. There is an almost identical parable in Luke 19:11-27. Here the servants are put in charge of cities.

We must interpret this parable like the ancient Jews would have interpreted it. They expected, when the Messiah comes, that Israel will rule the world. Jesus would never have used this parable if that belief was false. The teaching in the parable is telling us what we must do in order to have high-ranking positions during the Messianic reign. We don't work for the motivation of power. But the parable does teach that Christ's servants will have this "authority over cities."

The servant with just one talent failed to invest what he was given. Christ condemns that man as wicked. The problem was not that the servant failed to earn money. Jesus is not preaching salvation by works. The problem was in the man's attitude toward Christ. He hardened his heart against Christ and did not hear is Master's voice. He didn't apply the ability he had been given, because he didn't really love his Master.

Matthew 25:24b-26a NIV 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'" His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant!

This wicked servant was thrown "outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (verse 30). He will not be resurrected when Christ returns. He knew about Christ. But he hates his Master. The wicked servant has knowingly rejected Christ.

Those who are wise are those who work with the gifts they have been given to advance the kingdom. This work must be motivated by a deep and growing love for Christ. Those who do know Christ, but deep in their hearts actively reject him, wind up suffering the fate of the wicked. This parable is a strong warning against any rejection of Christ. The foolish of the world will be those who have either not yet accepted Christ, or who have not yet matured in Christ. But if one's heart hardens against Christ, then they become the wicked.

5.10) The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

The parable of the sheep and the goats is traditionally interpreted as involving two groups of people. The sheep are judged as righteous for their good works. The goats are judged as unrighteous for their lack of good works. This leaves some theologians scratching their heads and wondering what ever happened to salvation by grace alone. They say Jesus and Paul had different gospels. But the parable can be better understood if it's interpreted the way an ancient Jew would have understood it to be read.

Matthew 25:31 says this judgment happens when Jesus comes in his glory and sits on his throne. In other words, this is during the Messianic reign. Verse 2 says all the nations will be gathered before him. The ancient Jews would not have understood Israel to be part of the nations. In other words, this is a judgment of the nations and not of Israel. The people of true Israel are the chosen ones who will bring the good news to the nations during the Messianic reign.

In this parable, Christ calls the chosen ones his brothers (Matthew 25:40). Christ's brothers are the true Israel, including Gentiles. The sheep and the goats are not judged so much for their good works involving each other. They are judged by their good works involving the brothers of Christ. In verse 40 Jesus said, "Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." This is not so much a judgment of works as it is a judgment of their attitude about Christians. Their attitude about Christians reflects their attitude about Christ. This is the primary teaching of the parable. The wicked are primarily condemned because of their hardened hearts toward Christ. With a hardened heart toward Christ, they will not be able to mature in Christ during the Messianic reign. This is not a judgment that happens immediately when Christ sets up his kingdom. It's about what will most likely happen during the course of the millennium.

So the parable has three groups of people. The brothers are the wise. The wise will receive spiritual bodies at the resurrection. This judgment happens after the resurrection during the Messianic reign. With spiritual bodies, the wise will not be subject to further judgment that could lead to the lake of fire. Therefore, the wise cannot be either the sheep or the goats. Looking at it the way an ancient Jew would have understood it, the wise are a part of Israel, not a part of the nations. The sheep, therefore, are the foolish who become wise, and the goats are the foolish who become wicked. In other words, the sheep and the goats are still under judgment, even after being resurrected. As we will see in the next chapter, they are raised to a resurrection of judgment. This is not a resurrection of damnation.

Chapter 6

Three Types of People in the Grave

The four parables of the Olivetti Discourse suggest there are three types of people in the grave: (1) the wise, (2) the foolish, and (3) the wicked. We can now continue our study of Daniel 12 to see why Daniel 12 supports these three groups. The terms “wise” and “wicked” come from Daniel 12. The term “foolish” comes from Matthew 24-25, interpreted in the context of Daniel 12. The terms “wise” and “foolish” can also be found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Our study of Daniel 12:1-2 began in chapter 1 of this book. Here, we go into more details. We will also get into verse 3 of Daniel 12. This verse tells us about the wise, who will teach the foolish.

In Daniel 12:1, we find the great tribulation.

Daniel 12:1a ESV "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.

Then, in verse 2, we find the resurrection. Since this resurrection immediately follows the great tribulation, the resurrection happens on the “last day” before the Messianic reign of Christ.

Daniel 12:1b-2 ESV But at that time your people shall be delivered [escape], everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.
(2) And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Notice that not everyone who sleeps in the dust of the earth is resurrected. “Many of those who sleep” will be resurrected. But not all are resurrected when Christ returns. Of those resurrected, some are resurrected to everlasting life, and others to shame and everlasting contempt. Only those whose names are found in the Book (of Life) are resurrected. They are the “many of those who sleep.” The remainder, who are not resurrected, are those who are not in the Book of Life.

Some people believe that those “delivered” in verse 1b are people being delivered from the great tribulation. Is everyone whose name is in the Book of Life delivered from the great tribulation? Even those who believe in the pre-tribulation rapture would not be able to make this claim. Those who believe in the pre-

tribulation rapture also believe in tribulation saints, whose names would also be in this book.

I do not believe the text is saying that anyone is "delivered" from the great tribulation. They are "delivered" from the grave. The better and primary translation of this Hebrew word is "escape." They "escape" from the grave. Therefore, those who "escape" from the grave are those whose names are in the Book of Life. "Everyone whose name shall be found written in the book", will "escape" the grave. Therefore, those who escape to shame and contempt are also in the Book of Life!

They don't "escape" the tribulation. God does not promise escape or deliverance from trials, tribulations, or persecutions. Some will survive. But to say that this text is talking about surviving through it would not fit the word "delivered" or "escape." Many whose names are in the Book of Life will not survive through the tribulation.

Not everyone is resurrected. "Many of those who sleep" are resurrected. However, "many" does not mean all. Those whose names are not in the Book of Life are not resurrected. Yet those who are resurrected include both the just and the unjust (ESV Acts 24:15, John 5:25, 28-29). Those who are resurrected include some to everlasting life, and some to shame and contempt.

From 1 Corinthians 2:14 to 3:3, Paul outlines three types of people.

1. In verse 14 of chapter 2, Paul speaks of the natural man. The natural man "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God." The natural man is the wicked. Even when the Spirit of God shows him truth, the natural man rejects this truth.
2. Secondly, in verse 1 of chapter 3 Paul speaks of the fleshly (carnal) man. This is Paul's letter to the problem-ridden church at Corinth. Paul addresses them as carnal Christians. Yet Paul makes it clear that they are saved (1 Cor. 1:2-9).
3. Thirdly, in verse 15 of chapter 2, Paul speaks of the spiritual man. The spiritual man "judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one," according to Paul. This would not fit the description of the fleshly (carnal) man, who still struggles with sin.

	The Wise	The Foolish	The Wicked
1 Corinthians 2:14 to 3:3	The spiritual man	The fleshly (carnal) man	The natural man
Dan 12:2	Awake to everlasting life	Awake to shame and contempt.	Not the many. Not all are raised.
John 5:25, 28-29	Those who have done good	Those who have done evil	Those who do not hear Christ's voice
Acts 24:15	The Just	The Unjust	
1 John 5:16-18	Does not sin	Sin not leading to death	Sin leading to death
Rev 20:4-5	Represented by those beheaded	Those being reigned over during the millennium	The rest of the dead, who take the mark of the beast
Hosea 13:12-13			Ephraim
Wise and Wicked Servants	The Wise Servant		The Wicked Servant
Ten Virgins	Five Wise	Five Foolish	
The Sheep and the Goats	The Brothers of Christ	The Sheep of the nations	The Goats of the nations
The Wedding Banquet	The Bride	The Guests, both good and bad	The Elite, originally invited
Sermon on the Mount	Narrow Gate Builds House on Rock	Wide Gate Builds House on Sand	

Compare these three types of people in 1 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:3 with three types of people found in the grave. Daniel 12:2 would seem to define three similar types of people as Paul has described. There are minor difference in the middle group because Paul was specifically addressing the Church; not those in the grave. The middle group in the grave would include those who had not yet heard about Christ, or who didn't understand enough to want to join a church.

Here again is the verse in Daniel:

Daniel 12:2 ESV And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Here is Young's Literal Translation of this verse:

Daniel 12:2 YLT And the multitude of those sleeping in the dust of the ground do awake, some to life age-during, and some to reproaches -- to abhorrence age-during.

The middle (unjust) group contains people described as resurrected to "reproaches" and resurrected to everlasting "abhorrence." The Hebrew word translated "abhorrence" is a much stronger word than the Hebrew word translated "reproaches." Abhorrence is found only in one other verse of the Bible.

The eternal state of those resurrected to shame and everlasting contempt has not yet been determined. As we will see, some of them will be resurrected to reproaches, but will then advance in wisdom and will later inherit everlasting life. Others in this group will be resurrected to reproaches, and will fall into everlasting abhorrence. In other words, some in this group will wind up being eternally saved, and others will wind up forfeiting their salvation.

To understand better, we need to take a look at the Hebrew word used here for "abhorrence." This Hebrew word is used only one other time in the Old Testament. Isaiah 66:24 uses this word to describe the people who are killed at the battle of Armageddon. It says their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched. This is not to say that the resurrected foolish group includes those killed at Armageddon. Those killed at Armageddon will have taken the mark of the beast, so they won't be resurrected. It's just saying that some in the foolish group will die a second death, and then their death is everlasting abhorrence.

In Mark 9:45, Jesus quotes Isaiah 66:24 when he says people will be thrown into hell-fire because of sin. He says their worm will not die, and their fire is not quenched. We must remember that sin can still lead to the lake of fire, even if the

unjust are given additional chances to trust in Christ after the resurrection. Even now, before Christ returns, sin can lead some to commit the unpardonable sin, preventing them from being resurrected when Christ returns.

Isaiah is a book of poetry. Things in Isaiah are said in a poetic way. To say the "worm never dies" is simply saying they are not resurrected. They stay in the grave. There is no literal worm. So to say it does not die is to say that the state of death remains. They will not be saved from the grave.

The Hebrew word translated "reproaches" is not nearly as strong as the one for "abhorrence." It means "shame" or "disgrace." It's used 73 times in the Old Testament. The word is often used in reference to the people of Israel. It's not considered an irreversible condition. Those resurrected without spiritual bodies would be in "shame" or in "disgrace." This resurrected unjust group is described with both the words "reproaches" and "abhorrence." Over time, the resurrection of "reproaches" can turn into eternal life. So the "reproaches" is not everlasting. But if the resurrection of "reproaches" becomes "abhorrence," then it's eternal. That's why the word for everlasting, in the text, is only applied to "abhorrence" and not to "reproaches."

Two types of people in the unjust group are given because the fate of the unjust group is not yet determined. During the millennium, each individual in this unjust group will eventually become either righteous like those in the just group, or they will fall further into "abhorrence" and be eventually condemned to Gehenna (hell), like those in the wicked group. After the millennium, at the judgment, those who wind up being eternally in a state of "abhorrence" will be like those who take the mark of the beast. They will be blotted from the Book of Life. They will die a second death. Their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched.

Now, let's look at the next verse.

Daniel 12:3 ESV And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:3 tells us the "wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens," and that they are like the stars. The verse also says they will lead many to righteousness. What does it mean to shine like the "brightness of the heavens?" At the same time, what does it mean to be like the stars?

Stars can be symbolic of angels (Isaiah 14:12-14, Rev. 1:20, 12:4, 19:1). We know that angels literally shine (Matthew 28:2-3, Luke 2:9, Acts 12:7). When we

get our spiritual bodies, we will be like the angels (Matthew 22:30, Luke 20:36), and we will also shine (Matthew 17:2). In the age to come, “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of [our] Father” (Matthew 13:43). The wise will shine like the angels, and will lead many to righteousness. So the wise will lead the foolish to righteousness. Notice that the foolish do not have spiritual bodies. But they are taught by those who do. Some of the foolish, however, will continue in their foolishness and will eventually become wicked.

Read Young’s Literal Translation of the verse:

Daniel 12:3 YLT And those teaching do shine as the brightness of the expanse, and those justifying the multitude as stars to the age and for ever.

Notice that he translates the wise as “those teaching.” The Hebrew word means those who are intelligent, and the word is associated with teachers. Also notice that they teach to the “age,” and “forever.” The context here is right after the resurrection. So they teach into the age to come, and then forever. Let’s look back at the ESV translation again.

Daniel 12:3 ESV And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Some (amillennialists) say that the wise are not teachers because they will have nobody to teach. The Hebrew word does not require that they be teachers. They can simply be wise, who would be able to teach. But the text itself says the wise “turn many to righteousness.” This is teaching. Those resurrected to “shame” and “contempt” will need to be taught. The wise will “turn many [but not all] to righteousness.”

6.1) Three Types of People in John 5:16-30

We must always interpret Scripture in its context. Jesus had healed the man at the pool of Bethesda, who had been a cripple for thirty-eight years. The Jewish leaders began to persecute Jesus and were trying to kill him for doing this on the Sabbath (verse 16). Therefore, Jesus is addressing those who see the miracles but deny they are done by God. They do not hear Christ's voice. Therefore, they will not be resurrected. Also, remember that salvation is being saved from the grave.

In this context, these Jewish leaders are the wicked who have eyes to see, but do not see. They have ears to hear, but do not hear. They see the miracles, but will not accept Christ. As you read this passage, don't forget who the audience is.

John 5:16-30 For this cause the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill him, because he did these things on the Sabbath. (17) But Jesus answered them, "My Father is still working, so I am working, too." (18) For this cause therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

(19) Jesus therefore answered them, "Most certainly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father doing. For whatever things he does, these the Son also does likewise. (20) For the Father has affection for the Son, and shows him all things that he himself does. He will show him greater works than these, that you may marvel. (21) For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he desires. (22) For the Father **judges** no one, but he has given all **judgment** to the Son, (23) that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who doesn't honor the Son doesn't honor the Father who sent him.

(24) "Most certainly I tell you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and doesn't come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. (25) Most certainly, I tell you, the hour comes, and now is, when the dead will hear the Son of God's voice; and those who hear will live. (26) For as the Father has life in himself, even so he gave to the Son also to have life in himself. (27) He also gave him authority to execute **judgment**, because he is a son of man.

(28) Don't marvel at this, for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice, (29) and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. (30) I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I **judge**, and my **judgment** is righteous; because I don't seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me.

The Jewish leaders were not willing to hear Christ's voice. Thus, Jesus is saying that Jesus himself will condemn them. They will not be resurrected because Jesus is the Judge who decides who will be resurrected. All those who are raised hear Christ's voice and come out of the tomb, whether or not they do good or evil. Jesus is only condemning the Jewish leaders who were not willing to hear Christ's voice, even a voice as strong as the miracles. Thus, in addressing the Jewish leaders directly, he is saying that if they don't hear Christ's voice, they will not be resurrected.

Many translations of these verses will tend to replace some of the words "judgment" with "condemnation" or "damnation." The ESV and WEB translators were good enough to be consistent within the same context. Doing otherwise only imposes the translator's personal doctrines into the text. Because most translators believe there are only two types of people in the grave, they don't understand what Jesus was saying. So they tend to interpretatively change some of the words for "judgment" to "condemnation" or "damnation."

Jesus is not saying those who do evil are to be resurrected for condemnation. And it's not a resurrection "for judgment." It's a resurrection "of judgment." As they live, they are judged. These Jewish leaders have refused to hear Christ's voice. However, most people have not seen the miracles. Jesus is saying the dead will be given a chance to live under Christ's judgment. They will be given a chance to live when Christ is King of Kings. Then, they will have the opportunity for eternal life. But the Jewish leaders had hardened their hearts to Christ's voice.

Many of the translations use the word "condemnation" in verse 29. They assume those who do evil will be resurrected in order to be condemned. However, being condemned for doing evil, and receiving life for doing good, doesn't fit salvation by grace. Did the thief on the cross do good or evil? Salvation is by grace alone. Without an understanding of the three types of people, translators wind up turning this verse into a salvation-by-works verse.

Another verse where this translation inconsistency occurs is in verse 24. They render it as, "He doesn't come into condemnation, but has passed out of death into life." That's true, but it's not what Jesus is saying. And there is another Greek word for condemnation that could have been used, if that had been Jesus' intent (Luke 6:37). Those who are resurrected with eternal life will not be judged (James 5:9).

Think about it this way: The verse says, "whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed

from death to life" (verse 24, ESV). Notice the fact that they hear Christ's voice? They not only hear his word; they also believe that word. The Greek word for belief also means to have faith in that word. They act upon that belief. And they have eternal life. If they have eternal life, then how can they come into any type of judgment that would cause them to lose their life? So, the verse says they "do not come into judgment." Since they won't be judged, they won't be condemned. They no longer live a life that is under judgment.

Compare and contrast this with those who have not as yet matured in Christ. Those who have matured in Christ no longer have sinful habits their lives. So they are doing good. Those who have not yet matured in Christ still have sinful habits in their lives. So they are still doing evil. Because of this, when they are resurrected, they will still be living a life that is still under judgment. And later, if they do not mature in Christ, they will wind up rejecting Christ and will be subject to the second death (Revelation 2:11, 20:6, 20:14, and 21:8).

Both those resurrected to life, and those resurrected to judgment, are resurrected from the grave. That means both are saved from the grave. Salvation is by grace alone. Both groups are thus saved. But it takes work to inherit the kingdom. Therefore, this verse is not saying that salvation is for those who do good, and not for those who do evil. But if the resurrection of judgment is interpreted as a resurrection of condemnation, then salvation does become strictly for those who do more good than evil instead of by grace alone.

From this passage we see three types of people in the grave.

1. The wicked, like the Jewish leaders, do not hear Christ's voice. Verse 25 says that the dead "who hear" will live. Jesus is saying the Jewish leaders do not hear Christ's voice. So they will not be resurrected when Christ returns.
2. The fleshly (carnal) are those who do evil. Verse 29 says they will hear Christ's voice from the tomb, and will come out to a resurrection of judgment. Since they hear Christ's voice, they are not like the Jewish leaders who refuse to hear Christ.
3. Verse 24 says those who hear Christ's voice, and not only Christ's voice but also Christ's Word, and believe in that Word, will be resurrected to eternal life. These are no longer under judgment.

6.2) The Rest of the Dead in Revelation 20:4-6

Premillennialists traditionally interpret Revelation 20:4-5 as saying that all unbelievers are not raised until after the millennium.

Revelation 20:4-6 I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as didn't worship the beast nor his image, and didn't receive the mark on their forehead and on their hand. They lived, and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (5) The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. (6) Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over these, the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him one thousand years.

First, we will examine the dispensational view and its problems. Then we will see how the New Wine System resolves these problems.

Daniel 12:2 and John 5:28-29 seem to be in direct conflict with the dispensational view of Revelation 20. With two-type thinking, dispensationalists tend to say that all the unrighteous-dead will not be raised until after the thousand years. This seems to go against both Daniel 12:2 and John 5:28-29. In John, both those who have done good and those who have done bad are resurrected in the same hour. It's not two hours separated by a thousand years. And it's not one hour stretched into a thousand years. The Greek word for "hour" could be considered a short time, even a couple of years. But it would never mean a thousand years.

Dispensationalists tend to take Revelation 20, with its much harder-to-understand way of saying things, and let their interpretation of those harder verses overshadow the much simpler and earlier-written verses of Daniel 12:2 and John 5:28-29. Dispensationalists have a very difficult time reconciling Revelation 20:4-6 with John 5:28-29. And amillennialists use this argument against them.

It's always important to read each verse in the context of the Scripture that pre-dated the verse. Those alive at the time of Daniel would not have had John's Revelation. Likewise, those alive at the time of Jesus would not have had John's Revelation. So we should be very careful when significantly changing the meaning of earlier verses based on a verse written years later. Those living at the time of Daniel and Jesus would not have interpreted the words of Daniel and Jesus with a

time-gap in-between. We should never interpret Scripture in a way that would have been impossible for the audience of that time to do so.

The second problem with the dispensational view of Revelation 20 is that literally speaking, only those with their heads chopped off are raised. They assume the martyrs represent all believers. But literally speaking, only those whose heads are missing are raised. With only two types of people, the “rest of the dead” would literally be everyone that does not have their head chopped off. They have to make assumptions of symbolism in order to say the “rest of the dead” does not include those who die in Christ before the tribulation.

Of course you can always go to 2 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (the rapture verse) to point out that all those in Christ are raised just after the resurrection. But it’s a problem when you have to use another verse to make any given verse say what you want it to say. So dispensationalists have two really big problems with their view of Revelation 20:4-6.

Now, let's take a look at the verses from the New Wine System viewpoint. I embrace the fact that it’s specifically the martyrs that John is speaking about. He sees the souls of the martyrs who have died because of their testimony and “and didn't worship the beast nor his image, and didn't receive the mark on their forehead and on their hand.” This is the key phrase to focus upon. He is not seeing the souls of those who died in Christ before the tribulation. And he is not seeing the souls of the unrighteous before the tribulation either.

The context of Revelation 20 is Revelation 19, which is Armageddon. The broader context is the tribulation period during which the saints are beheaded. John is talking about the dead at Armageddon, and the dead martyrs of the tribulation period. John is saying nothing directly about others who die before the tribulation. However, it’s fair to learn from the examples of what John sees and talks about in order to get a broader picture. We can then take the principles behind what John is seeing and apply them to everyone else.

In context, John is only talking about two types of dead people. The vision looks at two extremes. The two groups are those who take the mark of the beast and those who don’t for the sake of their testimony. To take the mark of the beast, or not to take the mark of the beast. That’s the question. Those who do not have to make this decision are outside the scope of what John is seeing. Taking the mark of the beast is a deliberate action against Christ. It’s not an action taken in ignorance.

Those condemned are condemned because they take specific actions against Christ. They specifically harden their hearts against the miracles of God. These miracles will be happening during the great awakening that is coming during the preaching of the two witnesses for 1260 days. Those who take the mark of the beast after they have seen the miracles will be committing the unpardonable sin. And everyone will see the miracles. With no room for argument, everyone will know that Christ is returning. I even think they will all see the New Jerusalem, which is Paradise, in orbit around the earth. Bottom line is that taking the mark will be the deliberate and knowledgeable rejection of Christ.

Those who have died without knowing Christ have not taken the mark of the beast. They have not explicitly rejected Christ. They are outside the context of what John is seeing.

In context, the martyrs reign with Christ for a thousand years. In that context, the “rest of the dead” would be those who take the mark of the beast. Nothing is being said about those who die with or without Christ from before the tribulation.

Revelation 12:11 NIV They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

You can't say this about all believers. Before the tribulation, those who do not overcome are saved. But they don't inherit the kingdom. During the tribulation, believers will have to make the choice between keeping their faith and keeping their lives.

We can look at what John said and draw a general principle for everyone. Those who reject Christ, as in taking the mark of the beast, are the wicked. They forfeit their salvation so they will not be raised to live in the Messianic kingdom. The King does not save those who commit treason against him.

On the other hand, those who overcome sin through a relationship with Christ, and through the works of the Father are like the martyrs. They do not shrink from death. Those who get to the point where they would die for Christ, if they had to, will be raised to reign with Christ. Everyone else will also be raised, but not with spiritual bodies. They are still under judgment.

In other words, those who explicitly reject Christ are being compared to those who completely overcome sin to the point of being willing to die for Christ. These are the two very-different groups being compared. Those in the middle are still in the middle. Even believers are still in the middle group if they have not yet

overcome all the sinful habits in their lives. And the rewards promised to the Church are only to those who overcome, as it says in each of the seven letters to the seven churches. They will not reign with Christ. But neither will they remain in Hades. They are saved. But they don't inherit the kingdom. You see, it all starts to come together once you break out of the traditional two-type system.

When you look at it this way, there is no longer a conflict between Revelation 20 and John 5:28-29, or with Daniel 12:2. In Daniel 12:2, "many" of those who sleep in the dust of the earth are raised. "Many" means not all. Those who take the mark of the beast are not raised. The word "many" allows for some to not be raised. But this requires three types of people. The wise who are raised to everlasting life. The foolish who are raised to shame and contempt. And the wicked who are not raised. However, the wicked come to life again after the thousand years for the Great White Throne Judgment.

If one does not interpret Revelation 20:4-5 in this more literal and in-context way that I've suggested, then how would one deal with Daniel 12:2, John 5:28-29, and Acts 24:15? Do you insert a thousand years into these verses? John 5:28-29 says both are resurrected in an "hour". Does the hour become a thousand years? Or does it become two separate hours? Dispensationalists take this very complex passage in Revelation 20:4-6 and impose their interpretation onto the much simpler verses that pre-date its writing. And that complex interpretation involves the beheaded as representing those who will reign with Christ. In other words, they take a symbolic meaning and impose that interpretation on much simpler verses that state both are resurrected, at the same time, and thus they force the "hour" to become a thousand years.

6.3) The Earth Will Give Birth To Her Dead

Isaiah 26:9-21 is the first place in Scripture where the resurrection is clearly described. A close study of these verses show some people do not get resurrected, but the high majority of those in the grave are resurrected.

Verse 13 talks about rulers, other than God, who have ruled over Israel in the past. Verse 14 says they are dead now. So Isaiah is not talking about other gods. He is talking about past rulers of Egypt, from the time of the Exodus. They saw the plagues on Egypt, knew that it was the work of God, but they chose to ignore the fact that God was personally speaking through these plagues. That's the unpardonable sin. Verse 14 says, they will not be raised from the dead.

The context of these, who are not raised, is best established with verses 9 and 10. God's judgments come upon the earth. Again, this is like the plagues upon Egypt. These plagues were the clear and visible voice of God. When we personally hear the voice of God, and harden our hearts to that voice, it's unpardonable. So again, in verse 9, when these judgments come, the people of the world learn righteousness.

In verse 10, the wicked do not learn righteousness. They are given grace or favor. But they do not learn righteousness. (Some translations render the word in verse 10 it as "grace." Others as "favor." Grace literally means favor.) Today, the true believer lives under God's grace, which means favor. Being under grace, we hear God's voice and obey. This follows the formula. When we personally hear the God's voice, and harden our hearts to that voice, it's unpardonable. Those who commit the unpardonable sin are not resurrected when Christ returns.

Just a few verses down, however, in verse 19, just about everyone is resurrected. I say just about everyone because of verse 14, which shows the exception. On the other hand, if you were to interpret verse 19 by itself, you would say that everybody is resurrected.

Verses 13-14 show an exception to those who will come out of the grave. And verses 10 and 11 give the reason for this exception. The wicked see the power and miracles of God and reject it. Or they reject the personal voice of God. The resurrection in verse 19 does not distinguish between the just and the unjust. They all come out and shout for joy. So, again, we have the three types of people in the grave: the just, the unjust, and those who do not come out.

In verse 18, Isaiah grieves over the fact that Israel had not brought salvation to the world. People all over the world continued dying because they did not have salvation. Yet in verse 19, Isaiah says these people will live. By the context of verse 18, those who live are those who, all over the world, have been dying for a lack of salvation.

Since these are people from all over the world being raised, and not only the people of Israel, those being resurrected must be both the just and the unjust. Now at long last, they wake up and shout for joy. If some of these were waking up to be condemned, would they be shouting for joy? Some are waking up to eternal life. Others awake to judgment. But that judgment lasts a thousand years. Some will make it. Others won't. And those from verses 13-14 do not get resurrected. Then verse 21 says the earth will no longer cover its slain. Again, most people from all over the world will be resurrected to live again.

6.4) The Bride of Christ and the Parable of the Wedding Banquet

In Ezekiel 16, Israel is the Bride of God. But the Bride is adulterous. The entire chapter of Ezekiel 16 is about this topic. Thus, the idea of Israel being a bride is not from some obscure Old Testament passage that few people would have known about. When the New Testament speaks of Christ as being the Bridegroom, it's a clear allusion to this Old Testament teaching.

Are there two brides? Is Israel the Bride of the Father, while the Church is the Bride of Christ? If so, then why does Christ return to the earth to be with the Bride of the Father, while the Father remains in heaven to be with the Bride of Christ? Are they wife swappers? Obviously this is not what the New Testament writers had in mind. When Jesus referred to himself as the Bridegroom, he was obviously making an allusion back to Ezekiel 16. Jesus was equating himself with God as being the Bridegroom. Thus, the Church and Israel are the same. Israel (which is the Church) is the Bride of Christ.

As this metaphor is brought into the New Testament, there is some confusion as to who the Bride is, and who are the guests at the wedding banquet. In Matthew 9:10-16, Jesus eats at Matthew's house with other tax collectors and "sinners." Other accounts of this story, or similar stories, can be found in Mark 2:14-20 and Luke 5:27-35. The Pharisees ask why these "sinners" did not fast. In all three accounts, Jesus said the "guests" of the bridegroom do not fast while the bridegroom is with them. But they will fast later. The bride is not mentioned. Who are the redeemed? Are they the Bride, or the guests, or both?

In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus tells us the parable of the ten virgins. Jesus is called the bridegroom. The word "bride" is not used. But it's only reasonable to assume the five wise "virgins" are the bride, and not simply guests.

In John 3:25-30, some of the disciples of John the Baptist complain about everyone going to Jesus. John's response is that the bride belongs to the bridegroom. John refers to himself as the friend of the bridegroom who waits and listens for the voice of the bridegroom.

Paul uses the metaphor of the Church being the Bride of Christ in 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:22-27. In Revelation 19:7-8, the saints are depicted as the Bride of the Lamb when it's stated that the wedding of the Lamb has come and the Bride has made herself ready. So it's clear that the redeemed in Christ become the Bride of Christ. So then, who are the guests?

The parable of the wedding banquet can be found in Matthew 22:1-14. There is a similar account in Luke 14:15-24. In Matthew's account, it's a wedding banquet that a king prepares for his son. The bride is not mentioned; the parable only talks about the guests. In Luke's account it is not explicitly a wedding banquet. We therefore focus more on Matthew's account for information about the Bride.

The servants are sent to those who have been invited, telling them to come. They all make excuses and do not come. So the king tells his army to destroy those murderers and to burn their city. Then servants are told to go into the street and invite anyone they find, both good and bad. In the banquet, the king spots one man without wedding clothes. The man is thrown into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

To understand the parable, we must identify each of the players. Who is the king and who is his son? Who are the original ones invited to the wedding? Who are the guests who come? And who is thrown out of the banquet? Also, what is the meaning of the wedding clothes?

Almost everyone would agree that the king and his son represent the Father and Christ Jesus. Many theologians would say the original invited guests represent Old Testament Israel, and the guests who come are Gentile believers. But is this the way ancient Jewish hearers of the parable would have interpreted it? Jesus was speaking to common people who saw themselves as a part of Israel. It is doubtful they would have considered themselves to be the original invited guests who found excuses not to come.

Think about the culture of that time. If a king threw a banquet, especially for the wedding of his son, then the elite of the society would be invited. Royalty and the rulers would be invited. Pharisees and the teachers of the law would be invited. People who were wealthy would be invited. But the common worker and the poor would not be invited.

This parable of Jesus was addressed to the common worker and the poor. They were the ones who were hearing the parable as Jesus taught. The elite of the society ignored Jesus at best, and rejected him at worst. They all found excuses to ignore the miracles and the teachings of Christ. In a society like that, one would have expected the Pharisees and the teachers of the law to be the first to recognize the Messiah. But they hardened their hearts and rejected Christ. In the New Wine System, they are the wicked. In the parable, the king sends his army to destroy those murderers and to burn their city. This will happen at Armageddon.

The guests are mostly the common people. Anyone who is found on the street is invited, both good and bad (Matthew 22:10). In the New Wine System, they are the middle foolish group. Both the good and the bad will be resurrected (John 5:28-29) to live in the kingdom, which will be Christ's millennial reign.

What about the man who is thrown into the outer darkness because he doesn't have wedding clothes? Both the good and the bad are invited. So he was invited even if he was bad. Why would he be invited, and then thrown outside into punishment? Just because both the good and the bad are resurrected does not mean they will all receive eternal life. In the kingdom to come, the wise will rule the world and will lead the nations to righteousness through a relationship with Jesus Christ. But some will not be willing to submit to Christ's reign over their lives. They do not respect the King. Eventually they will die a second death.

The Bride of Christ is the Church (which is Israel.) The Bride will have already matured in Christ before the age to come. Wedding clothes represent righteousness. Normally, only the bride and the groom wear wedding clothes to a wedding. But in this case, the guests also wear wedding clothes. Everyone is saved, including the guests. The lack of wedding clothes for the one man in the parable is a sign that he does not respect the King. He is not willing to mature in Christ after being invited to live in the kingdom under Christ's reign. So after some time, he dies a second death and is thrown out of the kingdom into the lake of fire.

Therefore, from this parable we see three types of people in the grave.

1. The wicked, like many of the Jewish leaders, do not hear Christ's voice. In this parable, they don't even bother to come to the King's wedding banquet, because they don't hear the voice of the King.
2. The foolish are the guests. They are the nations during the Messianic age to come. They hear Christ's voice and come to the wedding banquet. The foolish guests include both the good and the bad. They wear wedding clothes because Christ has died for them. Most of the foolish have respect for the King. They will have the opportunity to mature in righteousness. But some will reject Christ's righteousness and will forfeit their salvation, like the one man without the wedding clothes. He had no respect for the King.
3. The Bride of Christ represents the wise, which is the true Church, which is true Israel. The Bride takes on the same purpose as Old Testament Israel. That's because the Bride of Christ is Israel, which is the Church.

6.5) Paul Talks about the Resurrection

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul discusses the resurrection. The debate at the time was not whether or not there would be a Messianic reign. Most everyone believed in the coming Messiah. They disagreed on whether or not there would be a resurrection when the Messiah comes. The significance of the resurrection to the Jew was far more important than most Christians realize. The Jews believed that both the righteous and the unrighteous sleep in the dust of the earth (Isaiah 26:14, Daniel 12:2, John 11:11-14, 1 Corinthians 15:51). There was no belief in heaven or hell immediately after death. So the belief in a resurrection was in fact their only belief in a life beyond the grave. This was a very important debate.

The following verses can be interpreted in two different ways. It all depends upon one's predisposition as to whether there is one type of resurrection or two. If there is one type of resurrection, then everyone who is resurrected gets a spiritual body, and this passage is talking about the natural body in which we are now clothed in contrast to the spiritual body in which we will be clothed. And there is certainly some truth to this view. We are "sown in dishonor, and raised in glory."

But if one's predisposition is that of two types of resurrections, then this passage is talking about the two types of bodies that are raised for the two types of resurrections. Now consider the fact that Daniel 12:2, John 5:28-29, and Acts 24:15 all speak of a "resurrection of both the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15). Theologians have assumed the second type of resurrection is really a "resurrection of damnation," (John 5:29 KJV) and have thus considered it as only one type of resurrection from the dead. But that's only an assumption based on a bad translation. It's really a "resurrection of judgment" (John 5:29 ESV), which means they are still living under judgment. Try reading this passage as if one really believed in a "resurrection of both the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15).

1 Corinthians 15:34-50 Wake up righteously, and don't sin, for some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. (35) But someone will say, "How are the dead raised?" and, "With what kind of body do they come?" (36) You foolish one, that which you yourself sow is not made alive unless it dies. (37) That which you sow, you don't sow the body that will be, but a bare grain, maybe of wheat, or of some other kind. (38) But God gives it a body even as it pleased him, and to each seed a body of its own. (39) All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. (40) There are

also celestial bodies, and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial differs from that of the terrestrial. (41) There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. (42) So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. (43) It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. (44) It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is also a spiritual body. (45) So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (46) However that which is spiritual isn't first, but that which is natural, then that which is spiritual. (47) The first man is of the earth, made of dust. The second man is the Lord from heaven. (48) As is the one made of dust, such are those who are also made of dust; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. (49) As we have borne the image of those made of dust, let's also bear the image of the heavenly. (50) Now I say this, brothers, that flesh and blood can't inherit the Kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption.

There are two types of bodies. There are heavenly (celestial) bodies and there are earthly (terrestrial) bodies. Paul also calls them natural bodies and spiritual bodies. One is like Adam's body. The other is like Christ's body (the second Adam) after his resurrection. It's true that the natural body comes first. But Paul asks, "With what kind of body do they come?" (verse 35). The answer seems to depend upon the seed that is sown. "Wake up righteously, and don't sin, for some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame," Paul says. "You foolish one, that which you yourself sow is not made alive unless it dies." Is Paul saying some are foolish because they don't understand about the resurrection? Or is Paul saying some are foolish because of sin? What we ourselves sow in our own deaths depends upon our own continued sins or our own continued righteousness. If we continue to sin when we are sown, then we will be raised with a body like Adam's instead of a body like that of Christ.

Adam had a natural body, but he lived to be 930 years old. So there are natural bodies that live "age-during" as Adam lived. Also, there are spiritual bodies that are more heavenly in nature and have eternal life. Spiritual bodies are like the bodies of the angels (Matthew 22:30).

6.6) Consistent Use of the Terms: Wise, Foolish and Wicked

As we have seen, there are three types of people in the grave. My use of the terms “wise,” “foolish” and “wicked” comes from the very consistent use of these terms by Jesus.

Also, these terms have their origins in Daniel 12. As we have seen, Daniel 12:3 says, “those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the sky above.” The verse says they will turn many to righteousness.

Verse 10 tells us that none of the wicked will understand, but the wise will understand the answer to the question. This verse also tells us the wicked will continue to be wicked. In other words, the wicked is a class of people who are beyond changing. They will never become wise. They will never become righteous. Therefore, there is an unstated middle group, who have not as yet gone one way or the other, which Jesus seems to have called “foolish.”

In the previous chapter of this book, on the Olivetti Discourse, we studied the four parables in the Olivetti Discourse and observed the three types of people in these four parables. Three of the parables each make use of two of these terms. Unfortunately, there is never a single parable or context where all three terms are used together. Accordingly, traditional theologians have assumed that the foolish and the wicked both refer to the unredeemed. But of course the New Wine System recognizes the distinction between all three terms.

The parable of the wise and wicked servant is about the wicked in the churches who forfeit their salvation. The parable of the ten virgins is about the five foolish virgins who do not get into the wedding banquet. But they are still saved. The parable of the talents is also about wicked servants in the churches who forfeit their salvation. These three parables make consistent use of the terms “wise,” foolish” and “wicked.” And as we will see, the parable of the “sheep” and the “goats” does include terms for all three types of people. In it, the wise are called “brothers.”

The Sermon on the Mount also makes consistent use of the terms “wise” and “foolish.” This sermon is not about salvation. It’s about becoming holy. The sermon is about two ways of living. Are you on the wise path of the narrow gate that leads to righteousness, or are you on the foolish path of the wide gate that leads to destruction?

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those

who enter in by it. (14) How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it.

In the “IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament”, by Craig S. Keener, pg 64, the section on Matthew 7:13-14, Keener writes:

Jesus’ hearers would have been familiar with the image of “two ways” – one leading to life and the other to death; it was common in Judaism. Jesus’ emphasis that few are on the right way occurs in 4 Ezra but is not as common as the general image of the two ways. Most Jewish people believed that Israel as a whole would be saved and that the few who were lost would be exceptions to the general rule.

The striking message here is that most people in Israel (and the Church today) believe they are on the right path. However few, even in the churches, actually find the narrow gate of holiness. In this same sermon, Jesus said for us to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Jesus is not saying the less than perfect will spend eternity in hell. They still have the blood of Christ. But they are on the path of the wide gate that leads to destruction. In context, the destruction being spoken of is destruction of wealth. The sermon focuses on the fact that you can't serve both God and money. The foolish, even in our churches, focus more on money than on serving God. If we focus on money, it will be destroyed. If we focus on treasures in heaven, we find the narrow gate that leads to eternal life.

The sermon concludes with a comparison of the wise and the foolish. The wise listen to the words of Christ and build their house on the Rock. The foolish do not listen and build their house on the sand. Their wealth will be destroyed.

In a play on words, the word "foolish" can also be found earlier in the sermon, about the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). Keener writes (pg 57):

Various scholars have emphasized different uses of salt in antiquity, such as a preservative or an agent regularly added to manure; but the use of salt here is as a flavoring agent: “if salt has become tasteless” (the Greek word can also mean “become foolish,” so it may include a play on words.)

I do believe this to be a play on words. The context is that of the wise, who have their rewards in heaven and are compared with the Old Testament prophets (verse 12). This is a warning that if the wise turn back to the foolishness of sin, that they become ineffective and of no value in the kingdom.

6.7) The Wide Gate that Few Find and the Narrow Gate of Destruction

A few verses down, in verse 19, Jesus says that whoever relaxes even the least of the commandments (of Law by context) will be the least in the kingdom of heaven. (By the way, the least of the commandments would have to include the seventh-day Sabbath.) Whoever keeps the commandments and teaches others to do so will be called the greatest. So again, the Sermon on the Mount is all about holiness. It's about the distinction between the wise and the foolish.

In verse 5:20, Jesus says unless your righteousness is better than the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. How holy do you need to be? Is salvation determined by one's degree of holiness? Of course not. Jesus is just saying that without holiness you will not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven. The amount of holiness is given a few verses down. In verse 48, Jesus says we must be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect.

But when Jesus says they will not be able to enter the kingdom, it doesn't mean they won't be able to live outside the kingdom with the rest of the nations. In other words, think about it like the Jews of that time would have done. They were waiting on the Messiah to come and set up the kingdom of heaven in Jerusalem. These words of Jesus would only have been interpreted as saying that people who lack righteousness will not be able to enter the kingdom that will come to rule over the nations. But the unrighteous can still live in the nations.

After Jesus tells us we must be perfect, Jesus proceeds to talk a lot about forgiveness, prayer, and money. Matthew 6 seems to be more about money than anything else. The wise are those who lay up treasures in heaven for the age to come. The foolish are those who build their houses for this present age. In other words, the foolish put emphasis on money and build their houses on the sand. When the Messiah comes, and the kingdom of heaven is set up here on earth, the foolish will see the destruction of everything they have built. Those who build their houses on the Rock of Christ and his righteousness will have eternal life and will reign with Christ in the New (heavenly) Jerusalem that is to come.

The wide gate eventually leads to the destruction of the soul. But in the immediate context of the sermon, the wide gate leads to the destruction of one's wealth and possessions as we enter the age to come. Those who build their houses on the sand are on the path of the wide gate. Unrighteous living leads to the destruction of money and possessions. But if one were to continue on that path during the age to come, it would eventually lead to the destruction of one's soul.

6.8) The Punishment of the Wicked

The wide gate eventually leads to the destruction of the soul. What exactly does that mean? Tradition tells us that soul cannot be destroyed, and the wicked will suffer the torment of hell for all eternity. But how would the ancient Jew have interpreted the words of Jesus and the rest of the New Testament? What does the New Testament tell us when interpreted in the context of the Old?

The two Greek words which are traditionally translated as hell are Hades and Gehennah. Hades literally means the grave and is the Greek word used by the New Testament when quoting the Old Testament Hebrew word Sheol. So Hades is the place where the dead sleep and await the resurrection.

The Jews believed the dead are asleep in Hades and await the age to come, when the Messiah comes. Those asleep in Hades include both the just and the unjust. Old Testament Scripture also teaches that some of the dead are destroyed and will not be resurrected. In this context, Jesus preaches against sin. Jesus preaches to repent, for the kingdom is at hand. To get ready for the kingdom, Jesus preaches to love the Father and your neighbor. For those who refuse, Jesus warns about the fire of Gehennah.

Matthew 5:22 But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna.

Gehennah was the name of the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem. The word is always used in the context of a place of punishment for the wicked. It's often used in conjunction with fire. Thus, Gehennah is a metaphor for the punishment of the wicked in the afterlife. Fire burned the garbage. Since garbage was continually being thrown into the garbage dump, the fire probably seemed to never go out. Gehennah probably refers to the same thing as the lake of fire in Revelation. Traditional translations, like the KJV, simply used the word "hell."

Mark 9:43 KJV And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.

Mark 9:43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having your two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire.

The warning about being thrown into Gehennah occurs twelve times in the New Testament. Eleven of those are the words of Jesus. (Mat. 5:22, 5:29, 5:30 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 23:33, Mark 9:43, 9:45, 9:47, Luke 12:5, and James 3:6) When we understand that Gehennah is a metaphor, used primarily by Jesus, we can do a more literal translation that might help us understand how the Jews would have interpreted the words of Jesus.

Mark 9:43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having your two hands to go into [the garbage dump], into the unquenchable fire.

The term "enter into life" is a reference to the resurrection. If one is dead, and then "enters into life," it simply means the dead person is now alive.

If one is taught from childhood that the dead go immediately to eternal life in heaven or eternal punishment in the fire of hell, and if one's Bible says "hell" instead of "garbage dump," then one would read the above verse as proof that the souls of the wicked are never destroyed and are punished eternally. If, on the other hand, one is taught from childhood that both the just and the unjust dead are asleep awaiting the resurrection, then one would read the above verse as an indication that the wicked could wind up being thrown into the garbage dump instead of being resurrected and "entering into life" in the age to come.

Would the ancient Jew interpret being thrown "into the garbage dump, into the unquenchable fire," as eternal torment by the unquenchable fire? If someone were to literally be thrown into the fire of a garage dump, it would be a very painful death. And it would be a very shameful way to die. The fact that the fire is unquenchable does not imply that the person would never die from the fire. The fire of a garbage dump is not as hot as the fire of a furnace. The fire of a furnace would kill a person immediately. They would not suffer prolonged pain from the fire. But the fire of a garbage dump could take quite a while to kill a person. It would be prolonged agony. Yet the person would eventually die. Here is another verse where Jesus uses the metaphor of the garbage dump.

Matthew 10:28 Don't be afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.

The fire of Gehennah destroys the soul. And it's real prolonged torment. But eventually the soul is destroyed. The ancient Jew would not have assumed that the soul is eternal. The soul sleeps as he or she awaits the resurrection. But if the soul were to be destroyed by God, there could no longer be a resurrection. In other

words, the concept of "eternal fire" does not mean eternal pain and torment. It simply means there is no longer a possibility of a resurrection. Yet, at the same time, there will be pain and torment for a period of time as God destroys the soul in the lake of fire.

Matthew 18:8 If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire.

Matthew 25:41 Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels;

Jude 1:7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them, having, in the same way as these, given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire.

Many theologians consider Matthew 25:46 (quoted below) to be the strongest proof-text verse for eternal pain and torment. This is used to argue that the soul is never completely destroyed.

Matthew 25:46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Christian Universalists, who argue that everyone will eventually be saved, take the position that "eternal" does not really mean forever. The problem with this argument is that the same word is also used in the same sentence for eternal life. A clear parallelism is being made between eternal life and eternal punishment. If one were to argue a limited amount of time for "eternal punishment," then one would also have to allow for a limited amount of time for "eternal life."

The Greek word used for "punishment" can mean pain and torment. But given all the other evidence, we can easily interpret this verse as saying that the consequence of the punishment is eternal.

Consider "eternal sin" in Mark 3:29 (quoted below). The wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life. Yet there is a sin that cannot be forgiven. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven in this age, or in the age to come (Mat. 12:31-32). In Mark, Jesus calls it an "eternal sin."

Mark 3:29 but whoever may blaspheme against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"

The idea here is not that the sin itself continues forever. The consequences of the sin last forever. In the same way, the consequences of "eternal punishment" lasts forever. The wicked are eternally destroyed. They will never live again.

The fire is eternal. But the pain and torment do not have to be eternal. A number of verses speak of "destruction" in relation to the punishment of the wicked. Does the destruction take an eternity? The verse below is the only verse which uses the term "eternal destruction."

2 Thessalonians 1:9 who will pay the penalty: eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

Some will argue that the term "eternal destruction" in this verse means the soul is never really destroyed because the process of destroying the soul takes an eternity. But is Paul really saying the destruction takes an eternity? Or is Paul simply saying that the person will never be raised? Paul specifically states that the person will not see the face of the Lord and the glory of his might. It's easily argued Paul means this is eternally true. But why does Paul use the noun "destruction?"

First, we need to go back to the Sermon on the Mount, discussed in section 6.8 above, and remember that in the context of the sermon, the destruction associated with the wide gate is the destruction of possessions and wealth accumulated in the present age. The foolish who build their houses on the sand lose their possessions. But if one were to remain on the path of the wide gate in the age to come, it would eventually lead to the destruction of the soul.

Paul's use of the term "eternal destruction" is an allusion to what Jesus taught. God can destroy the body and the soul. And the fire in the garbage dump burns eternally. This puts emphasis on the fact that when God destroys the soul the person will never be resurrected. The soul is permanently (or eternally) destroyed.

Secondly, we need to remember that Paul was a Pharisee and would think in terms of the Old Testament teachings. Isaiah 26 is the first place in the Old Testament that teaches about the resurrection. The wicked are described as "shades." They will not be resurrected. Directly related to this is the fact that God has visited destruction upon the wicked. One must realize that for the most part, the possessions of the wicked have not yet been destroyed by God. So this is something that will happen in the future. At the same time, that destruction can refer to the souls of the wicked. But in the Old Testament context, where the dead

are asleep, this destruction primarily refers primarily to the destruction of possessions. I think Paul's use of the term "eternal destruction" is an allusion to Isaiah 26:14 as well as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus may have also been alluding to Isaiah 26.

Isaiah 26:14 ESV They are dead, they will not live; they are shades, they will not arise; to that end you have visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them.

Isaiah 26:19 ESV Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

Jesus refers to Judas as the "son of destruction" (John 17:11-12). This equates Judas with the destruction that will reign down on the wicked. This equates Judas with the wrath of God. Judas will not be resurrected. But he will "come alive" at the great white throne judgment and will be thrown into the lake of fire. That fire is eternal in nature. Judas will "come alive" to be judged for what he has done (Revelation 20:12). Then, in the lake of fire, he will experience torment for some time. His soul will be destroyed.

Revelation 20:12-14 I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. (13) The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. (14) Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

I think the amount of time it takes to destroy the soul will vary from person to person. It will be according to God's judgment, based on what they have done. It could be that the destruction of the soul is gradual. As the soul is destroyed over a period of time, they would become less aware of the torment. It's up to God's judgment as to how long the torment lasts.

Some will argue that a loving God would let the soul be immediately destroyed. Why is torment needed? Isn't it enough that they will never live again? If so, then why did God say, "vengeance is mine" (Deuteronomy 32:35)?

Romans 12:18-21 If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men. (19) Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved,

but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord." (20) Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head." (21) Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Hebrews 10:30-31 For we know him who said, "Vengeance belongs to me," says the Lord, "I will repay." Again, "The Lord will judge his people." (31) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The wicked will be judged by their works, or deeds. In other words, the wicked will be judged by their evil deeds against others. Many wicked people have lived their lives doing unthinkable evil. Even today, children are sold as sex-slaves. And many of these wicked people live to a ripe old age and die rich. For those who truly repent and trust in Christ to overcome their sinful habits, we can all find it in our hearts to forgive. But for those who reject Christ's salvation, God's justice requires more than a destruction of their property when the Messiah comes.

Does even a full life-time of evil deeds, even against young children, deserve a forever-and-ever eternity of torment and pain? Some have argued that eternal torment and pain is required because sin is against an infinite God. But Revelation tells us they are judged by their finite-amount of deeds.

Revelation 14:10-11 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger. He will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. (11) The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. They have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.

In the lake of fire, the wicked will no longer rest. They have "no rest day and night." But this does not mean it continues forever. However, the "smoke of their torment goes up forever." The smoke of their torment is simply the evidence of their punishment. The evidence of an eternal fire will remain forever.

Chapter 7

The Book of Life and the Unpardonable Sin

Most people assume the Book of Life is a book in which your name is written when you are first saved. This might be Arminian thinking. Others believe the book was written before the foundation of the world and contains the names of everyone predestined to be saved. This might be Calvinistic thinking. Scripture does say those of the elect (Israel) were chosen before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5). But it's one thing to be chosen to teach and rule the world in the age to come. It's another thing to simply be saved from sin and death.

A close study of the Book of Life shows that it's not a book where one's name appears when one inherits eternal life. It's just the opposite. It's a book where one's name is blotted out when the person becomes condemned to the lake of fire. In other words, it's a book that originally contained everybody's name that will ever live. It's not a book of predestination saying those not written there were condemned to hell before they are even born.

As we will see, there are clear Old Testament cases in which people's names are blotted out of the book. If just one name is blotted out, the book cannot be a book of predestination. A book of predestination with the accuracy expected of God would never require correction. Would God say, "I predestined that guy. I thought he would be saved. But I guess I was wrong. So I'll just have to blot his name out of the book?" God could never be wrong about the future. So it's not a book of predestination. It's a book that says you are still in the running for eternal life. It's a book of Christ's sheep, both lost and found, who hear Christ's voice. It's a book of both the wise and the foolish, until they become wicked and are blotted.

The unpardonable sin is when a person hardens their heart and rejects Christ's voice. In other words, no matter what the Holy Spirit does, the person will continue to reject Christ. If a person commits the unpardonable sin, that person becomes known as the wicked, and his or her name is blotted out of the book. But the unpardonable sin is not something that is committed in a weak moment. God is very slow to blot people from his book. He wants everyone to be saved.

It's called the Book of Life because it's a list of people who will be given life at the resurrection. Before looking at the Book of Life in the Old Testament and the New Testament, we will take a close look at the unpardonable sin itself. Jesus calls it blaspheming the Holy Spirit, which cannot be forgiven.

7.1) Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

Matthew 12:31-32 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. (32) Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.

What is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? Why would blasphemy against Christ be forgiven, but not against the Holy Spirit? To understand this verse, we must read it carefully in context. Let's go back to the start of the chapter.

Matthew 12:1-8 At that time, Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the grain fields. His disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him, "Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." But he said to them, "Haven't you read what David did, when he was hungry, and those who were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and ate the show bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law, that on the Sabbath day, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? But I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

As the Pharisees begin to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath, Jesus responds that He is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus is being a little more direct about His claim of being the Messiah. This claim is the one thing that the Pharisees cannot tolerate. Such a claim would elevate Jesus to an authority over the Pharisees.

The Sabbath seems to have been the big area of theological disagreement between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus honored the Sabbath, but not in the strict unreasonable rule-based way in which the Pharisees interpreted the law. All their rules were not in Old Testament Scripture. They had been added as an interpretation of Old Testament Scripture.

The Pharisees believed in all these rules. They had been taught from their childhood. For them, to do anything they considered to be work on the Sabbath was simply something that God would not condone. Therefore, they thought, Jesus would not be able to heal on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees knew Jesus had the power to heal. They would have known that he could do it again and again. Yet they asked him to heal a man again, in order to accuse him. Were they stupid? Why would they bring yet another man to him, to be healed, if they knew they would be humiliated when Jesus healed the man? No doubt they didn't expect Jesus to be able to heal on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees believed Jesus had no respect for the Sabbath (from their strict viewpoint.) Thus, they had what they thought was the perfect plan. Ask Jesus to heal on the Sabbath. He would not be able to heal, because it would be against God's will. Then they would have him in their trap. They would accuse him of working on the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:8-14 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." He departed there, and went into their synagogue. And behold there was a man with a withered hand. They asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" that they might accuse him. He said to them, "What man is there among you, who has one sheep, and if this one falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, won't he grab on to it, and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day." Then he told the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out; and it was restored whole, just like the other. But the Pharisees went out, and conspired against him, how they might destroy him.

Their plan had failed. Jesus had claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath. And the miracle on the Sabbath seemed to back up his claim. Such a claim is equivalent to a claim of being the Messiah, or even greater. The Pharisees would have never considered themselves to be Lord of the Sabbath. They considered themselves to be enforcers of God's Laws, especially the Sabbath.

No doubt the Pharisees didn't believe that Jesus would be able to heal on the Sabbath. When Jesus did, after claiming to be Lord of the Sabbath, their plan had backfired. Jesus had proven to have a higher authority than the Pharisees. Jesus had proven Himself to be the Messiah. And the Pharisees knew it. So they went out to plot against Jesus, to destroy him.

Matthew 12:15-21 Jesus, perceiving that, withdrew from there. Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them all, and commanded them that they should not make him known: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit on him. He will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not strive, nor shout; neither will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He won't break a bruised reed. He won't quench a smoking flax, until he leads justice to victory. In his name, the nations will hope."

Why did Matthew bring out, at this point, the fact that Jesus had ordered those he healed to not say anything? What's significant about the fact that Jesus was aware of their plotting? Was Jesus afraid for his life?

As we will see, Jesus does not want anyone to commit the unpardonable sin. Some of the Pharisees were about to do so, or had perhaps already crossed that line. Jesus wanted to heal anyone and everyone who desired his healing. However, Jesus did not want his healing to lead Pharisees into committing the unpardonable sin. So Jesus told those he had healed to not make him known.

Why did Matthew quote Isaiah at this point? Why does Matthew talk about Jesus proclaiming justice to the Gentiles? When the Jewish leaders begin to commit the unpardonable sin, it becomes clear that the Jews would reject the Messiah. The people will ultimately follow their leaders. Therefore, the Gospel would be proclaimed to the Gentiles.

Matthew 12:22-24 Then one possessed by a demon, blind and mute, was brought to him and he healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. All the multitudes were amazed, and said, "Can this be the son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebul, the prince of the demons."

The nightmare of the Pharisees has come about. The Pharisees, down deep, know that Jesus is the Messiah. Now Jesus heals a very difficult case. The man has a demon, and at the same time, the man is blind and mute. This healing is great, and the people start saying that Jesus could be the Messiah. What is the response of the Pharisees? They attribute the healing to Satan's power.

As we will see, this is the unpardonable sin. The Holy Spirit is performing miracles that prove God's presence in Jesus. The Pharisees know this is God's power, before their very eyes. Yet they deny the work of the Holy Spirit. They deny God's miracles. Even the untrained people see that God is doing these miracles. However, the trained Pharisees' love for their own power is greater than any desire to see God's work, even when it's undeniably in front of their eyes. Their hearts had become extremely hardened against Christ's voice.

Matthew 12:25-27 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

With these verses, Jesus begins his arguments against the unpardonable claim of the Pharisees. Satan cannot drive out Satan. Jesus is being sarcastic when he asks, "By whom do your sons cast them out?" The Pharisees had not been casting out demons.

Who are the "sons" of the Pharisees? Why will these "sons" be their judges? When or where will this judging take place? Perhaps out of confusion, the NIV translates "your sons" as "your people." But most translations stick with the word given in the Greek. Jesus asks, "By whom do your sons cast them out?"

The "sons" of the Pharisees are their students. In many cases, their literal sons probably carried on in their father's footsteps, and became the next generation of Pharisees. Their "sons" would naturally put great faith in their teachings. Yet, the Pharisees denied that Jesus is the Messiah. Some would commit the unpardonable sin. Others might simply remain silent. At least in silence, they would not be committing the unpardonable sin. In the age to come, when Christ returns, some of their students will be their judges. For example, Paul was a Pharisee. He was one of their students. Those with an [agape] love for Christ cannot remain silent. In the age to come, those who will have matured in Christ, and who will have walked as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9), will be the priests and kings over those who remained silent. Thus, their sons will be their judges in the age to come.

Matthew 12:28 But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.

Take careful note of this verse. Jesus is saying that it's the Holy Spirit that casts out the demons. Not He Himself. This will be important when we look at the verse on the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

Also, if the Holy Spirit is casting out these demons, it's proof that the presence of Jesus is the presence of the Kingdom of God. This goes back to the claim that Jesus is the Messiah. If the kingdom of God had come upon them, it was because the Messiah had come. So again, the claim that Jesus is the Messiah challenged the authority of the Pharisees.

Matthew 12:29 Or how can one enter into the house of the strong man, and plunder his goods, unless he first bind the strong man? Then he will plunder his house.

What (or who) is the "strong man's house?" Who is the "strong man?" How does this parable relate to the healing of the blind man, with the demon? How does this parable argue against the idea that Satan could drive out Satan?

Amillennialists, since Augustine, have used this verse to explain, in Revelation 20, how Satan could currently be chained, so that he could deceive the nations no more. Such an explanation is necessary for them to say that the future and literal reign of Christ will not take place. They say that Christ chained Satan at the cross. However, nothing in the context of this verse is about the cross. This verse is in the context of the healing of the blind and mute man, who had a demon.

The strong man's house is the body of the blind and mute man. The strong man is Satan, or the demon inside the man. The demon had to be bound before Christ could heal the physical problems of the man's house. Christ is arguing that Satan would not bind himself.

Matthew 12:30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters.

This is the bottom line. There are only two groups here. Everyone must make a decision to be either for or against Christ. The miracles Jesus performed produced division in the ones who saw the miracles. Seeing the miracles forces everyone to decide for themselves. Eventually, everyone must decide to be with Christ or against Christ. This means that eventually everyone will know Jesus is the King.

Many will stay in the middle during his or her entire lifetime. However, eventually God's miracles will force everyone to be either for or against Christ. If this doesn't happen now, it will happen in the age to come. In the age to come, when Christ returns, the kingdom will be undeniably everywhere. Everyone will be

forced to be on Christ's side, or against him. Those who decide to be against Christ, in the face of undeniable proof, will be committing the unpardonable sin.

Matthew 12:31-32 ESV Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. (32) And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Remember our important verse? Verse 28 tells us that it's the Holy Spirit that does the miracles. It was not Jesus himself. When the Pharisees said it was by the power of Beelzebul, they were attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Beelzebul. Saying a word against the Son of Man can be forgiven. But seeing the miracles, and still denying God's power is unpardonable.

Notice that Jesus is warning about this sin in the present age, and in the age to come. The age to come is when the Messiah literally rules the world. They knew that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus was saying that even when He literally rules, in the future, that this sin will be unpardonable.

Some may think that the age to come might be the Church Age. However, Mark 10:30 and Luke 18:30 clearly place the age to come as the time of eternal life. The age to come is the millennial reign of Christ.

If actual miracles are not enough, then it's impossible to bring the person into repentance. These Pharisees were more concerned about their selfish power than to publically recognize the Messiah, even in the face of this proof. And they knew that healing on the Sabbath proves Jesus to be Lord of the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:33 "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit.

Here Jesus continues to argue against what the Pharisees had said. Jesus had been doing good works in healing the people. How can this good fruit come from a bad tree?

Matthew 12:34-37 You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings out good things, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings out evil things. I tell you that every idle word that men speak, they will give

account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Does this mean that Christ will weigh all our good words against all our bad words? Is Jesus saying that if our good words outweigh our bad words, then we are saved? What happened to salvation by grace alone?

Or can we interpret this verse more in line of the context of verse 30? Because of the miracles of God, everyone will eventually decide for themselves to be with Christ, or to be against Christ. If they are against Christ, they will deny the undeniable works of God, and come up with something crazy like the miracles are the works of Satan. Thus, everyone will be judged by their words. Their words reflect what is in their hearts. Their words reflect their decision to be for or against Christ. But for those who have not yet heard about Christ, or for those who have not been forced to make that decision, death is not the end of the journey of righteousness. In the age to come, they will still be judged by their words for or against Christ.

Matthew 12:38 Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

Why would the Pharisees say such a thing when they had just seen this miracle, a miracle so undeniable that they had said it was the work of Beelzebul? Could it be they are fearful of being wrong? Could it be they are in denial? Could it be they are afraid? People can always find some way to explain away any kind of proof that God may give. Here, they were trying to convince themselves that Jesus is not the Lord of the Sabbath, because the signs were somehow not great enough. If Jesus had done an even greater sign, they would have still attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to Beelzebul.

Matthew 12:39-42 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, someone greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone greater than Solomon is here.

The sign of Jonah was probably only understood after the crucifixion, and only by believers. The Pharisees were not meant to understand it.

The sign of Jonah was certainly the crucifixion and the resurrection. Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, Jesus was also three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. However, the meaning of this sign goes far deeper. Jonah prophesied that Nineveh will be destroyed in forty days. However, the king of Nineveh led his people into repentance. So God did not destroy Nineveh in forty days. Did this make Jonah be a false prophet? No, because there is always an understanding that repentance can change God's intended actions of wrath.

God also intended to destroy Jerusalem forty years after the crucifixion. But if the Jewish leaders had repented during those forty years, Jerusalem would not have been destroyed, and Christ could have returned in that generation as he had hoped to do (Matthew 10:23, 16:28).

Jesus knows that no additional sign would convince the Pharisees any more than the ones already performed. So he begins to talk less plainly. After this, Jesus will begin to only talk in parables publically. Jesus does not want more people committing the unpardonable sin.

Matthew 12:43-45 But the unclean spirit, when he is gone out of the man, passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and doesn't find it. Then he says, 'I will return into my house from which I came out,' and when he has come back, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes, and takes with himself seven other spirits more evil than he is, and they enter in and dwell there. The last state of that man becomes worse than the first. Even so will it be also to this evil generation."

Jesus continues on the topic of casting out demons. Here, we find the house allegory for the body used as it was in verses 28-29, the strong man's house. But here, Jesus draws parallels between the man who was healed and the Pharisees of that evil generation.

During the first half of Matthew the kingdom is portrayed as "forcefully advancing since John." (Matthew 11:12). After Matthew 12, everything slides down to the crucifixion. After this unpardonable sin, Jesus began to speak in parables. After a few verses, in the next chapter, Matthew quotes Isaiah again:

Matthew 13:10-17 The disciples came, and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" He answered them, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to them. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever doesn't have, from him will be taken away even that which he has. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they don't see, and hearing, they don't hear, neither do they understand. In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, 'By hearing you will hear, and will in no way understand; Seeing you will see, and will in no way perceive: for this people's heart has grown callous, their ears are dull of hearing, they have closed their eyes; or else perhaps they might perceive with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and should turn again; and I would heal them.' "But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For most certainly I tell you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which you see, and didn't see them; and to hear the things which you hear, and didn't hear them.

After this, Jesus spoke in parables to prevent more people from committing the unpardonable sin. The unpardonable sin is when a person hardens their heart to the point where they no longer hear Christ's voice. In other words, no matter what the Holy Spirit does, the person will continue to reject Christ. If a person commits the unpardonable sin, that person becomes known as the wicked, and his or her name is blotted out of the Book of Life.

7.2) Eyes to See and Ears to Hear

Look back at Jesus' quote of Isaiah (Matthew 10:13-17, Isaiah 6:9-10). Jesus summarized it before quoting it. In summary Jesus said, "Because seeing they don't see, and hearing, they don't hear, neither do they understand." The hearing is connected to understanding because you cannot understand without hearing. Likewise, Jesus was not talking about a metaphorical seeing. In the context of chapter 12, and the unpardonable sin, Jesus is talking about literally seeing the miracles and denying that they are the works of the Holy Spirit.

When the literal seeing is denied, hearing and understanding becomes impossible. Therefore, to have eyes to see but cannot see is always tied to the unpardonable sin. To have ears to hear is always tied to those who have not committed the unpardonable sin, and thus can still hear Christ's voice.

This can help us understand a difficult verse in John 9:39-41. "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains." What does this mean?

Jesus had healed a man who was blind from birth (John 9). The man was brought to the Pharisees for questioning. This was also a case where Jesus had healed on the Sabbath (verse 14). As we have seen, this proves that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, and therefore the Messiah. The Pharisees believed that healing on the Sabbath would be a sin. But how can you heal on the Sabbath, if it's a sin, when the healing power is from God?

John 9:16 ESV Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them.

The Pharisees could not accept the fact of this healing on the Sabbath. They even brought in the parents of the formally blind man for questioning. They were hoping that the man had not really been blind (verse 18). The Pharisees knew that Jesus had healed many times. However, His healing on the Sabbath was their worst nightmare. It was a direct challenge to their authority. It showed that their most important teaching about God was wrong, because God was healing on the day when the work of healing should not be possible.

During this episode, the Pharisees did not cross the line and actually say the healing was the work of Satan. But they probably came close. At first, the formally blind man did not know that Jesus is the Son of Man. But when they meet again, Jesus told the man, and the man worshiped Christ. Some of the Pharisees were looking on.

John 9:39-41 Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, that those who don't see may see; and that those who see may become blind." (40) Those of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" (41) Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains.

If the Pharisees had not seen the miracles, then they would not be held accountable for that revelation from God. The judgment that Christ speaks of is through the miracles. The miracles force everyone to either accept Christ, or to reject Christ. All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). However, God's judgment of us depends solely on whether or not we accept Christ when we hear

Christ's voice or see the miracles. They saw the miracles. The judgment is based on what one does with God's undeniable revelation.

John 15:22-24 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. (23) He who hates me, hates my Father also. (24) If I hadn't done among them the works which no one else did, they wouldn't have had sin. But now have they seen and also hated both me and my Father.

This then, clearly establishes the middle foolish group that have not yet become either wise or wicked. Those to whom Christ has not yet spoken are not guilty of sin. That's because Christ died for them. Of course they are not righteous either. They are sinners. But they will not be condemned of their sins until Christ speaks to them. If they harden their hearts to Christ's voice, they can be eternally condemned. It's only those who wind up hating both Christ and the Father who are condemned. And anyone who hates Christ will automatically hate the Father.

To have ears to hear is always tied to those who have not committed the unpardonable sin, and thus can hear Christ's voice. Let's revisit the verses in John about the dead hearing Christ's voice.

John 5:25, 28-29 Most certainly, I tell you, the hour comes, and now is, when the dead will hear the Son of God's voice; and those who hear will live. ... (28) Don't marvel at this, for the hour [time] comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice, (29) and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

John 10:1-18 "Most certainly, I tell you, one who doesn't enter by the door into the sheep fold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. (2) But one who enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. (3) The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. (4) Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. (5) They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they don't know the voice of strangers." (6) Jesus spoke this parable to them, but they didn't understand what he was telling them. (7) Jesus therefore said to them again, "Most

certainly, I tell you, I am the sheep's door. (8) All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. (9) I am the door. If anyone enters in by me, he will be saved, and will go in and go out, and will find pasture. (10) The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly. (11) I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (12) He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who doesn't own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and flees. The wolf snatches the sheep, and scatters them. (13) The hired hand flees because he is a hired hand, and doesn't care for the sheep. (14) I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and I'm known by my own; (15) even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. (16) I have other sheep, which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice. They will become one flock with one shepherd. (17) Therefore the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. (18) No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father."

Christ's sheep are those who hear Christ's voice. Both those who have done good, and those who have done evil, hear Christ's voice from the tombs. You don't have to be a disciple of Christ in order to hear His voice from the tomb. It is only the wicked who don't hear Christ's voice. They knowingly reject and hate Christ, and they refuse to see the miracles. They don't hear Christ's voice.

7.3) The Unpardonable Sin, and the Book of Life, in the Old Testament

The first mention of the Book of Life in Scripture is in Exodus 32:32-33. The Lord had brought ten miraculously spectacular plagues upon Pharaoh and Egypt. He had parted the Red Sea, and the armies of Pharaoh had perished in the sea behind them. He'd given the miraculous manna in the desert. Water came from the rock at the strike of Moses' staff, for all to drink. A cloud went before them by day, and a pillar of fire by night. After all of these miracles, however, the people built a golden calf to worship. In other words, no matter what God did, no matter how much God revealed about Himself, some of these people were never going to

simply trust and have faith in God. When they sinned against God in this way, God blotted their names out of the Book of Life.

Exodus 32:22-24 Aaron said, "Don't let the anger of my lord grow hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. (23) For they said to me, 'Make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we don't know what has become of him.' (24) I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them take it off:' so they gave it to me; and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

Exodus 32:30-33 It happened on the next day, that Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. Now I will go up to Yahweh. Perhaps I shall make atonement for your sin." (31) Moses returned to Yahweh, and said, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made themselves gods of gold. (32) Yet now, if you will, forgive their sin--and if not, please blot me out of your book which you have written." (33) Yahweh said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."

Do you see the parallels between this story and the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, in Matthew 12? Both have undeniable miracles that proved the power of God. In both cases, people chose to ignore the undeniable miracles, and followed their own selfish desires.

This then, is the unpardonable sin. When someone who has a relationship with God or with Christ intentionally and purposefully turns to other gods, it's an unpardonable sin. When God reveals Himself to an individual, and that individual hardens his heart against God's revelation, it's an unpardonable sin. Their names can be blotted out of the Book of Life. Notice that in Exodus 32:32 Moses refers to this as "the book you have written." In other words, it's not a book that's currently being written. God wrote the book before the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8, 17:8). It's not a book of predestination, and it's not a book where your name is added when you get saved. It's a book where your name is blotted out when you harden your heart to the point of committing the unpardonable sin.

The author of Hebrews seems to draw the same conclusion about the people in the desert, without explicitly mentioning the Book of Life.

Hebrews 3:7-11 ESV Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, (9) where your

fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. (10) Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' (11) As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'

When God said, "They shall never enter my rest," he was denying them salvation (Hebrews 4:1-11). Their salvation was taken away because of their rebellion. But the author of Hebrews includes the condition of hearing His voice. Pagans all around Israel committed the very same sin of idol worship. Nevertheless, these pagans had not yet heard God's voice.

Psalms 95:7-11 ESV For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, (9) when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. (10) For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." (11) Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

Notice that God is very slow to bring his wrath. They sinned against God in the desert by building the golden calf. But God gave them forty years in the desert to repent.

This brings us back to the sign of Jonah. The Jewish leaders hardened their hearts against Christ in seeing the miracles that proved Christ to be the Lord of the Sabbath. They committed the unpardonable sin. Yet God gave the Jewish leaders forty years after the sign of Jonah to repent. In 70 AD, Jerusalem was destroyed and became desolate. This was forty years after Christ was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Thus, it was forty years after the sign of Jonah had been given. Jonah said Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days. But the king led the people into repentance. If the Jewish leaders had likewise repented during those forty years, Christ would have returned in 70 AD and just like Nineveh, Jerusalem would not have been destroyed.

So God is very slow in actually blotting a name from the Book of Life. It doesn't happen in a weak moment. It doesn't happen out of one mistake. It's a hardening of the heart that is proven over the course with plenty of time to repent. It would seem that God gives people forty years to repent before their name is blotted from the Book of Life for the unpardonable sin.

However, the greater one's personal revelation about Christ has been, the quicker God is going to blot ones name if they were to reject Christ. Judas was not forgiven even though he repented almost immediately. But Judas had been one of the disciples, learning directly from Christ during his entire ministry. As will be shown in Hebrews, it gets really bad if you have received the Holy Spirit and have tasted the powers of heaven, but then you knowingly and deliberately reject Christ.

This principle of an unpardonable sin can be found later in Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26-29. It is a major theme in Hebrews. Hebrews will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter of this book. If someone is given undeniable proof about God or Christ, such as the miracles the Holy Spirit performed for Moses or for Jesus, and they deny the miracles, they have committed the unpardonable sin. The bottom line is that when the heart is hardened to the point of a rejection of Christ, and it does not involve Satan's deceit or a lack of understanding, then it is unpardonable. The unpardonable sin causes your name to be blotted from the Book of Life.

One person I know tried to wiggle out of Exodus 32:32-33, saying that the names in this book were only the names of those under God's covenant with Israel. Yet Scripture does not teach about such a book. In other words, the assumption has been that the Book of Life is a book of predestination. Therefore, when this verse is used to challenge that assumption, some people tend to look for other possibilities as to what this book might be other than the Book of Life. Even if this were a book of names under God's covenant with Israel, how would being blotted out of such not be a loss of salvation?

Exodus 17:14 and Deuteronomy 25:18-19 says that the memory of Amalek was blotted out from under heaven because of actions against Israel as they were coming out of Egypt. See Exodus 17 for the account of this battle against Israel. Perhaps Amalek had seen God's miracle of water in the desert, and had decided to fight Israel for the water. Also see 1 Samuel 15 and 1 Samuel 28:18. Saul was commanded to destroy Amalek, not for revenge, but because their names had been blotted out from under heaven. Obviously Amalek was not under God's covenant with Israel. Yet, for his name to have been blotted out, it had to have been in the book in the first place.

Some may argue that the actual book was not explicitly mentioned in Exodus 17:14 and Deuteronomy 25:18-19 where the memory of Amalek was blotted out from under heaven. But with similar language, Deuteronomy 29:18-20 says that if the people of Israel, who know about God, turn to gods of the nations, then their

names are to be blotted from under heaven. The same language portraying Amalek being blotted out is used to portray the people of Israel being blotted out as well. Both are blotted out from under heaven. From Exodus 32:32-33, we know that people of Israel were also blotted from the book.

Furthermore, Deuteronomy 9:12-16 also speaks about God blotting names from under heaven because of the calf they had made. In other words, Exodus 32:32-33 and Deuteronomy 9:12-16 are both about the same sin, and both speak of names being blotted out. In one case, their names are blotted from the book. In the other case, their names are blotted from under heaven. This equates the terminology and shows that Amalek was blotted from the same book.

The memory of Amalek was blotted out from under heaven. The very first mention of the resurrection in the Old Testament is in Isaiah 26. God is said to have "wiped out all remembrance" of those who will not be resurrected. In other words, blotting a name from the Book of Life, or from under heaven, is the same as God wiping all remembrance of the person. Thus, they are not resurrected.

Isaiah 26:14 ESV They are dead, they will not live; they are shades, they will not arise; to that end you have visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them.

Isaiah 26:19 ESV Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

The reason these people were blotted out is that they had no fear of God even with the knowledge of the miracles. An intentional and knowledgeable turning away from God is a sin that is unpardonable.

Psalms 9:5 speaks of the names of the wicked being blotted out forever and ever. A book is not specifically mentioned, but the language remains consistent. Their names had to be written in a book in order for them to be blotted out.

In Psalm 69:27-28, David asks God to blot the names of his enemies out of the Book of Life.

Psalm 69:27-28 NIV Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. (28) May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.

Notice that in verse 27, David relates this action to denying them salvation. David actually uses this term, "Book of Life." If it's possible for David's enemies to be

blotted from the "Book of Life", then the "Book of Life" must contain their names. If the names of David's enemies are in the "Book of Life", then it's impossible for this to be a book of predestination.

If David's enemies are in the "Book of Life", then it's also unlikely for this to be a book in which the names of the righteous are written as they become saved. David would probably not have considered his enemies to be people who love and fear the one true God.

Some people will argue that just because David asked God to blot names out of the Book of Life doesn't mean that God would do so. Perhaps God did not do what David asked. Nevertheless, this verse shows David's understanding of how the "Book of Life" works. David wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I think his understanding of how it works has the weight of Scripture. David would not have asked God to blot out the names of his enemies if the names of these enemies were not already in the book. Moreover, when we combine all the other accounts in which people were actually blotted out, it proves that it can be done, and has been done.

Many verses in the Psalms can be literally applied to David, but have turned out to be prophetically applied to Jesus. Other verses in the Psalms can only be applied to Christ. For example, Psalms 16:10 (NIV) says "you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." Acts 2:27 and 13:35 applies this prophecy directly to Christ. Likewise, Psalm 69:27-28 can be applied directly to Christ. The enemies of Christ are blotted from Christ's Book of Life. You have to explicitly and knowledgably reject Christ in order to be his enemy.

In Daniel 12:1, those who are in the Book of Life escape the grave after the great tribulation. Those in the book are resurrected. Those not in the book are not resurrected. This resurrection includes both a resurrection into eternal life, and a resurrection into "shame" and "contempt." But you have to be in the Book of Life to get resurrected when Christ returns. In Philippians 4:3, Paul mentions a few of his fellow workers whose names, he says, are in the Lamb's Book of Life. Also, the Lamb's Book of Life is mentioned seven times in Revelation.

Some will argue that the Book of Life in Psalm 69:27-28 doesn't have to be the same book as in Exodus 32:32-33. So for argument's sake, let's focus only on what's called the "Book of Life." John's book of Revelation, more than any other book in the New Testament, is packed full of Old Testament quotes and allusions. Revelation uses the phrase "Book of Life" six times. The only other place in Scripture where this entire phrase is used is Psalm 69:28 and Philippians 4:3.

It would be a great stretch to say that the Book of Life, mentioned by John, was not the same as the "Book of Life," spoken of by David. John says it was written before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8, 17:8). David says names can be blotted out. Consequently, this book cannot be about predestination. John even mentions the idea of names being blotted out (Revelation 3:5). The only possible conclusion, therefore, is that everybody's name was there before the foundation of the world.

7.4) The Book of Life in Revelation

The term "Book of Life" is used six times in Revelation. This is far more than any other book of the Bible. Thus, the Book of Life is important to the theme of Revelation. The theme of Revelation seems to be that of overcoming sin and avoiding getting one's name blotted from the Book of Life.

Revelation 3:5 says that those who overcome sin (the wise) will not have their names blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life. This promise is of little value if names cannot be blotted out. Furthermore, this promise obviously implies that those who don't eventually overcome sin will have their names blotted out. Don't fall into the trap of focusing on this one New Testament verse while ignoring all the Old Testament evidence. It's true that this verse doesn't explicitly state that anyone had his or her name removed. But John, I'm sure, got the term, "Book of Life," from David. And David would have received his Holy Spirit inspired understanding from reading Exodus and Deuteronomy. And David clearly expected names to be blotted.

As I pointed out earlier, Revelation is packed full of quotes and inferences to the Old Testament. The Book of Life is no exception. John got it from David. (David called it the Book of Life.) David clearly understood its function. This promise, given in Revelation 3:5 to those who overcome sin, is not a promise of little value. Names really have been blotted from this book.

Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 both say that the names were originally written in the book before the creation of the world. Many of these verses surveyed speak of names being blotted out. However, no verse ever speaks of a name being added or written. Your name is not written when you are saved. Nor is it included in a list of predestined people who will be saved. When people commit the unpardonable sin, their names are simply blotted out.

7.5) Verb Tense in Revelation 13:8 and 17:8

Some people have objected to these arguments by saying that Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 are translated generally as, "all whose names have not been written in the book of life." The argument is that if their names have not been written in the Book of Life, then they never were written, and thus were not blotted out.

The Greek word used here for "have been written", parsed in exactly the same way, occurs 67 times in the New Testament. In the vast majority of these verses, most translations render the word as "is written." These two verses in Revelation are the only two cases where "not" is included. Therefore, in these two verses the word can be translated as, "is not written." Since we are talking about more than one name, the grammar in the English would be, "are not written." The King James Version seems to be the only version that translates 13:8 in this way. The KJV renders it as "whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb" (13:8). Then, unfortunately, the KJV renders 17:8 as "were not written." But in the Greek, it's the same word parsed in the same way, which is: indicative, perfect, passive, 3rd person, singular.

In his book, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, (2003) William D. Mounce writes (pg. 225, paragraph 25.2):

The Greek perfect is one of the more interesting tenses and is often used to express great theological truths. The Greek perfect describes an action that was brought to completion and whose effects are felt in the present. Because it describes a completed action, by implication the action described by the perfect verb normally occurred in the past.

He goes on to say:

Another example is the verb "to write." When the Bible says, "It is written," this is usually in the perfect tense. Scripture was written in the past but is applicable in the present. That is why some translations choose the present "It is written," instead of "It has been written." This emphasizes its abiding significance. The translation "It stands written" would state this nuance even clearer.

Thus, it's perfectly correct to translate both verses like the KJV of Revelation 13:8. "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (KJV Revelation 13:8).

However, if one wanted to be more literal, Revelation 13:8 can be translated as, "All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been continually written from the foundation of the world." Revelation 17:8 should be similarly translated. This says that anyone whose name gets blotted out fails to be able to say "my name has been continually written since the foundation of the world."

7.6) Will All Unbelievers Take the Mark?

Now that we have closely examined the verb tense of Revelation 13:8 and 17:8, let's look at exactly what this verse is saying:

Revelation 13:8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been [continually] written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been killed.

Traditionally, the Book of Life has been interpreted as having only the names of believers. Under that assumption, this verse would mean that all unbelievers in the world will worship the beast. Then we read a few verses down (13:16-17) about the world taking the mark of the beast. It's easy to conclude that this chapter is saying all unbelievers will wind up taking the mark of the beast and so be eternally condemned.

But look at the verse with the understanding that everyone who has not hardened their hearts is still in the Book of Life. Thus, it's only those who harden their hearts that will worship the beast. People are blotted from the Book of Life when they harden their hearts against Christ. If the Book of Life were a book that only contains the names of those predestined to be believers, then it would mean that everyone else will worship the beast. But the Book of Life has the names of everyone who has not rejected Christ. So Revelation 13:8 does not mean that all unbelievers will worship the beast. People who harden their hearts against Christ will thus worship the beast and then get their names blotted.

Thus, there can still be many people who will remain in the foolish group but will not take the mark of the beast. There can still be billions of people, especially very poor people in third-world countries like India, who will not get caught up in all the TV propaganda of the one-world government. But the more educated people of first-world countries who do not love Jesus Christ will have a tendency to believe the lies of the antichrist, and will wind up worshipping the beast.

7.7) More on the Unpardonable Sin

Earlier in this chapter we took a close look at Matthew chapter 12, and the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 12:32, Jesus says, “Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” Speaking a word against Jesus is anger, but it’s not a complete hardening of the heart against Christ. The context of the passage is about the miracles performed by the Holy Spirit. The miracle of healing a man was called the work of Beelzebub (Satan). The Holy Spirit was doing the miracles. The miracles presented undeniable proof that Christ is the Messiah. It was like the time when the people rejected God in the desert, even in the light of all the miracles performed for Moses. Consequently, speaking against the miracles was speaking against the Holy Spirit.

The miracles left no doubt that Christ was who he said he was. But some of them hardened their hearts to the point where they could no longer see the obvious, or hear Christ’s voice trying to speak to their hearts, while all the evidence proved that Jesus was the Messiah. This is the unpardonable sin.

An overall outline of the book of Matthew can show that Matthew 12 is the climax. The kingdom of heaven was forcefully advancing since John the Baptist (Matthew 11:12). Jesus taught plainly, as in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). But after some of the Pharisees committed the unpardonable sin by saying the miracles were the works of Beelzebub, Jesus began to speak in parables (Matthew 13:10-17). He did so to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9 saying, “By hearing you will hear, and will in no way understand; Seeing you will see, and will in no way perceive: for this people’s heart has grown callous, their ears are dull of hearing” (Matthew 13:14-15).

God does not want people to commit the unpardonable sin. God does not want to blot their names out of the book. Therefore, God wisely withholds much of His revelations about himself until people are ready and willing to accept Him.

Today, the gospel is spread through the witness of Christians. Often people have knowledge of the Creator before missionaries come, but never of God’s Son. If revelation of God’s Son were to be given by God’s audible voice, or by angels, then rejection could be unpardonable. Thus, God prefers that witnesses provide the good news. Rejection of the gospel as given by a missionary or preacher is not unpardonable.

Judas committed the unpardonable sin. Judas was given the privilege of being one of Christ’s twelve disciples. The twelve were given more understanding about

God than anyone else had ever received. Therefore, when Judas betrayed Christ, the sin was unpardonable (John 17:12). Judas' sin was greater than Pilate's (John 19:11). When Jesus was crucified, he asked the Father to forgive them, for they didn't understand what they were doing (Luke 23:34). The key here is that they didn't understand. God was able to forgive them because they didn't understand. Even those who pierced him will be resurrected when Christ again appears (Rev. 1:7). Judas understood what he was doing. He was not forgiven.

Judas regretted his actions. Filled with remorse, he confessed that he had sinned (Mat 27:3-5). He even threw the thirty pieces of silver back into the temple, begging the religious leaders to release Jesus (Mat 27:3-5). But Judas was not forgiven. Judas was not damned because he hung himself. He was condemned because he committed the unpardonable sin.

In John 12:32, Jesus said, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself." All men includes every person ever born, and every person that will be born. All men, therefore, have the free will to accept or reject Christ. All men will have this opportunity with full understanding and without Satan's deceit.

At the final Great White Throne Judgment, after the millennium, the Lamb's Book of Life will be opened (Revelation 20:12). Anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life is thrown eternally into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). At that time, everyone who has not committed the unpardonable sin will still have his or her name written in the book. No one will be condemned unless they have their names blotted out by committing the unpardonable sin. No one will have an excuse, saying they didn't understand or know about God.

You must have faith in Jesus Christ in order to be eternally saved. You must mature in Jesus Christ in order to live past the Great White Throne Judgment. No one can come to the Father, except through Christ (John 14:6), and there is no other name under heaven by which a person can be saved (Acts 4:12).

7.8) Taking the Mark of the Beast is the Unpardonable Sin

During the great tribulation, the antichrist will rule over every nation, tribe, people, and language. He is given a mouth, meaning the free will to speak, to utter proud words and blasphemies against God. He slanders God's name, his dwelling place, and those who live in heaven (Revelation 13:5-7). "He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4 NIV). Thus, the antichrist himself also commits the unpardonable sin.

This will be a time when it will be popular in the world to reject Christ. Those who harden their hearts so they can no longer hear Christ's voice will worship the antichrist (Revelation 13:8) and their names will be blotted from the Book of Life. It's interesting to note that the antichrist is called the beast. This comes from Daniel chapter 7, which speaks of four beasts or four governmental systems. The fourth beast is the one-world government of the antichrist in the days of the great tribulation.

We can also see the beast symbolism in Daniel chapter 4, which talks about Nebuchadnezzar being given the mind of the beast. But the symbolism of the beast probably goes back even further to the time of Moses. After all the spectacular miracles, the people built a golden calf and worshiped it. A calf is a beast. As we will see, the worship of the beast in the great tribulation is this same unpardonable sin.

Before the 42-month reign of the antichrist, the two witnesses will prophesy for 1260 days (Rev 11:3). The witnesses will be known worldwide. Upon their deaths, the world will exchange gifts in celebration (Rev 11:10). The world will probably blame the witnesses for the trumpet-plagues, which will occur during these 1260 days (Rev 11:6). The trumpet-plagues are similar in nature to the plagues on Egypt. For example, a third of the seas are turned into blood (Rev 8:8). The people of the world will see these plagues from God, like the plagues on Egypt. Without the proper response to God, they can harden their hearts to the point of the unpardonable sin. Those who take the mark of the beast will worship the beast and his statue (Rev 13:8, 15). It will be no different than when the people of Israel worshipped the calf after seeing all the miracles.

People will come to either very much love or very much hate Christ. Those who worship the beast and take the mark of the beast will be doing so out of hatred for Christ. This then, is the unpardonable sin. They will be rejecting Christ in a way that does not involve a lack of understanding. Everyone who takes the mark of the beast will have his or her name blotted out of the Lamb's Book of Life.

Revelation talks a lot about the Lamb's Book of Life. It's mentioned in Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 20:15, and 21:27. Revelation 20:4-5 says that those who take the mark of the beast will not be resurrected when Christ returns. They will not get resurrected, because they will have committed the unpardonable sin. Only those who have a mature relationship with Christ are willing to give up their lives instead of taking the mark.

Mark 13:13 You will be hated by all men for my name's sake, but he who endures to the end, the same will be saved.

Whatever happened to salvation by grace alone? Is Christ talking about the unsaved becoming saved? No, because the verse is about those who are hated by all for Christ's sake. Those who are hated by all for Christ's name sake must endure to the end of the great tribulation, or they will lose their salvation. It's clear that even true Christians, who have professed Christ's name for salvation, can lose their salvation if they take the mark of the beast during the great tribulation. Their hearts would become quickly hardened. Their names will be blotted out from the Lamb's Book of Life.

During the great tribulation, carnal Christians will either become mature and walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9), or they wind up taking the mark, because of all the persecution. This is why Jesus said to watch and be ready, because we do not as yet know the day or time (Matthew 24:42, 44, 25:13). Pre-tribulation rapture advocates and amillennialists alike will often say it's simply a matter of accepting Christ, and then you are ready for Christ's return. The Doctrine of Imminence, however, is a false doctrine. It's not simply a matter of accepting Christ as Savior. We must walk as Jesus walked now, because when the great tribulation comes, a Christian who has not matured could easily take the mark of the beast instead of sacrificing his or her life. Only the Christian who "endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:22, 24:13, Mark 13:13).

7.9) The Unpardonable Sin in the Age to Come

Jesus said that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in this age, or in the age to come (Matthew 12:31-32). The age to come is the millennial reign of Christ. Those in the middle foolish groups, during the millennium, will eventually mature in Christ, or they will commit the unpardonable sin.

At the start of the millennium, Satan is chained so that he can no longer deceive the nations. During that time, for anyone who does not mature in Christ, it will not be because of Satan's deceit. At the end of the thousand years he must be released for a short time (Rev. 20:2-3). During the thousand years, one's loyalty to the government is equivalent to one's loyalty to Christ. Christ will literally be the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords (1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14, 19:16), the ruler of the world. Many will be led into a mature discipleship relationship with Christ. Many new babies will be born during that time. At the end of the thousand

years, Satan must be released. Everyone who wants to develop a mature relationship with Christ will have done so by that time.

During the millennium, everyone who is still carnal will be forced to become either wise or wicked. Jesus draws every person to himself so that every person decides for himself whether to accept or reject Christ's reign over his or her life. For each of us, this decision is made with full understanding and without deception from Satan. This is true for every person who has ever lived or who will ever live in the future. It matters not the time, place, or culture to which one is born. Every person will be given both the opportunity and the requirement to decide for themselves whether to accept or reject Christ. And accepting Christ means to become like Christ.

When Satan is released, he will go out again to deceive the nations. Multitudes will revolt against the government (Revelation 20:8). They will march the breadth of the earth to attack Jerusalem. But with Christ as King of Kings, an attack on Jerusalem is an attack against Christ. Thus they will be committing the unpardonable sin and will have their names blotted out of the Lamb's Book of Life. At this point in time, there will be no more carnal Christians. At this juncture, everyone whose name is still in the Lamb's Book of Life will have matured in Christ. Everyone whose name is not in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire.

7.10) Some to Everlasting Condemnation

Hosea 13:13-14 also talks about the resurrection.

Hosea 13:13-14 ESV The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son, for at the right time he does not present himself at the opening of the womb. (14) Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

Hosea 13 is about the northern ten tribes of Israel, called Ephraim. After the northern kingdom was separated from Judah, they turned to idol worship (verse 2). God cared for them in the desert (verses 5-6). But they rejected God. Their sins were not forgiven (verse 12).

This verse uses the metaphor of the woman giving birth. In chapter 3 of this book, titled "Born Again Verses," we saw how extensively this metaphor is used throughout Scripture. The woman is Israel, and the birth is the resurrection. Here,

we see that these people who rejected God, and turned to idol worship, will not come out of the grave when the time comes. They do not come to the opening of the womb. It's very similar to when they made the golden calf in the desert. Likewise, these people turned to idol worship and lost their salvation. They will not be "born again." They will not be resurrected.

Daniel 12:2 shows us the distinction between those resurrected to life, and those resurrected to shame and contempt. Also, this verse in Hosea 13:13-14 shows us those who are not resurrected at all. They do not come to the opening of the womb. They have committed the unpardonable sin.

Therefore, by comparing Daniel 12:2 with Hosea 13:13-14, we have more evidence that there are three types of people in the grave.

1. The wicked do not come to the opening of the womb. They have committed an unpardonable sin, such as idol worship after having received the personal knowledge of God.
2. The foolish are those who are resurrected to shame and contempt. They are the unjust of Acts 24:15. Theirs is a resurrection of judgment according to John 5:28-29.
3. The wise are those who are resurrected to everlasting life. They are the just of Acts 24:15. Theirs is a resurrection of life according to John 5:28-29.

This then, is the New Wine System, as presented in this book. Only those who commit the unpardonable sin will be eternally condemned. Everyone else will eventually mature in Christ.

Chapter 8

Evidence from Hebrews

Let's take a close look at the book of Hebrews. This book gives very strong evidence of the unpardonable sin. Evidence of the unpardonable sin is further evidence that names in the Book of Life are blotted out when hearts are hardened to the point where these sins occur. Without the New Wine System, Hebrews can be a very difficult book to understand. To be more precise, there are two small passages that theologians have had difficulty in explaining based on their systems of theology.

Hebrews 6:4-6 ESV For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Hebrews 10:26-29 ESV For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. (28) Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. (29) How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

Theologians from the school of Calvinism and Reformation Theology, with their emphasis on election, tend to say that people who commit these sins were not truly saved to begin with. They were not part of the elect. They say, "Once saved always saved." But how can the not-truly-saved be partakers of the Holy Spirit? How can they have tasted of the heavenly gift and the powers of the age to come? No, the author of Hebrews makes it absolutely clear that these people are truly saved, and then they turn away from Christ and lose their salvation.

Other Calvinists say these sins are only theoretical, and cannot actually be committed because of election. They point to verse 6:9, where the writer expresses

hope of better things for the readers of his letter. One would wonder why the writer of Hebrews would feel the need to warn against sins for which there is no actual danger of committing.

Theologians from the school of Arminianism, especially of Wesleyan traditions, will allow for the loss of one's salvation (1 Timothy 1:19-20, 2 Peter 2:20-21). But they say you can repent and get it back again. Yet these verses in Hebrews 6 say that it's "impossible to restore again to repentance," because it would be crucifying the Son of God all over again. And these verses in Hebrews 10 say "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin."

These verses may be somewhat in line with the Catholic doctrines of excommunication. Those excommunicated have no hope for salvation, not even that of purgatory. But even that doctrine allows for one to "recant" before the decision of excommunication is made. The author of Hebrews does not seem to allow for a "recant." He says it's impossible to bring them back into repentance.

God's salvation is only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But amillennialism has restricted that faith in Christ to be only during this present age. Conservative Christian churches of all denominations have not allowed for simple faith in the Creator to be credited as righteousness, as was Abraham's faith. God is faithful to those who are faithful to Him. God will reveal His Son to everyone who is faithful to God. Faith in the Creator will ultimately develop into faith in Christ, as God personally reveals Christ to each individual. Conservative Christian churches have never allowed for people of other religions to be saved by simple faith in the Creator. That's because they have not allowed for the continuation of the journey of righteousness to go beyond the grave into Christ's millennial reign.

On the other hand, if the continuation of revelation and the path toward Christ continues beyond the grave, then these verses in Hebrews make a lot more sense. You don't want to commit the sin that prevents you from getting beyond the grave. When you reject a personal revelation that God gives you, then you have rejected faith in God entirely. To those who have been given much, much is required. To those who have been given little, little is expected. God does not want to give someone so much revelation of Himself that he rejects that revelation and falls away. For some, this even includes the revelation of Jesus Christ himself. The lies of Satan have produced cultural traditions that are very difficult to reject. But Christ will be revealed to all when every knee shall bow before Him, after the resurrection.

8.1) The Theme and Audience of Hebrews

The theme of Hebrews is that we must respond in faith to God's revelations. We should have faith in whatever revelations God gives us. Those revelations can be spiritual as God speaks to our hearts. Or revelations can be more physical, such as in miracles. Purposefully turning away from that faith, or denying the miracles, is unpardonable. This is why God's public and undeniable display of miracles is seldom seen, especially by the unbeliever. People can be quick to deny that these miracles are really from God.

Hebrews was written to Christians who were considering turning back to Judaism. Their reasons probably were that of persecution. But since the author goes into lots of theological details about why Christ is the Messiah, it's reasonable to assume that these pressures of persecution were leading these Christians to express their theological doubts. The author warns that turning back to Judaism would cause them to lose their salvation.

In ancient times, the Greek style of writing was very straightforward. It was point-by-point, similar to western-style writing today. Paul's letters to the Gentiles followed the Greek style, which is the western style employed today. This makes Paul's letters easy for us to understand, and easy to outline. But the Jews were eastern. Their style was circular. To the western mind, circular writing seems unorganized. But to the eastern mind, it is elegant and has beauty.

Circular writing repeats the more important points by coming back to them later in the text. It's like the important points are circled around by supporting points. You can see what's important to the author by seeing what's repeated. Those points are the theme of the book. In Hebrews, the point about losing your salvation is repeated. Also, the point about Christ being the high priest, in the order of Melchizedek, is repeated. Surprisingly, these are the important points of the book. The truth hides in the middle (center of the circle).

8.2) Hebrews 1 - A Literal Messianic Age

Chapter 1 of Hebrews establishes that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, and the Son of God. Verse 5 asks, "To which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father?'" This quote comes from Psalm 2:7. To the ancient Jew, Psalm 2 would have been all about the coming of the Messianic Age. It speaks of the nations and their kings taking a stand against the Messiah (Psalm 2:2). God says the Messiah is installed as King on Zion (Israel), "my holy hill" (verse 6). Verse 8 says God will make the nations an inheritance for the

Messiah; and he will rule the ends of the earth with an iron scepter. How more literal can a prophecy get? How else would the ancient Jews have interpreted Psalm 2? How else could the author of Hebrews have interpreted what he was quoting when writing to Jewish people?

In the very same verse of Hebrews 1:5, he also quotes 2 Samuel 7:14, where Samuel makes a similar statement about God becoming David's Father, and David being God's son. The author of Hebrews sees this as a statement of the Davidic covenant, with Christ being David's Son, and heir to David's throne. So again, the author of Hebrews is drawing on two Old Testament passages that establish the Messiah as ruling on David's throne, and Israel as ruling all the nations of the earth. Back then, this is exactly what the Jews believed will happen.

Then in verse 8, the author quotes Psalm 45:6-7. Verse 5 of Psalm 45 speaks of arrows piercing the hearts of the king's enemies, and the nations falling beneath the king's feet. Then verse 6, as quoted in Hebrews, speaks of the Messiah's throne lasting forever and ever. Again, no Jew of that day would have interpreted these words any differently than a literal Messianic Age.

The first chapter is also about Christ being the Son of God. This is framed as messages that are spoken to the angels, and messages from the angels. Then Hebrews 2:1 warns against drifting away by ignoring this message. Verses 2 and 3 speak of the great punishment that awaits those who ignore this message. This is the theme of Hebrews. These messages to and from the angels are revelations about God. We must be faithful to the personal revelations that God gives us. If we turn away from those revelations, it can cause us to fall into eternal condemnation.

Hebrews 2:8 says that everything was put under the feet of Christ. Everything is subject to Him. This reflects back to chapter 1, where the author makes it clear that Christ is the Messiah and reigns on David's throne. But this verse also says that at the present we do not see everything subject to him. Hence, the author is affirming that Christ will reign in the Messianic Age, just as they expected the Messiah to do. The covenant with David is being partially fulfilled. Everything was put under the feet of Christ. But, according to the verse, it's not yet completely fulfilled. We don't yet see everything subject to him. The author obviously believes that in the future everyone will see that everything is subject to him. So in the future, the literal Messianic Age will come. In the future, the covenant with David will be literally fulfilled.

8.3) Hebrews 3 – Hearing God’s Voice and Hardening Your Heart.

In chapter 3, verses 1-6, the author of Hebrews talks about the faithfulness of Moses, and Moses being a part of God’s house. God builds the house, which is the church (the temple). We are God’s house. Christ is the Son of God. Thus, Christ is the Son of the owner of the house. Also, notice that the author calls Christ the High Priest in verse 1. This is a topic that the author will keep coming back to.

Gentiles would not think it’s a problem to call Christ the High Priest. But to a Jew, there is a problem in that the Messiah is from the house of David, which is the tribe of Judah. Priests can come only from the tribe of Levi. These Jewish Christians, because of persecution, were considering turning back to Judaism. They may have seen this question as a reason for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. The author will come back to this issue several times. This little bit about relating Christ to Moses gives the author a stepping-stone back to the unpardonable sins that were committed during the generation of Moses.

Verses 7-10 warn that if today, you hear God’s voice, to not harden your hearts as they did in the rebellion. In other words, the author is relating the possible turning away from Christ to the sins of Israel after they came out of Egypt. In chapter 7 of this book, we showed that sinful generation as being the first occurrence in Scripture in which people’s names were blotted out of the Lamb’s Book of Life (Exodus 32:32-33). The author of Hebrews calls this the rebellion or provocation (verses 8 and 15). In other words, it’s a rejection of God when you already know God.

In verse 11, the author quotes Psalm 95:11, in which God declares an oath in his anger, “They will never enter my Rest.” The author quotes it again in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 3, and again in verse 5. It’s quoted three times. In other words, this is very important to the author. It’s a direct description of the consequence of the unpardonable sin. To never enter God’s rest means two things. First, it means you are always at odds with God. Secondly, it means you don’t get resurrected when Christ returns. Your name is blotted out of the Lamb’s Book of Life.

In the context of the passage, why would one never enter God’s rest? Three times, the author quotes, “They will never enter my Rest.” And three times, the author says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years” (ESV Hebrews 3:7-10, 3:15, 4:7). According to the author, the consequence of hardening one’s heart when one hears God’s voice is that they will never enter God’s rest.

Also notice verse 9 says that they saw God's works forty years. This goes back to what Jesus taught about the leaders having eyes to see, but not seeing and ears to hear, but not hearing. They do not see the miracles and they do not hear Christ's voice in their hearts. Forty years after the miracles of Christ, without repentance by the Jewish leaders, Jerusalem was destroyed. When the Holy Spirit speaks through God's works, and one denies the works as being of God, it's unpardonable. When one hears God's voice, and denies its God, it's unpardonable.

The unpardonable sin is to harden one's heart and no longer hear Christ's voice, or to fall away, after having received the knowledge of God. In these verses, it's after hearing God's voice. In chapter 6, it's rejecting Christ after having received the Holy Spirit. As we will see, this warning is given three times in Hebrews. Three times the author gives a warning against hardening your heart when you hear God's voice (Hebrews 3:7-9, 3:15, 4:7). Three times the author says you will never enter God's rest (Hebrews 3:11, 4:3, 4:5). And three times the author warns about the rejection of Christ, saying the sin cannot be forgiven (Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26-27, 12:25-29). Therefore, this is the theme of Hebrews.

8.4) Hebrews 4 – Entering God's Rest

In Hebrews 4:3-5, the author relates the rest that God has for us to God's rest on the seventh day of the Creation. It's important here to interpret this in the way an ancient Jew would have done so at that time. The Sabbath rest was an extremely important part of their culture. The author relates the weekly Sabbath to entering God's rest, something that the wicked generation of Moses was not able to do.

It's also important to note that in these verses, the author points out that the gospel given to the generation of Moses was of no value to them because they didn't have faith in the Creator. In other words, you must have faith in the Creator in order to be saved. God then gives you a personal revelation of Himself. This is described as a message, which relates it back to the messages to and from the angels, in chapter 1. When the message of God's revelation is combined with faith, your faith is made stronger, and eventually you can enter God's rest.

In Hebrews 4:7, the author quotes Scripture that says, "Do not harden your hearts" when you hear God's voice. This is a quote from Psalm 95:8, just a few verses above Psalm 95:11 in which God declares, "They will never enter my rest." So the point is repeatedly made. We are judged based on the personal revelation that God gives us. To those whom much is given, much is required. To those whom little is given, little is expected. Do not be fearful when God speaks to you.

At some point, God will speak to everyone. Our eternal salvation depends on how we respond to God's voice. Christ's sheep hear his voice.

Verses 8-10 say there remains a Sabbath rest for God's people. Again, it's very important to interpret these verses about the Sabbath in the way an ancient Jew would have done. "For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work just as God did from his" (verse 10). People have come up with all sorts of ways to interpret this verse other than the way an ancient Jew have interpreted it.

The Jews grew up resting on the Sabbath of each week. The sentence ends with "just as God did from his." Especially in the context of verse 4, this is without doubt a reference to the seventh day of the Creation. The phrase, "For those who enter God's rest," is about the rest that the generation of Moses was not able to enter. The phrase, "also rests from his own work," is talking about keeping the Sabbath each week. No Jew would have interpreted it in any other manner.

Some have tried to say we rest (or cease) from doing good works that we think will earn our salvation. In other words, we stop doing our own good works. But that simply doesn't fit the context of the passage. Some people try to say this phrase is talking about God's rest. But then the sentence would make no sense. It would read thus: "For anyone who enters God's rest also [enters God's rest]"? Obviously that's not what the author intended to mean. The author is saying that those who will be able to enter God's rest must also follow God's example and rest on the Sabbath. Verse 11 confirms this by saying that failing to do so is disobedience.

We rest to have time with God so that we can hear Christ's voice. We may go to church on Sunday. And sure, we should pray every day. But the Sabbath is a time to really deepen our personal relationship with God. Sunday church services can be good, but they are not a time to spend alone with God. Our Sabbath is a time to build our faith. That's why the author relates the rest of the Sabbath with God's rest. We rest alone with God. The author stated that the generation of Moses was lacking in faith. They saw all the miracles, but they didn't have the faith they needed. You build faith by spending time with God. This makes us holy, as we overcome sin. We thus keep the Sabbath holy.

During the great tribulation it will be the same. God will reveal himself in miracles. The miracles will be of a nature which will cause people without great faith to deny that God is doing the miracles. The trumpet-plagues of Revelation will be miracles that many people will deny are from God. The rebellion that occurs during the great tribulation will be similar to the rebellion at the time of Moses.

Many people will harden their hearts and get their names blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life. Many carnal Christians will not have the faith to endure. They will wind up worshiping the antichrist and taking the mark of the beast. It's important to build a strong relationship with Christ in order to be able to endure to the end, and so be saved (Matthew 10:22, 24:13, Mark 13:13). Spending the Sabbath with Christ is one good way to build your relationship with Christ.

The last chapter of this book is titled, "Christian Perfection in the Sabbath." The issue of the Sabbath is discussed in more detail in that chapter. Just remember that the Sabbath is an important aspect of what God has given us for the purpose of overcoming sin.

8.5) God's Rest in the Millennium

Those who don't believe in the millennium do not accept other aspects of what's being said in these verses (Hebrews 4:4-11). The early church, before Augustine, believed in the millennial reign of Christ. They also believed the millennium is the seventh of seven millennia. In other words, the Messianic reign of Christ occurs on the Sabbath millennium. Christ is literally Lord of the Sabbath millennium.

Israel had to wander in the desert forty years before they could enter the Promised Land. The Promised Land is the land of Palestine that God promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18-21). National Israel, at the time of Solomon, possessed most of this land, but only for a short time. The promise remains. Those who are in Christ are heirs to the promise of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). Thus, the complete fulfillment of Abraham's covenant will be in the millennium as Christ reigns with the saints from Old and New Jerusalem.

The partial fulfillment of Abraham's covenant, at the time of Moses, is therefore a type (symbol) of its complete fulfillment in the millennium. That generation was not able to enter the Promised Land, and God's rest. The Promised Land is not only a region of the earth; it's also a time. It's the Sabbath millennium of seven millennia. The Sabbath millennium is God's rest. For six days God works to redeem his people. On the Sabbath day, God rested. Therefore, those who hear Christ's voice in their hearts will enter God's rest by being resurrected to live during the millennial reign of Christ.

8.6) Hebrews 5 – The Order of Melchizedek

In chapter 5, the author gets into a complex issue, saying that Jesus is the high priest in the order of Melchizedek. He gets this from an obscure Old Testament passage, which is Psalm 110:4. This is the same Psalm from which he quoted, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (Hebrews 1:13). Hebrews speaks to a Jewish audience, who would naturally question that the high priest could be from any tribe other than Levi. Remember that the author’s intent is to keep these Christians from turning back to Judaism. This passage in Psalm 110:4 is going to be the author’s main evidence that Jesus can, in fact, be the High Priest. But then the author takes a step back from this complex issue (5:11). The author returns to this topic in more detail in chapter 7. The arguments about Melchizedek are to get past this stumbling block for Jewish Christians. The arguments about the unpardonable sin are about the consequences of them turning away from Christ and going back to Judaism.

8.7) Hebrews 6 – The Unpardonable Sin

The author indicates that he would like to discuss the more foundational issues of (1) “repentance from acts that lead to death,” (2) “faith in God,” (3) “instruction in baptism,” (4) the “laying on of hands,” (5) the “resurrection of the dead,” (6) and “eternal judgment” (all NIV - 6:1-2). The author wants to return to these issues later. And for some of them he does. But the author skips over these foundational issues and moves straight to his number one point. Even if you have received the Holy Spirit, if you fall away from Christ, you cannot be brought back into repentance (6:4-6).

Let’s look at the subjects the author mentions and skips over. The first is “repentance from acts that lead to death” (NIV). Most translations render it as “repentance from dead works.” Dead works are generally understood to be works of self-righteousness instead of works motivated out of love for God and neighbor. Those who ignore the Father’s leadership and will do dead works. “Dead works,” or “acts that lead to death” can also be found in Hebrews 9:14. Here it seems more to suggest that these “acts” or “works” are sin from which we need to be cleansed.

Could “dead works” really be sins that lead to death, as the NIV translation seems to suggest? Could “dead works” really mean “acts that lead to death?” Based on the overall context of Hebrews, I believe that’s what the author is saying. This brings to mind some interesting and sometimes confusing words of John. He talks about sins that lead to death and sins that don’t lead to death.

1 John 5:16-18 ESV If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death [**foolish**], he shall ask, and God will give him life--to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death [**wicked**]; I do not say that one should pray for that. (17) All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. (18) We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning [**wise**], but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

Do you see the three types of people in just these three verses?

- 1) The wise are those who do not keep on sinning.
- 2) The foolish are those who are committing sins not leading to death.
- 3) The wicked are those who commit the sin that leads to death.

No doubt theologians have had some very interesting explanations for this verse in 1 John. But the most obvious interpretation is that there are two types of sin. There is a sin which is unpardonable, and there are other sins for which we can repent. This context of this verse is 1 John 5, which is probably John writing against Gnostics. They knew Christ but then they started to heavily distort the teaching for their own selfish gains. The Gnostics taught that Jesus was not born of God (John 5:1), but that the “Christ-spirit” came upon him when he was baptized and left him before he died. Almost every point John makes in this chapter goes against Gnostic teachings. John probably considers the Gnostic leaders to have sinned in the unpardonable way that leads to death.

Next, the author of Hebrews mentions faith in God. Hebrews 11, of course, is the great faith chapter. But as we will see, this chapter is not just about faith. It’s about combining faith with the hearing of God’s voice. And the hearing of God’s voice is fundamental to understanding about the unpardonable sin. We must respond with faith when we hear God’s voice.

The author speaks about the laying on of hands. This is probably in relation to receiving the Holy Spirit. Some Pentecostals believe that receiving the Holy Spirit comes sometime after your initial profession of faith. Non-charismatic groups disagree. But either way, the author is probably talking about the Holy Spirit, because in Acts, the Holy Spirit did come with the laying on of hands.

This verse says all of these preliminary points are “foundational” to the next point, which is the unpardonable sin. The Holy Spirit is mentioned in verses 4-6 of chapter 6, where the author first spells out his warning. The unpardonable sin is a deliberate rejection faith. The warning is for those who have heard God’s voice

and know deep inside God's truth. The teaching about Christ's voice has been foundational in everything that's been said up to this point. This personal deep down knowledge of God comes through Christ's voice and the Holy Spirit.

The author speaks about the resurrection of the dead. Those who have not committed the unpardonable sin will be raised from death. This too is an important foundational teaching that relates to the unpardonable sin.

Finally, the author mentions the eternal judgment. As John said, there is sin that does not lead to death. We can repent from those sins. But there is also a sin that leads to death. John is saying that prayer for those people will not help them. The eternal judgment is about the sin that leads to death, as John puts it.

The author is concerned that his audience does not understand these fundamental issues. Getting into the details could have caused the reader to get lost in confusion. The author, accordingly, skips these fundamental issues and gets straight into his main point.

Hebrews 6:4-6 ESV For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Reading this can be scary. It's scary for a lot of Christians today who are confused by this verse. The author immediately speaks of his confidence that this fate will not come to his readers (verse 9-12). We can have assurance that this fate will not come to us simply by having faith in God (verses 12-15).

Some would say that this verse is not talking about true believers because you can't lose your salvation. But only true believers would have shared in the gift of the Holy Spirit. People who see the miracles of the Holy Spirit but attribute them to Beelzebub (Satan) are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. They would be unbelievers. But believers have the Holy Spirit. If believers deliberately turn away from God they are danger of committing this unpardonable sin for the very same reason. They would be rejecting the Holy Spirit. Those who argue that you can't lose your salvation are doing so on the basis of the incorrect doctrine of salvation election. They assume that if your name is in the Lamb's Book of Life, that it can't be blotted out. But as we have seen, it works just the opposite.

Everyone is in the Lamb's Book of Life until they are blotted out due to the unpardonable sin. Salvation and election are not the same. The elect are those who have an [agape] love for Christ and who learn to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9) before they die. You can be saved without being one of the elect. The author of Hebrews is addressing these Christians as having the Holy Spirit, yet being immature. He views them as still being on milk, not solid food (5:13). Their immaturity actually threatens loss of their salvation.

Jesus speaks of the wicked servants who beat their fellow servants. They will not know the day or the hour of Christ's return. They are assigned a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. These wicked servants would have received the Holy Spirit but they choose to reject the teaching of the Holy Spirit and instead they use their positions towards their own evil desires.

When people have been given true down-deep revelations of God, and they harden their hearts, their names can be blotted out. The author of Hebrews is addressing Christians who are considering turning back to Judaism. The Holy Spirit confirms the understanding of the truth of Jesus Christ down deep. It would be unpardonable to intentionally reject that revelation.

The author must go to great lengths to affirm their faith in Christ, showing why Jesus Christ really is the Son of God, the Messiah. The author must argue against obstacles that would naturally be seen by the Jews.

Hebrews 6:7-8 ESV For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

The "rain" is the voice of Christ, or the Holy Spirit. If, after receiving the "rain," the land does not bear fruit, then it is burned. This is similar to the teaching of John 15:1-6. This illustrates the unpardonable sin.

Beginning with chapter 6, verse 15, the author starts talking about the covenant with Abraham. He brings up Melchizedek again to show why Jesus can be the High Priest, and yet not be a Levite (chapter 7). He speaks of the new covenant that was prophesied by Jeremiah (chapter 8). This is important to the author because he quotes quite a bit of it (Hebrews 8:8-12, Jeremiah 31:31-34). The author talks about how the sacrifice of Christ's blood was the final sacrifice, under the new covenant, and unlike the old covenant, only one sacrifice was needed (chapters 9 and 10, through verse 15).

8.8) Hebrews 9:27 – Are we Appointed to Die Once?

The KJV of Hebrews 9:27 says, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” On the surface, this verse could appear to speak against my view that people can get resurrected in the millennium before they accept Christ as Lord. But as we will see, that common view is taking the verse out of the context of Hebrews and its theme.

Are all men really appointed to die once? Were Enoch and Elijah appointed to die once? There is a theory that the two witnesses must be Enoch and Elijah, based on this verse, because they have not yet died. However, these two men are not the only ones who will bypass death. How about those in Christ who will endure to the end of the tribulation and are alive at the time of the rapture? Are they appointed to die once?

The context right before this verse is that Christ died once for our sins. The verse after this verse says that Christ will appear a second time to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. Verse 27 is often yanked out of this context.

The Greek word for “appointed” is used only four times in the New Testament. In the other three cases, it’s always translated as “laid up.” For example, Luke 19:20 says, “Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth.” Does this sound like “appointed?” Appointed is much too strong for this Greek word. Young’s Literal Translation (YLT) renders it as “laid up.” A better translation for this word, in this context, is “one’s lot.” In other words, it’s what is generally expected to happen. But it’s not a strong statement of unalterable destiny.

Another important Greek word used here is the word for “once.” It’s found in verses 26, 27, and 28. It can be translated as “once for all time.” A parallelism is drawn between the facts that Christ died “once for all time,” and, that likewise, most of us will die “once for all time.”

The author simply makes an analogy about Christ’s single sacrifice, using the fact that most of us will die once. It is our hope that we will not experience the second death that is spoken of in Revelation. And true believers will not die a second death. Even believers who do not overcome sin will most likely mature in Christ during the age to come. Thus, a better translation might be, “And it’s our lot for men to die once and for all time, and after this the judgment.” Again, this is in the context of Christ dying for us. So the verse is mostly about believers, including those who will believe in Christ in the age to come.

What then, is the judgment? After we die, there is a judgment as to whether we are to be resurrected. However, for a broader view of the judgment, think back to the four parables taught by Jesus in the Olivetti Discourse.

1. The parable of the wise and the wicked servants and the thief in the night (see sections 5.5 through 5.7) is interpreted in the context of Daniel 12. The wicked will not know the day and time of the resurrection and the judgment of sudden destruction until it suddenly comes upon them.
2. The parable of the ten virgins, five are wise and five are foolish (see section 5.8), is about a judgment between believers, some of whom have not had a true discipleship relationship with Christ. Jesus tells them, "I never knew you." They are resurrected but do not inherit the kingdom.
3. The parable of the talents (see section 5.9) is about the judgment of the wicked servant who was given one talent. This servant of Christ knows about Jesus and professes to serve Christ. But he really despises Christ. So he is judged as wicked and is not resurrected.
4. The parable of the sheep and the goats (see section 5.10) is about the ongoing judgment of the nations as Christ reigns as King (and Judge). The attitudes of those in the nations about Christ will largely determine if they are truly willing to become true disciples of Christ in the age to come.

Let's bring this verse back into the context of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews is a warning about the unpardonable sin. With a focus on the resurrection instead of heaven or hell, the judgment is primarily about whether or not one is resurrected. If the unpardonable sin is committed, then one will not be resurrected. That's the judgment being spoken of after death.

This same judgment also determines whether one is resurrected into a spiritual body or a natural body. It is a resurrection of eternal life or a resurrection of judgment, meaning that one is still under judgment. But that is outside the discussion of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews is more focused on the issue of whether or not one will be resurrected. That's the judgment in the context and the theme of Hebrews.

Another way to look at this judgment is to point out that Christ's Messianic reign is a thousand years of judgment. Christ is the King, and the King is the Judge. See section 17.9 for more information about the Day of Judgment being a thousand years. But again, while this is true, the context of Hebrews is whether or not one commits the unpardonable sin.

8.9) Hebrews 10 – The Unpardonable Sin - Again

In Hebrews 10:16-18, the author quotes some of the new covenant again. (The largest New Testament quote of Old Testament Scripture is back in Hebrews 8:8, where the author quoted the New Covenant from Jeremiah 31:31.) This is that eastern circular writing style, which repeats the important points, surrounding the important points with supporting points.

This time, in quoting the new covenant, he states that there is no longer an animal sacrifice for sin (10:18). This reminds us of his original reason for why the sin is unpardonable (6:5-6). To forgive it would require the crucifixion of Christ all over again.

Hebrews 10:16-18 ESV "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," (17) then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." (18) Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Here we see the author's logic. Under the old covenant, the sacrifices were made over and over. That's because it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin (10:4). But under the new covenant, only one sacrifice is needed. The one sacrifice is good enough for all our sins. If we nevertheless reject that one sacrifice, there is no other sacrifice available.

Some would argue that verse 18 is simply a statement that Christ's sacrifice covers all our sins, so that he only had to die once. That's certainly part of what verse 18 is saying, but verse 18 is also a link back to the unpardonable sin of verse 6:5-6. This is shown in verse 26 and 27 of chapter 10, which makes it clear.

Hebrews 10:26-27 ESV For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Here the author repeats his important point. It's the circular eastern style of writing. In our understanding of the overall context of Hebrews, we can see that this verse is not talking about weak moments of sin, or even about sinful habits (addictions) that we have not been able to break

It's talking about hardening one's heart against the teachings of the Holy Spirit. One can lose their salvation and then no sacrifice would be left for salvation. If the Holy Spirit is still convicting you of a sin, the Holy Spirit has not left you. But

if you get to the point where you continually want the Holy Spirit to go away, and don't want to hear Christ's voice, then there will no longer be a sacrifice for later repentance. It's the unpardonable sin. As John says, it's the sin that leads to death.

Next, in verses 28-31, the author relates the unpardonable sin to disobedience against the Law of Moses. Those who rejected this revelation of God were put to death after the testimony of two or three witnesses. Again, it's all about hardening the heart against God's revelations. It's not about weak moments in which you slip up and sin. God's mercy is awesome. If we repent of our sins, there is mercy. But acts of rebellion to God's revelations lead to death. Verse 31 says, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

The author then reflects upon the earlier days of his audience, when they had first received the light. Receiving the light is a metaphor for hearing Christ's voice and receiving God's revelation. They had responded to that revelation with faith. Faith in that revelation enabled them to persevere through persecution, and to have little concern about the confiscation of their property. Faith in Christ's voice caused them to sympathize with those in prison. The author is asking his audience to remember those days, and to return to that faith.

Then, in verses 37-39, the author restates the unpardonable sin again. The author makes it clear that if we respond to God's revelations with faith, then we will not be destroyed.

Hebrews 10:37-39 ESV For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; (38) but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." (39) But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Christ told us that he is coming again. We respond to that revelation with faith.

8.10) Hebrews 11 – Salvation is by Faith

The requirement of faith to God's revelations leads the author into his famous chapter on faith. How does faith tie to the overall theme of the book? In verse 4:2, we see that witnessing the miracles in the desert was of no value to them, because they did not combine this revelation of God with faith. In verse 4:14, the author speaks of the revelation of God, about the great High Priest who has gone through the heavens, who is Jesus, the Son of God. He tells us to hold firmly to this revelation with faith. In verse 6:1, the author lists faith in God as one of the

foundational teachings. It's a foundational teaching that must be understood in order to understand the unpardonable sin.

Back in verse 6:12, after speaking about the scary unpardonable sin, the author assures his audience that he is confident of better things for them. In this verse, he asks them not to become lazy, but to imitate the faith of those who came before, and who will inherit the promises. In verse 10:22, after speaking about the one sacrifice of Christ, the author asks us to draw near to God through faith. We must respond to the revelation of Christ's sacrifice with faith. And finally, this chapter is introduced in verse 10:38 (quoted above), with the statement that we must live by faith, because those who shrink back from God's revelations are destroyed.

This chapter is a survey of God's revelations, and how these people responded to revelations with faith. Interestingly, the first revelation was the Creation itself. This is stated in verse 11:3. Everyone has had revelation of the Creation. Everyone has some revelation of God to which they must respond. To those whom much is given, much is required. To those whom little is given, little is expected.

The author subsequently speaks of the faith of Abel and Enoch. Enoch walked with God and was no more (Genesis 5:24). The author of Hebrews elaborates on this, saying that he did not experience death. Enoch had a huge amount of revelation about God as he walked with God. Enoch was commended as one who pleased God. The author then deduces that without faith, it is impossible to please God.

We must believe that God exists, and he rewards those who seek him (verse 6). In other words, even those who only have the revelation of the Creation, if they respond to that revelation with faith, they will be rewarded. These are the two extremes. There are those who only have the revelation of the Creation. On the other end of the spectrum, there are those like Enoch, who walk with God and receive huge amounts of revelation. Enoch's faith in huge revelations was enough that he didn't die.

Noah received revelation that the rains would come. He responded to that revelation with faith and built the ark (verse 7). Abraham received revelation that he should go to a place where he would receive his inheritance (verses 8-9). He responded to that revelation by going to the Promised Land, and it was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, 5, 9, 11, 22, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23). In addition, the author goes through many more examples of people responding to God's revelation with faith.

This brings us back to chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews, in which three times he quotes Psalm 95:7 (Hebrews 3:7, 3:15, 4:7).

Psalms 95:7b-11 NIV Today, if you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, (9) where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. (10) For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways." (11) So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."

8.11) Hebrews 12 – Living Holy Lives

In chapter 12, the author takes these examples of faith and concludes that we must live holy lives.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore let us also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, (2) looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We respond to God's revelations with faith. God's revelations tell us that God is holy. We respond to the revelation of God's holiness by fighting to overcome sin in order to be holy ourselves. The author then speaks about the disciplines in whom the Father corrects in order to achieve holiness in the ones he calls sons. Verse 14 says, "Without holiness, no one will see the Lord."

The metaphor of running a race, used in this verse, is also used by Paul in Acts 20:4, 1 Cor. 9:24, Gal. 2:2, Gal. 5:7, and 2 Tim. 4:7. In Hebrews, we can find another of Paul's metaphors. Colossians 2:17 speaks of the shadow of things that were to come. This same metaphor is also found in Hebrews 8:5, and Hebrews 10:1. The author of Hebrews uses the eastern writing style, which is different from the western writing style used in Paul's letters. But then again, Paul's letters were written to Gentile churches. Paul was both a Roman citizen and a well-educated Jew. He would have known how to write in both styles.

But let's get back to the text. The author tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus. This is how we overcome sin. We don't look at ourselves. We look to Christ. This reminds us of Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:25-31). When Peter began to look at the waves, and think about himself instead of Christ, he began to sink. Jesus said, "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?" (verse 31). To keep your eyes fixed on Jesus builds faith. So the author says to keep our eyes on "the author and perfecter of our faith." As we act on our faith to be more like Jesus, we become holy. We must always consider what Christ went through, at the cross, as we endure hardships and persecutions, and as we overcome sin (Hebrews 12:3).

The next verse (12:4) tells us that our struggle with sin must continue even to the point of shedding our own blood. This should be taken both literally and figuratively. In context, the author has just mentioned the cross. We must take up our cross and follow Christ (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23). This means we must be ready to literally die a martyr's death if it's needed in order to avoid sin. But figuratively, this verse tells us how important it is to overcome sin. It's like when Jesus said to gouge out your eye if it causes you to sin. If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off (Matthew 5:29-30, 18:8-9, Mark 9:43-47). This is not to be taken literally. Doing so literally would not stop the sin. But these verses give us an idea of just how important it is to overcome sin. If we truly have faith in Christ, then we must overcome sin.

Hebrews 12:5-11 talks about how God disciplines those he calls his sons. The child may not understand why it's so important to obey his parents. But loving parents know there will be major problems for their children if they are allowed to grow up without overcoming the sinful habits (addictions) they have.

Verse 14 warns that without holiness no one will see the Lord. It's easy to read this verse and say we get our holiness from Christ. The blood of Christ covers our sins and makes us appear holy to God. It's easy to read this verse and say that nobody is perfect, that we will always have some sin. So these little sins in my life are going to be covered by Christ's blood anyway, right? Would the author of Hebrews be in agreement with this type of thinking? Is this what the author meant when he asked if we had resisted sin to the point of shedding our blood?

This type of inappropriate thinking comes from equating salvation with holiness. If we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, then we will be saved. But you can be saved without seeing the Lord, in this context. To be saved simply means we will be resurrected. However, we must completely overcome sin if we are to be caught up

in the rapture to the wedding banquet inside Paradise. We must completely overcome sin if we are to see the Lord. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. That's why the Lord disciplines those he calls sons.

Then, we get the third warning about the unpardonable sin.

Hebrews 12:25-29 See that you don't refuse him who speaks. For if they didn't escape when they refused him who warned on the Earth, how much more will we not escape who turn away from him who warns from heaven, (26) whose voice shook the earth then, but now he has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens." (27) This phrase, "Yet once more," signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. (28) Therefore, receiving a Kingdom that can't be shaken, let us have grace, through which we serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe, (29) for our God is a consuming fire.

This is a warning against refusing him who speaks, which is the unpardonable sin. When we hear God's voice, we must respond with faith. "At that time," refers to the days of Moses. Those that did not escape had been warned by the miracles of Moses. The Holy Spirit warns us from heaven. This is in the context of verses 18-21, with the voice speaking from the mountain. It's also in the context of the entire book. The author uses the generation of Moses, the generation that would not enter God's rest, as an example of the unpardonable sin.

At that time his voice shook the earth. Again, the voice was from the mountain. In the future, the voice will shake not only the earth, but the heavens as well. This relates to verses 22-24, which speak of the new covenant and the heavenly New Jerusalem. It started with Christ's first coming and is fulfilled with his second coming.

"Once more" indicates the removal of created things. The shaking of the heavens and the earth is like the new heavens and the new earth. It's a figurative shaking. Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 speak of the new heavens and the new earth. These chapters are about the coming Messianic Age. Isaiah is a book of poetry. The new heavens and new earth, in these chapters, are figurative. They mean a new age. It's like Isaiah 24:23, in which the sun and the moon are ashamed and abashed. Emotional characteristics are given to elements of the creation to indicate the prevailing emotion for the time.

But in the Bible, figurative speech tends to later become literal. We are saved now from sin and death. But we still die. Later, we will be literally saved and will literally no longer die. We are new creatures. Later, we will literally be born again into new spiritual bodies and literally be a new creation. Likewise, at the start of the millennium, it will be figuratively new heavens and a new earth. After the millennium, there will literally be a new earth. When Christ returns, there will be a great figurative shaking. The entire world's governments will be overturned. At the end of the millennium, the heavens and the earth will be "removed." We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

8.12) Paul Summarizes Hebrews

As we have seen, Hebrews warns Christians that turning back to Judaism could result in their permanent loss of salvation, even for true Christians who have received the Holy Spirit. The author of Hebrews uses the example of the people of Israel in the desert. They heard God's voice and saw all the miracles, but they rejected God. They went back to the worship of an Egyptian idol, which was the golden calf. Their names were blotted out of the Book of Life.

1 Corinthians 10:1-21 can be viewed as a summary of the book of Hebrews. Verses 1-3 speak of the miracles that were performed. Paul uses the miracles themselves as a symbol and evidence of the baptism they had into Moses. Verses 3-4 says they all ate the same spiritual food, and drank the same spiritual drink. Verse 4 says they drank from the Rock of Christ. Thus, Paul draws a parallelism between the bread and wine in remembrance of Christ, to their experience in the desert. Paul believes that these things happened and were written down as a warning to us (verse 6). In verse 12, Paul says that if we think we are standing firm, we should be careful that we don't fall. In other words, Paul is warning us that we could lose our salvation, just as they did in the desert.

The writer of Hebrews follows his warning with an assurance that he does not expect them to fall. Paul does the same in verse 13, saying that there is no temptation that we cannot bear, and that God will provide us with a way out.

In verses 14-21, Paul explains the warning further, exhorting against falling into idolatry. He recognizes that eating the food offered to idols is nothing. But he also warns that pagans themselves are sacrificing to real demons. He follows that getting involved in this is not compatible with being in Christ. We cannot eat from the Lord's Table and the table of demons at the same time. So this is a further warning against turning away from Christ toward idol worship, which is the

worship of demons. That's what was done in the desert. When they built the golden calf, then wandered in the desert without repentance forty years, they lost their salvation. Their names were blotted from the Book of Life.

All pagans have the opportunity to repent from their idol worship and accept Christ. On the other hand, for a Christian, who has received the knowledge of Christ through the Holy Spirit, to turn back to the worship of demons could be unpardonable.

8.13) What is Faith?

Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Faith typically involves action or a response. We know that Christ lived a holy life. We know that God is holy. Our response to this revelation is to overcome sin. Otherwise, where is the faith?

Christ is holy and lived a holy life as a man. God is holy. We were born sinners and sinners cannot even look upon God without dying. As the author of Hebrews points out, Christ's sacrifice can only happen once. That one sacrifice paid for all our sins, whether past, present, or future. The unpardonable sin is to reject the personal revelation of that one sacrifice. Or it's to reject God's personal revelation that we are sinners and that we need Christ's sacrifice.

Just as the great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1) responded to God's revelations with faith, we must do likewise with this revelation of the cross, the greatest revelation of all time. The response of Abraham was to go to the Promised Land. Our response must be to accept Christ's sacrifice and then to overcome sin, through a life of faith. And a life of faith involves doing the good works that the Father has for us. As we do the Father's good works, our self-centered ways of sin just naturally disappear.

The great part of the journey is that God will personally reveal this truth to all men. All who have not committed the unpardonable sin will at some point receive this personal revelation. God would not sacrifice his Son for all men without revealing this truth to all men. So, even after Christ returns and even after the resurrection, God's greatest revelation will continue to be preached.

Some will argue that when Christ returns, nobody will be able to be saved by faith, because he will be here. But true faith is not just head knowledge. The disciples saw Christ and the miracles. Alone, that head knowledge was insufficient. It was not even enough for the disciples to see the resurrected Jesus. They had to

respond the way Thomas did, saying “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). At the same time, many saw Jesus and did not believe. When Christ returns, it will be the same. Those who respond by saying, and truly meaning, “My Lord and my God,” will be saved by their faith.

True faith, with the personal revelation of God’s holiness, is to overcome sin and to do the will of the Father. Christ’s first-time presence produced faith in some, but not in others. Likewise, Christ’s return will produce faith in some, but not in others. After Thomas’ profession of faith, Christ said, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). John 3:16 says that whosoever believes on him will be saved. The Greek word for belief here is “pisteuo,” which means faith, hope, and belief. It’s much more than mere head knowledge.

8.14) Concluding Thoughts for Part Two of This Book

Some people, who haven’t yet committed their lives to Christ, might read this and conclude that they don’t have a problem. They could reason that if everyone who doesn’t commit an unpardonable sin will be saved, they could just remain as they are, and not worry about their salvation. But if they really do have a personal revelation from God, about this truth, and choose to ignore it, that could be considered the unpardonable sin. Also, the great tribulation is coming very soon.

It’s my firm belief that this baby-boom generation is the generation that will not pass away before Christ returns (Matthew 24:34). Only those who mature in Christ will be able to endure the great tribulation and be saved (Matthew 10:22, Matthew 24:13, Mark 13:13). (It will be great tribulation against the Church, not against the world.) Therefore, unless you wind up getting killed, you will need to mature in Christ in order to be saved in this generation. The sooner you accept Jesus Christ as Savior, the easier it’s going to be.

Remember that even though God draws all men to himself, he doesn’t do so forever. The more you learn about God, the more responsibility you have to respond to what God shows you. This book is only words. My words mean nothing. But if God speaks to you through my words, then they become God’s words. If God speaks to you through this book, then it would be very dangerous for you to reject God’s revelations about Himself.

If you have not committed your life to Jesus Christ in a personal way, then you need to do so in order to be eternally saved. Tell Jesus that you are a sinner, and

ask him to forgive you. Ask Jesus to come into your heart personally. Ask Jesus to take control of your life.

Then start spending lots of time with Jesus. Like any other relationship, it has to mature. Spend time each day in prayer. Seek to find what areas of your life are sinful and need to be changed. Pray for others as well. If possible, try to make Saturday a day that is about prayer, Bible reading, and spending time with God. Find out what God wants you personally to do in order to advance his kingdom. Be constantly asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Christ, through the Holy Spirit, will lead you down the road toward sainthood, which is to be a part of the true Israel.

A countless number of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language will “come out of great tribulation” and stand before the throne of Christ (Rev. 7:9-14). This countless number has been assumed to be representative of the number that will be saved. But these are only the people who inherit the kingdom to become priests and kings (Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6) during the millennium. In other words, they are only the teachers who will rule over a much greater number.

It’s been the impression of many Christians that the number of people saved will be in the small minority of all people who have ever lived. But I think the number of people saved during the Messianic Age will be in the high majority. This includes everybody who has ever lived. The countless number, from every nation, tribe, people, and language is just the tip of the iceberg.

This is the Mystery of God (Romans 11:25, Ephesians 3:6-9, Col. 1:26-27), that Christ really did come to save the world in a much more glorious way than has ever been understood. Thus, the glory of Christ and the glory of His salvation are far greater than anyone has ever imagined.

Faith is knowing that you will follow Christ, no matter the cost.

Part Three

God's Revelation

A good way to study God's plan of salvation is to study the seven redemptive covenants between God and Man. The covenants show a progressive plan of redemption that includes everyone from all nations, and all generations. They begin with the covenant given to Noah, right after the flood. The covenants are relationships. The covenants between God and Man can be compared with our covenantal relationship with our parents. We are born into the relationship with our heavenly Father. Any of the covenants, however, can be rejected and broken.

This can be seen in the covenants, and is confirmed in Romans. Paul teaches that those who have little revelation about God can at least see God in the Creation. This corresponds to the covenant with Noah, which is about seeing God in the Creation. Those who do not respond to God's revelation in the Creation by faith will have "no excuse" at the judgment. But with simple faith in the Creator, people can still be on the journey of righteousness. Those who reject God's free gift of salvation are the wicked and will be condemned.

God's revelations about Himself began in the Creation. This is called General Revelation. Then it progressed into Special Revelation through the Old and New Testament prophets. Some people are given more revelation about God than others. We must respond to God's revelations by faith. As we are given more, our responsibility to respond by faith increases. To those who are given little, little is expected. To those who are given much, much is required.

This study of the progressive nature of God's revelation shows us that God's redemptive plan is for everybody. Everybody has some degree of revelation from God. God expects those who are given more revelation to lead others to God's righteousness. Those who are given the most revelation are the firstfruits of the harvest in God's redemptive plan for everybody.

Calvinism teaches just the opposite. Calvinism teaches that God's plan of salvation is only for an elected few. So after we have learned about God's redemptive plan for everyone, as a progressive series of revelations, we will look at the problems with Calvinism.

Chapter 9

The Seven Redemptive Covenants

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1). John begins his gospel by making a strong allusion to the Greek doctrine of Logos. In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. (Logos is Greek for “Word.”) The Greek doctrine of Logos, dating back to the 6th-century BC Greek philosopher Heraclitus, taught that the orderly rules of nature happen because of this Word, and that the Word is spoken through nature. Logos was the reason why rabbits have many young; while lions, who may eat rabbits, have few young. The Logos said what is right and wrong for each and every species of nature. “All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made” (John 1:3).

Every man and woman, since the Garden of Eden, has been able to hear the Word of Christ. Christ’s sheep hear his voice. But Satan has continued his practice of lies intended to trick man into trusting anything and everything except Christ’s voice. Satan does not want us to hear the Logos. Satan does not want us to accept God’s Word about what is right and what is wrong. However, we are all made in the image of Christ, and we all can hear Christ’s voice. Christ loves each and every one of us and continues to speak to us like children until we understand enough about Him to accept or reject Him.

Every man and woman, since the Garden of Eden, has been able to hear the Logos of Christ. Satan has deceived us into trusting anything and everything except for Christ. When God speaks to us more directly, however, such as doing the miracles that were done by Moses and Jesus, then we must respond to Christ’s voice. If one does not, then one is blotted out, and one can no longer hear Christ’s voice. Such a person can no longer hear the Logos.

Only those who hear the voice of Christ will be resurrected (John 5:25, 28-29). Those who hear Christ’s voice includes those who do not as yet know Christ. They hear the Logos, which is Christ. But they are lost sheep (Matthew 9:36, 10:6, 12:11-12, 15:24, 18:12, 26:31, Mark 6:34, 14:27, Luke 15:4-6) who hear Christ’s voice (John 10:1-18). The wicked, like some of these the Jewish leaders, do not hear Christ’s voice. They do not hear the Logos. So they will not be resurrected when Christ returns and will not receive any more life.

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). We can accept or reject that light. Adam and Eve were given the exact same choice. There were two unusual trees in that garden. I believe these trees were literally there. But the symbolism involved is the important thing for us to understand. The tree of life symbolizes Christ. He is the bread of life. Those who eat of Christ will live forever. Nevertheless, we can eat from this tree only if we remain obedient to Christ’s voice. Christ is the light of men. Christ tells us what is right and what is wrong. We must hear and obey the Logos of Christ. We must allow God to say what is good and what is evil, just as He does for all His Creation. Those who harden their hearts against Christ’s voice can be blotted from the Book of Life. The foolish can become evil.

“The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:5). The light shows us God’s nature. The light shows us what is good and what is evil. The other tree in the garden is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan tempted Eve by convincing her that if she ate the fruit, she would be like gods, knowing good from evil (Gen 3:5).

This knowledge is not an intellectual knowledge. It’s an intimate knowledge. In the Hebrew, it’s the same word as in Genesis 4:1, where Adam knew Eve and she conceived and bore a son. Satan was telling Eve that she would not die, but instead would become like God so that she could decide for herself what is good and what is evil. But this is darkness. Only God can truly show us what is good and what is evil.

Once we start deciding for ourselves what is good and what is evil, we are in darkness. This is ignoring Christ’s voice that is within. Still, the light remains shining in the darkness all over the world for every son or daughter of Adam to perceive. The light shines in the darkness. We see it in God’s Creation. By contrasts, those who believe the lie of Satan don’t understand the Logos of Christ. They don’t perceive the light.

Our sinful nature results in children quickly wanting to test their boundaries and rebel against the authority of their parents. Children tend to decide for themselves what they will and will not do. This sinful nature prevents us from partaking in eternal life. Yet Christ still considers us to be His. Everyone is still Christ’s Creation. Christ died for Adam and for all his children. Christ walked and talked with Adam in the Garden (Gen. 3:8-9). And Christ still speaks to all of us today.

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). If the Word, to which all of the Creation is obedient (Mark 4:39-41), became a man in the flesh, then that man must be the King of all Kings (1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14, Revelation 19:16). The two trees in the Garden of Eden symbolize two kingdoms as well as two choices.

In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom was symbolized as a tree. Daniel called Nebuchadnezzar a king of kings (Daniel 2:37). When Adam chose to disobey Christ, Adam’s descendants fell under the reign of Satan’s kingdom. Satan is called the prince of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). Nevertheless, we can choose to obey Christ again. We can listen to Christ’s voice. We can choose to let Christ say what is good and what is evil in our own personal lives.

We die due to our disobedience. Disobedience prevents us from fully partaking of the tree of life, which is Christ. Satan’s lies of confusion block us from developing a full understanding of the Logos of Christ before we die. This is why the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us. Christ demonstrated how we should live, even to the point of dying for us to pay the price for our disobedience.

After enough of us have matured in obedience in order to teach the world, the dead will rise and Christ will again dwell among us as our literal King of Kings. Being the King of Kings is literally being the Logos to the entire Creation. Everyone will be forced to make the same informed choice that Adam decided upon. It’s the choice of being obedient to the Logos, or to reject that obedience.

But to effectively run a literal worldwide government, Christ must have loyal kings and priests from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Revelation 7:9). These must be rulers and priests (Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6) who will have matured in their relationship with Christ so that they are no longer deciding for themselves what is good and what is evil. They must be entirely motivated out of love for their King, and out of love for their neighbors, over which they will then rule with wisdom and compassion. These kings and priests will be the teachers who will lead all who are willing into a mature relationship with Christ.

9.1) Covenants are Relationships

In order to accomplish this, God instigated a plan that was governed by a series of progressive covenants. Covenants are promises, as well as the instigation and establishment of relationships. Covenants are much more a relationship than a promise. God uses covenants to show that a restoration of relationship is at the heart of God’s plan. We must come into maturity in our relationship with Christ,

under the bond of these covenants. It's very much like the relationship of marriage, which is also a covenant.

Rules, laws, or conditions can be related to a covenant. But the rules, if any, are not themselves the covenant. The covenant between Jonathan and David did not involve rules (1 Samuel 18:3). Most covenants between men occur through the explicit establishment of new relationships. If one of the two is greater in authority, then he is the one that makes the covenant. So, Jonathan made a covenant with David, not the other way around. Any newly established covenant must be explicitly stated before such a relationship exists.

Marriage is a covenant. Marriage requires agreement from both parties, but the man marries the woman. The man makes a covenant with the woman. (At least this is the case in Scripture.) Marriage may involve rules, but the rules do not establish the relationship. If anything, the rules are a means by which the covenant may be broken. But the rules, in and of themselves, do not establish the covenant.

There is a similar relationship between parents and their children. In this case, the relationship is established before the children are even born. The parents have covenantal authority over the children. At some juncture, after understanding and growing up, the children may break the covenant. But they do not establish the covenant. The parents establish the covenant before the child is born. When children grow up into mature and loving adults, they generally do not even think about the possibility of breaking their covenantal relationship with their parents. Children, however, with their lack of understanding, do not have the authority to break the covenantal relationship that was established by their parents.

There was a similar relationship between Adam and his Father. The following verse makes reference to that prior covenantal relationship:

Hosea 6:7 But they, like Adam, have broken the covenant. They were unfaithful to me, there.

This relationship provided Adam with life. With it, a rule was established that Adam understood. If Adam broke the rule, it would break the relationship. It would break the covenant. God promised that the eating of the fruit would bring death. The covenant with Adam was broken when Adam ate the fruit. The relationship was lost. The covenant was broken.

All covenants between God and Man, which are explicitly established in the Scripture, are about the re-establishment of that lost relationship. They are progressive in nature. One covenant builds upon the previous. God instigates

these covenants unilaterally. Being our Father, He doesn't ask Man to agree to them. Like the covenant with Adam, these new covenants with God can be broken.

Since the first relationship (or covenant) with Adam was broken, the sacrifice of Christ, and His blood, was needed for any new relationship between God and Man. Adam did not originally agree to his covenantal relationship with God. He was “born” into it. Likewise, we don't agree to enter into the re-establishment of covenants between God and Man. Christ died for us before we were even born.

We did not decide to enter into a mutual agreement between us and our parents before we were born. Likewise, we did not decide to enter into a mutual agreement between us and our heavenly Father. Salvation is not a mutual agreement. We don't become saved one day. Salvation is a free gift for everyone. But at some point in our journey of righteousness, we must seek a personal (discipleship) relationship with Christ that will bring about the overcoming of all our sinful habits. If, however, we break this covenantal relationship, there is no longer a sacrifice. When we break the relationship, our names are blotted out of the Lamb's Book of Life.

If we do not accept Christ, we will eventually reject Christ. Everyone is given the same choice as Adam. We must choose between the two trees. We must choose between Satan and Christ. Everyone will be given the opportunity to make this choice. God is patient. God is powerful. Death is not the end of the journey of righteousness to complete holiness.

9.2) The Seven Covenants

The Bible speaks of seven different covenants between God and Man, which are explicitly called covenants by Scripture. This does not include the pre-existent covenant with Adam, because these covenants are all about God's re-establishment of a covenantal relationship with Man after the fall of Adam. The seven covenants explicitly and newly established by Scripture are: (1) the Covenant of Creation, (2) the Covenant of Blessing, (3) the Covenant of Law, (4) the Covenant of Priests, (5) the Covenant of Kings, (6) the Covenant of Grace, and (7) the Covenant of Peace.

1) God's covenant with Noah (Gen 6:18, 9:8-17) is the **Covenant of Creation**. God promises to never destroy the Creation with water again. The covenant is explicitly established with Noah and all his descendants (verse 9). It's also explicitly established with every living creature on the earth (verse 10). Everyone on earth today is a descendent of Noah. Hence, God has established a covenant with everyone from every nation, tribe, people, and language.

The sign of this covenant is the rainbow (verses 12-17). God promises to remember the covenant whenever a rainbow appears in the clouds (verse 14). God has a covenant (relationship) with everyone. It's not just with those who follow the Law of Moses or who have already accepted Christ. This is a relationship between God and Man that speaks through the Creation itself. This covenant is the Logos. Just as the rainbow appears in the clouds, the author of this covenant will appear in the clouds. Christ will reign as King of Kings over not only the Creation, but over every man, woman, and child on the earth.

The book of Job may date from before even Abraham, and shows God's relationship with Job. Job understood God to be the Creator. Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes -- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25-27). Job had faith in the Logos, and even knew that someday he would be resurrected and would see Christ stand upon the earth.

Just as parents unilaterally establish a covenant with their children, God unilaterally established this covenant with Noah and all of Noah's children. Everyone is a child of Noah. We can, however, break the covenant. We can harden our hearts against Christ's voice. We can deny the Creator.

2) God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 13:14-17, 15:9-10, 15:17-21, 17) is the **Covenant of Blessings**. Abraham is blessed because of his faith. This includes the promise of all the land in Palestine. God promises Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand of the seashore. Land and descendants were the ultimate blessings of the ancient world.

This promise to Abraham came down through Isaac and Jacob. Specifically, the promise did not come down through Esau, the older twin, but through Jacob. This was so that God's election would stand (Romans 9:11). The older will serve the younger (Romans 9:12). Jacob was given the name Israel, and his twelve sons are the twelve tribes of Israel.

But not all Israel is Israel (Romans 9:6). Not all of Abraham's descendants are Israel (Romans 9:7). Those who are in Christ are the ones considered to be Abraham's seed, and heirs to the promise (Galatians 3:29). The promise was not to all of Abraham's seed, but to a specific seed, meaning one person, which is Christ (Galatians 3:16). Therefore, only those who are in Christ are Abraham's seed, and heirs to this promise of land. This covenant is not with everyone. This covenant

is only with Israel. The Gentiles who are in Christ are grafted into the vine of Israel. So we are also the elect of Israel, and the covenant is with us through election.

This Covenant of Blessing is specifically for the land of Palestine (Genesis 12:7, 15:7, 15:18-21, 17:8). This covenant is unilateral. God instigated it, yet it's not with everybody. Only those who are chosen by God will receive this blessing. Only those who have an [agape] love for Christ, and who walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9) during this life, are chosen as priests and kings, and will receive this blessing of the land in Palestine. Everyone else, including Esau and his sons, is still under the Covenant of Creation. Esau will serve Jacob. The older will serve the younger. Jacob and the true seed of Abraham are the heirs to the promise and will reign in the millennium.

In Old Testament times, this covenant involved the revelation of the promise of Christ (which means Messiah). But some broke the covenant. They turned to idol worship. When the people of Israel turned to idol worship, they broke the covenant. Their names were blotted from the Book of Life. Their relationship with God came to an end. But for ignorant pagans, idol worship did not break the covenant, because no such covenant was in place with them. Moreover, even those under the covenant have the choice to break the covenant, just as adults can break the covenant with their parents. However, it must be a knowledgeable decision as an adult would make. Breaking the covenant with God brings eternal condemnation. But people who are not in Christ are not under this covenant.

3) God's covenant with Moses (Deuteronomy 5:1-3) is the Covenant of Law. The Law of Moses formed a theocracy. The government laws were also the laws of God. Any set of governmental laws needs to be changed or revised as times change. The Law of Moses also included moral laws, such as the Ten Commandments. These laws are eternal. They are the very Logos of Christ that tell us what is good and what is evil. These laws never become obsolete.

Many of the government laws of Moses were shadows of Christ (Colossians 2:17), who was to come. Now that Christ has come, they are no longer needed. In a broader sense, the entire Theocracy of Moses itself was a shadow of Christ. When Christ returns, he will set up an earthly government (Isaiah 9:6-7). The government will be on his shoulders. The words of the King are the Law of the land. Thus, the laws of that government will be God's laws. So it will again be a Theocracy. The Theocracy of Moses would seem to be a shadow of the future Theocracy of Christ.

4) God's covenant with Phinehas (Numbers 25:10-13) is the **Covenant of Priests**. When Christ returns, those who will have matured in Christ will be priests and kings over the nations.

5) God's covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:11b-16, 2 Chronicles 21:7, Psalm 8:3-4) is the **Covenant of Kings**. This covenant says that a descendent of David will always be on David's throne. Of course, Christ is the fulfillment of this covenant. Today, the kingdom of Christ is in the hearts of those who believe. The kingdom is in the hearts of the kings and priests to come, but the kingdom is not yet in the nations. It's only partially fulfilled. Likewise, the **Covenant of Priests** is only partially fulfilled. When Christ returns, King David's throne will extend throughout the world as a literal one-world government.

God's covenants are progressive in nature. One covenant does not replace the next. They are partially fulfilled. When Christ returns, they will all be completely fulfilled. When Christ comes again, there will again be a Theocracy.

Jeremiah 33:14-26 shows how the covenants are progressive, and are to be completely fulfilled in the Messianic age. Verse 17 puts emphasis on the Covenant of Kings, the covenant with David. Verse 18 emphasizes the Covenant of Priests, the covenant with Phinehas. Verse 20 speaks of God's covenant with the day and his covenant with the night. This is an obvious allusion to the Covenant of Creation, the covenant with Noah. Finally, verses 22-26 make strong allusion to the Covenant of Blessing, the covenant with Abraham.

6) The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-36, Hebrews 8:8-13), is the **Covenant of Grace**. At the Last Supper, Christ instigated this covenant the evening before the crucifixion. The Covenant of Grace, thus, had to await the crucifixion. With this covenant came the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As we mature in Christ, the very presence of God dwells within us, making us (corporately) the temple of God (John 2:19-21, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:20-22, Revelation 3:12).

The Holy Spirit causes us to mature in Christ. In so doing, the Holy Spirit is writing God's law in our minds and in our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:10). Thus, we no longer need to be under a Theocracy, which was the Law of Moses. In the future, when we are mature with God's law completely written in our minds and in our hearts, we will be eligible to be priests and kings to rule with Christ in Christ's Theocracy. Those who inherit eternal life and reign with Christ will no longer under be judgment (John 5:24). We will not be under this theocracy. But the law is written on our hearts. So we will always obey the will of the Father.

The New Covenant is the Covenant of Grace. Grace means favor. (The Greek word for grace is the same as the Greek word for favor.) Those who are now maturing in Christ are those whom God has chosen. We are the elect. We are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). It’s also a Covenant of Grace because it’s free from the Law of Moses. It’s a Covenant of Grace because we no longer abide under a theocracy.

Grace means favor. This grace and mercy extends to everyone who will have faith in God, not just to the elect. God has grace for everyone, because God does not show favoritism (Romans 2:11).

Like the covenant of Blessing with Abraham, the New Covenant is a covenant of election. The New Covenant is stated to be specifically with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31, Hebrews 8:8). Since the covenant is not with everyone, the very fact that God instigates the covenants reveals God’s election. The seed of Abraham are those who are in Christ. Those who are in Christ are the true Israel. We are the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). We are the elect, whom God has chosen to write his law on our hearts.

The covenant of Blessing with Abraham, during Old Testament times, could be broken. Likewise, the New Covenant can be broken. In other words, even after believing in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit, the New Covenant can still be broken. We all have free choice. Breaking the covenant would cause your name to be blotted from the Book of Life.

This covenant is with Israel, and is also with the house of Judah. Judah is the Jews. Israel includes Judah and constitutes people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. God is forming us, true Israel, into a holy nation that will reign when Christ returns. Then Israel will lead the rest of the nations to follow Christ as King, and to build an everlasting relationship with Christ.

7) The Covenant of Peace (Isaiah 54:4-10, 59:20-21, Ezekiel 34:23-25, 37:24-28, Hosea 2:16-19) is the covenant with the nations after Christ returns. It’s not just a covenant with true Israel. It’s also a covenant with the beasts of the field. This brings us back to the Covenant of Creation, given to Noah. Both the first and the last of these seven are covenants with everyone in all the nations.

The covenants are progressive in nature. Each builds upon the previous. They all form a progressive system of covenants that describe God's redemptive plan for everyone in all the ages.

The first and last covenants are with everyone. However, this on-going covenantal relationship with God can be broken by anyone who rejects Christ, by knowingly choosing the tree of knowledge of good and evil. These progressive covenants are with everyone written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world. Everyone's name was there. Rejection of God's personal revelations causes one's name to be blotted out from this book of covenant recipients, those who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

Chapter 10

Faith in the Creator and the Second Adam

The first five chapters of Romans is probably the best place in Scripture to study about salvation by grace. Chapter 5 is about Christ being the second Adam. Chapters 6 and 7 get into issues of sin and the Law of Moses. Chapter 8 is about being adopted as sons when Christ returns, and about the eternal security we have as we mature in Christ. Chapters 9 to 11 are about why the Jews didn't accept Christ, and whether that invalidated God's word. These chapters are about election. Finally, chapters 12 to 16 of Romans conclude with how we, as true Israel, should live our lives. Let's take a look at the first two chapters of Romans, which are about salvation for everyone.

10.1) Romans 1:16-21 No Excuse at the Judgment

Romans 1:16 says the power of the gospel is for everyone who believes. Paul says it's first for the Jew then for the Gentile. In other words, the gospel (good news) was brought to the Jew first. But now the good news is being brought around the world.

Romans 1:14-21 I am debtor both to Greeks and to foreigners, both to the wise and to the foolish. (15) So, as much as is in me, I am eager to preach the Good News to you also who are in Rome. (16) For I am not ashamed of the Good News of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes; for the Jew first, and also for the Greek. (17) For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, "But the righteous shall live by faith." (18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (19) because that which is known of God is revealed in them, for God revealed it to them. (20) For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; **that they may be without excuse.** (21) Because, knowing God, they didn't glorify him as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened.

Verse 18 speaks of the wicked, who “suppress the truth.” Paul mentions the wrath of God that will be poured out on the wicked. But what about those who have not even heard the truth? How can one “suppress the truth” if one has not heard the truth? And yet they do have the truth in the Creation. In other words, verses 19 and 20 assert that all the knowledge that’s needed (for salvation) has been revealed to them by God in the Creation! Verse 20 explains it by saying the truth of the gospel is plainly seen in the Creation, so “that they may be without excuse.” Knowledge of the Creation is knowledge of Christ. Christ is the Logos.

Now go back to verse 16 and 17. The Good News is that the power of God for salvation is supplied to everyone who believes. If they have never heard of Christ, then what do they believe? In this immediate context, they believe the evidence of God in the Creation! Thus, belief in God because of God's revelation of himself in the Creation is sufficient for salvation! Verse 17 puts emphasis on this by quoting Habakkuk 2:4, saying “The righteous shall live by faith.” This Old Testament verse was written before the name of Jesus was known. Faith in God brings righteousness. So if your only revelation of God is in the Creation, then faith in that revelation brings righteousness and salvation.

Does this contradict the fact that the only way to the Father is through Jesus Christ, and the only name under heaven by which a person can be saved is Jesus Christ? No, because first of all, by Christ all things were created (Colossians 1:16). Secondly, just because one is saved by being resurrected from the dead does not mean that they inherit eternal life. They must still mature in Christ, during Christ's reign, before they can come to the Father and inherit eternal life.

Very often this verse is interpreted as saying that all men are aware of their sins, and therefore they will have no excuse at the judgment. But that’s not what the verse is saying. Paul is explicitly giving us the reason for those who will have no excuse. Verse 21 says those who know God in the Creation, but do not honor Him as God, will have no excuse. In other words, God reveals Himself in the Creation. Only those who harden their hearts against God’s personal revelation to them, especially in the Creation, will have no excuse at the judgment.

Verse 21 goes on to say that those who knew God, but did not honor God, over time, become foolish in their thinking. They invent gods of wood and stone. As we will see, Paul expands on this foolishness from here to the end of the chapter. They go further and further into sin. Verse 31 even says they know they are worthy of death because of their sins. But does that mean they will not be saved? We who have known about Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross have been forgiven of our

sins because of Christ's sacrifice. But we are still worthy of death because of our sins. Jesus paid the price. Those who do not know about Jesus also know they deserve death because of their sins. But if they have faith in the Creator, apparently their faith is credited as righteousness just as our faith is credited as righteousness.

The important thing to note here is that we are judged based on what we do with the revelation we are given. Those who are without excuse are those who know God in the Creation, but do not honor God as a result of that knowledge. This leads to wickedness. However, God turns them over to the lusts of sin, and they become blinded by sin. They become foolish, but not wicked.

Those who have had personal knowledge of Christ, and have rejected Christ, will certainly have no excuse. As Paul says, those who “suppress the truth” that they see in the Creation, will not have an excuse. However, those who have been faithful to the only revelations of God that they have been given, would have excuse at their judgment. If they do not “suppress the truth” that they see in the Creation, then they will have lived by faith in that limited amount of revelation that God has given them. As Paul states here, “the righteous shall live by faith” (verse 17).

Some will argue that people will have no excuse if they are presented with the gospel and reject it. There are, however, many different churches out there. There are many different religions. If the person has faith in the Creator, but picks the wrong religion, how can it be said that he or she has no excuse? Such a person is simply under the deception of Satan. But God will be faithful to anyone who has faith in God. The Creator is God. God will not ultimately allow anyone to be deceived and go down paths that do not ultimately lead to His Son. Otherwise, they would in fact have an excuse at the judgment. Their excuse would be their faith in God the Creator.

Obviously people who have faith in the Creator have died without personally knowing Christ. Most theologians believe that death is the end of the journey of righteousness. Therefore, those theologians tend to come up with creative ways of explaining these verses.

Don't mistake this as an excuse to not tell people about Christ. Paul would have never thought along those lines. God reveals Himself through His faithful servants. There are still many elect people left to whom God plans on revealing His Son before they die. Those who are to be the saints in the millennium must have an [agape] love for Christ and learn to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9) before they die. Those who are mature in Christ deeply desire for God's plan of redemption to be spread to everyone who is ready to receive God's revelations.

10.2) Romans 1:21 – 1:25 The Wise, the Foolish, and the Wicked

Next, in verses 21 through the end of the chapter, Paul tells us that people knew God through the Creation, but because they didn't glorify God, they progressed through a series of sins that got progressively worse. In verse 21, Paul describes this as foolishness and darkness in their hearts. Verse 22 says, "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools." Paul uses the term "foolish" to refer to falling further into sin. And remember that the wicked, those for whom the "wrath of God is revealed," are those who "suppress the truth" (verse 18). The "wise" (righteous), of course, are those who "live by faith."

People knew God through the Creation. But if people do not give thanks to God, and honor God, they become self-centered. They think they are wise, but they become foolish and fall into sins.

Romans 1:21-25 Because, knowing God, they didn't glorify him as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened. (22) Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, (23) and traded the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things. (24) Therefore God also gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves, (25) who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Why does Paul say God gave them up? Is God saying, "Heck with them, let them all go to hell?" Or is God allowing them to fall into the foolishness of sins because it's better for them to be ignorant and foolish than it is for them to be knowledgeable and wicked? They "exchanged the truth of God for a lie." As one falls into sin, one no longer sees the truth in the Creation. The lie of idol worship and other sins hides this truth about God. But it's much better for them to be under Satan's deception than to intentionally "suppress the truth" about God.

Back in verse 14, Paul says he is obligated to "both Greeks and barbarians, to both the wise and the foolish." Paul's ministry was primarily to the Gentiles, although he routinely went to the Jews first. The Greeks, of course, are Gentiles. From the Greek perspective, the difference between Greek and barbarian is wisdom. From the Greek vs. barbarian perspective, the Romans, to whom Paul writes, would have considered themselves to be Greek (educated).

The Wise	Romans 1:15,17 I am eager to preach the <u>Good News</u> to you also who are in Rome. ... (17) <u>For in it</u> is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, "But <u>the righteous shall live by faith.</u> "
The Foolish	Romans 1:21-22 Because, knowing God, they didn't glorify him as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened. <u>Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.</u>
The Wicked	Romans 1:18-19 For the <u>wrath of God</u> is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who <u>suppress the truth</u> in unrighteousness, <u>because that which is known of God is revealed in them, for God revealed it to them.</u>

The foolish are those who fall under the control of sin. Yet, Paul says he is obligated to both the wise and the foolish (verse 14). In the context of the passage, the foolish are those who are not in Christ. They are still slaves to sin; but they are still saved because they have Christ in the Creation. They have the Logos. Paul does not obligate himself to the wicked, who “suppress the truth.”

10.3) Romans 2:1 – 2:16 Do not Judge the Foolish

Starting with chapter 2, Paul reprehends those who would pass judgment upon these people who are in slavery to these sins. Paul says those who pass judgment upon them do the same things. In addressing the church at Rome, Paul warns them not to pass judgment upon the foolish sinners or they themselves would be subject to the wrath of God. Notice in verse 1 that Paul uses the same terminology for those who judge as was used for the wicked. They “have no excuse.”

Romans 2:1-5 Therefore you are without excuse, O man, whoever you are who judge. For in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself. For you who judge practice the same things. (2) We know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. (3) Do you think this, O man who judges those who practice such things, and do the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? (4) Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (5) But according to

your hardness and unrepentant heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath, revelation, and of the righteous judgment of God;

Remember that in the original Greek, there were no chapter divisions. Paul talks about those who have God's revelation in the Creation, saying that those who reject this revelation will have no excuse at the judgment. Then Paul talks about the fact that God turns them over to the lusts of their sins. But God's purpose in doing so is not to condemn them, but to allow them to become foolish, blinded by their sins, in order to protect them from becoming wicked. God is protecting them from the knowledge of God for which they would "suppress the truth" and become wicked.

Here, in chapter 2, we see Paul's purpose in bringing all this up. In other words, the context has not changed. Paul's purpose is not to say they are condemned because they do not know Christ. It's just the opposite. Paul's purpose is to say that we should not condemn those who do not know Christ and are slaves to their sins. Such contempt, Paul warns, could make a Christian become wicked, and become the subject of God's wrath. This would be a case for which someone believes he has a relationship with Christ, but is actually condemned as wicked.

This was seen in the parable of the wise or wicked servant, as discussed in section 5.5 of this book. The wicked servant beat his fellow servants. In other words, they use their positions of authority in the Church to take advantage of those attending their churches. One way this is done is to preach that if you don't know Christ, you will burn in hell. This strongly implies or suggests that you need to be a member of that church in order to avoid hell. Such preaching could violate Paul's warning to not condemn those who do not know Christ, and are still slaves to sin. Of course the Church must continue to preach Christ Jesus. But it must be done in love and not out of self-benefiting judgment. At the same time, those who want to accept Christ as Savior must be told count the cost of discipleship before committing one's life to Christ. That's what Jesus was doing in Luke 14:26-33.

Those who know the truth of Jesus Christ, but who suppress that truth for the sake of their own self-interests, can become wicked. His or her name can be blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life.

Romans 2:6-8 [He] will pay back to everyone according to their works: (7) to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory, honor, and incorruptibility, eternal life; (8) but to those who are self-seeking, and don't obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, will be wrath and indignation,

In verses 6-8, Paul outlines what it takes to receive eternal life. Surprisingly, it's not a relationship with Jesus Christ. It's according to their works, says Paul. Those who persist in doing good works, who seek glory, honor, and immortality, will receive eternal life, according to Paul.

This is not to say that a personal knowledgeable relationship with Jesus Christ is not ultimately required. He starts out with the gospel (1:15-16). A knowledgeable relationship under the New Covenant (the Covenant of Grace) is the best way to eternal life. But for those who don't have the knowledge of Jesus Christ, those who persist in good works, who seek glory, honor, and immortality will receive life under the Covenant of Creation. Later, after the resurrection, their knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ can grow under the Covenant of Peace.

On the other hand, notice what it takes to receive God's wrath and fury. They do not obey the truth. In order to not obey the truth, they must have knowledge of the truth. They can harden their hearts against the truth in the Creation. They no longer hear Christ's voice in the Creation. It becomes a matter of choice. For self-seeking reasons, they do not obey the truth that they have been given by God.

Paul also warns about those who have God's revelation of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, but who become self-seeking with that truth. They judge others who do not yet have that truth. These Christians become wicked. Without the Holy Spirit, these Christians do all the same sinful things as the foolish non-Christians do in ignorance. It's all about what you do with the knowledge you have been given.

Notice that these sins of the foolish, listed in chapter 1, include homosexuality. Thus even the homosexual who does not profess Christ will be saved, if he persists in doing good, seeks glory, honor, and immortality. This may be shocking to many Christians. But those Christians who pass judgment on the homosexual are in danger of God's wrath, according to these verses. They are in danger of God's wrath for holding in contempt God's mercy that God has for foolish sinners, including homosexuals. Homosexuality is a sin, and it is foolishness. But it's not an unpardonable sin. It doesn't, in and of itself, get your name blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life.

Romans 2:9-11 [There will be] oppression and anguish, on every soul of man who works evil, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (10) But glory, honor, and peace go to every man who works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (11) For there is no partiality with God.

In verse 10, Paul assures glory, honor and peace to those who do good works. He says, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. But in verse 11, Paul says that God does not show favoritism (or partiality). Three times in the first two chapters, Paul says, “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom 1:16, 2:9, and 2:10).

The idea here is that the Jew first received revelation about God other than what can be learned from the Creation. To him who is given more, more is expected. Yet God does not show favoritism with regard to salvation itself (Romans 2:11, 10:12). The law was given to the Jew, and not to the Gentile. Those who sin apart from the law are not judged by the law. Those who sin under the law, as was given to the Jew, are judged by the law (verse 12). Those to whom less was given have a law to follow in the Creation itself. And those who follow Christ have Christ as our law to follow.

Romans 2:12-16 For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without the law. As many as have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. (13) For it isn't the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified (14) (for when Gentiles who don't have the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves, (15) in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying with them, and their thoughts among themselves accusing or else excusing them) (16) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men, according to my Good News, by Jesus Christ.

Commentators of this verse generally say that the law that's written on their hearts is only there to condemn them at the judgment. But I would ask, “Who wrote this law on their hearts?” The idea of the law being written on one's heart reminds us of the New Covenant. Jeremiah 31:31-32 is the Old Testament prophecy of the New Covenant. It's quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12. These verses say that with the New Covenant, God's law is written on our hearts.

These people do not yet know about Christ. But it was Christ, the Logos, who wrote His law on their hearts. Christ will not abandon them. Christ's lost sheep, who do not know Him, still hear His voice.

We have Christ as our example. We have perfection to follow. Those who follow Christ have been given more, and more is expected of us. We are expected to overcome sin. Salvation is first to the wise, then to the foolish. Both can be saved. God does not show favoritism.

10.4) Romans 4: Salvation is by Faith

Chapter 4 speaks of Abraham's justification. We are not justified by our works, or by observing God's commandments (law). Our obedience to Christ's commandments provides us with no more justification than those who don't know Christ and commit the sins listed in chapter 1. We are saved simply by faith in God. If we have a relationship with the person of Christ, then we are saved by our faith in Christ. Abraham didn't have the law, nor did he know the person of Christ Jesus. Yet Abraham was saved before God gave him the Covenant of Blessing. Abraham was saved by simple faith in God under the Covenant of Creation. He didn't have the Law of Moses. Abraham did not have the name of Jesus Christ.

Yet, there is no other name under heaven by which men can be saved (Acts 4:12). Those who have faith in the Creator will eventually be saved under the name of Jesus Christ. When Christ returns, Abraham will be raised from death and be given eternal life under the name of Jesus Christ. It was because of faith in his Creator that Abraham was saved.

As God gives us more revelation about Himself, more is expected of us. Those who harden their hearts to the truth can get their names blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life. But even today, especially when someone lacks understanding about God's revelations, people can be saved by faith in their Creator. Should we then refrain from telling someone about Christ for fear they would reject our testimony and be condemned? No, the rejection of Christ that would get someone condemned is a rejection in which they really do understand and know the truth, yet they "suppress the truth," due to their hardened hearts.

As one starts to obtain knowledge of Christ, he will eventually repent of his self-centered nature, or he will reject Christ in favor of that self-centered nature. This will happen either in this age, or in the age to come. With knowledge of Christ in this age, hopefully, the person will mature into righteousness. A revelation of the law in Old Testament times, or a revelation of Christ in this age, is never a bad thing. Eventually, everyone will have the full revelation of Jesus Christ, and will either reject him, or will seek a mature relationship with him.

Consider Job. Many theologians believe he lived before Abraham. Job was saved by faith in his Creator. But he was also given a revelation about his Savior. Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes -- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25-27).

10.5) Romans 5: Reconciliation and Justification

Chapter 5 of Romans is about justification. We are justified by the blood of Christ. Justification means to be declared righteous (or credited with righteousness), by faith. Based on Romans 1 and 2, can this be faith in the Creator? Or is faith in Jesus Christ necessary for any measure of justification? Were all people justified at the cross? Before answering, we need to carefully read what Paul wrote in Romans 5. But we need to interpret these words in the overall context of Jesus as the second Adam. As we read Romans 5, this context becomes more and more apparent. With that context in mind, let's take a quick look at what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15. This is Paul's chapter on the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:21-23 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. (22) For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (23) But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Notice the obvious reference to Christ being the second Adam. What Adam brought to the world was reversed by Christ for the world, not just for believers. By Adam came death for everyone. Likewise, by Christ came a resurrection for everyone! "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." There is no indication here that faith in Christ is necessary. This is something Christ did for everyone while we were still enemies of Christ. It doesn't say that only those who believe in Christ will be resurrected. It says "all" will be made alive. Some will point to verse 23 and say that only those who belong to Christ will be made alive. But was not the blood of Christ a ransom for everyone?

1 Timothy 2:6 who gave himself as a ransom for all; the testimony in its own times;

Everyone has been purchased by the blood of Christ and everyone belongs to Christ. We belong to Christ as long as we continue to hear his voice and have not hardened our hearts against him. This is true of Christ's lost sheep as well as those who are found. We have to remember that this verse about Christ being the second Adam is in the context of Paul's resurrection chapter. Salvation from the grave is a free gift for everyone. But we must become believers and have faith in Christ before we are no longer lost sheep. We must have faith in Christ in order for our sins to be forgiven and be credited with righteousness. As we will see in Romans 5, the distinction between being ransomed from the grave, and faith for the forgiveness of sins, is reconciliation and a justification that leads to sanctification.

Romans 5:1-2 Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; (2) through whom we also have our access by faith into this grace in which we stand. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Verse 1 says we are justified by faith. As we have been seeing in these chapters, you can have faith in the Creator before you understand about Jesus Christ. Verse 1 also says this faith brings us the peace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Could this peace be an allusion to the Covenant of Peace, which will happen when Christ reigns in the millennium? Verse 2 says we hope in the glory of God. To hope is to expect something to happen in the future. The glory of God in the future will be when Christ reigns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in the millennium.

Romans 5:3-5 Not only this, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering works perseverance; (4) and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope: (5) and hope doesn't disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Our suffering produces character. Our suffering produces faith. And we are justified by faith. As our character builds through suffering, God's love is poured out through the Holy Spirit. Through this process, the Holy Spirit changes us and we can overcome sin. These changes by the Holy Spirit are also a free gift.

Romans 5:8-11 But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him. (10) For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life. (11) Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Romans 5:8 says that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Verse 9 informs us that his blood has justified us. Verse 10 says that while we were his enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son. How can this not apply to everyone? Everyone is an enemy until we accept Christ as our Savior. Thus everyone is reconciled. Being reconciled, we will be saved by his life. I interpret that to be the giving of his life on the cross. Everyone is saved by his life in that

everyone can be resurrected if they do not reject Christ. That's why Christ is the second Adam. Yet God does not impart (or credit, reckon, account) full and complete justification to us until we put our faith in him (Romans 4:22-25).

This is because when we put our faith in Christ we embark on a journey to righteousness. As the Holy Spirit changes us, we overcome all our sinful habits. We cannot be completely justified as long as we are still sinning. But we can be credited with righteousness because we know the Holy Spirit will complete the work that he started. "He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Verse 18 (quoted below) says that just as the trespass of one man brought condemnation to all men, one act of righteousness brings "justification to life" for all men. This means everyone can be resurrected. To be "justified to life" does not mean eternal life. It means that the penalty of death that was given to Adam and all his children has been reverse. All of Adam's children can be resurrected.

Because Christ was lifted up, he will draw everyone to himself (John 12:32). Therefore, God will give everyone the opportunity to receive his or her free gift. Otherwise, it would not be fair to Christ.

In other words, the gift of Christ's crucifixion has already been given to all men. It's up to each individual person whether to accept or reject that gift. Christ is the second Adam. Every man and woman who has ever lived has already been given this gift. We are all Christ's sheep, even Christ's sheep who are lost. Everyone can be resurrected. But we must have faith in God for this gift to be credited to us as righteousness. Would God give anyone a gift and not provide some way for him or her to have the opportunity to accept the gift? Would God allow his Son to die on the cross for anyone, and then allow anyone to be forever deceived by Satan as to the availability of this gift?

All sin leads to death, regardless of whether or not the person knows it's a sin. However, verses 12-14 make a distinction between the sins of the ignorant, and the sins like the transgression of Adam.

Romans 5:12-14 Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned. (13) For until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not charged when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those whose sins weren't like Adam's disobedience, who is a foreshadowing of him who was to come.

Sin is not counted where there is no law. This is a direct connection back to chapter 2, especially verses 12-16, where Paul says, “When Gentiles who don't have the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves.” In other words, Paul connects the fact of everyone being reconciled at the cross with the fact that faith in the Creation counts for salvation where further direct revelation from God has not been given. We are all saved by faith.

However, sins like the transgression of Adam are sins where God's law is known. It's only after there is knowledge of God's law that sins are condemned. Therefore, everyone must be eventually made to understand, and be given an opportunity to live for Christ, or their sins would not be counted at the judgment. When they are made to understand the good news of Christ's sacrifice, they will have their opportunity to mature in Christ.

Romans 5:15 But the free gift isn't like the trespass. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

God's grace (favor) is related to being filled with the Holy Spirit. So in this verse, Paul uses “many” instead of “all” because God's grace (favor) is given only to those who accept him as Savior. Paul is comparing the fall of “many” to the salvation of “many.” Yes, everyone was given a death sentence because of Adam's sin. But Paul is using parallelism in these verses. So he equates the “many” who will receive the Holy Spirit with a literary “many” who were given Adam's death sentence.

Romans 5:16-17 The gift is not as through one who sinned: for the judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification. (17) For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ.

Paul continues to use “many” in talking about those who accept Christ as Savior. This includes those who accept Christ as Savior even after their resurrection. You can say “many” will be forgiven of their sins if that opportunity is extended past the grave. But “many” is too many for those who become disciples of Christ this side of the grave. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that only a few find that gate. However, justification is a free gift for everyone. Everyone has it. Only those who “suppress the truth” they are given wind up rejecting their free gift.

Romans 5:18-19 So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. (19) For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous.

Notice the undeniable parallelism? Through one trespass, all men were condemned. Likewise, all men were justified to life, through the one act of Jesus Christ. Any restrictions on the all who are justified must also be made to the all who are condemned. If all are not justified to life, then all are not condemned by Adam's sin. In both cases, the only possible exception is Jesus Christ himself.

The verse says that all men are "justified to life." What does it mean to be "justified to life?" Again, look at the parallelism. All men were condemned by Adam's trespass. It means that Adam's sin brought a condemnation of death. Thus, to be "justified to life" means Christ's one act of righteousness brings life to all men. All men can be resurrected. To be resurrected means you are saved from the grave (Hades). But of course some men will forfeit their salvation.

Verse 18 tells us that "all men" were "justified to life." Then, verse 19 tells us that "many" will be made righteous. Justification to life has been given to everyone. Earlier, Paul called this reconciliation. But not everyone will be made righteous. Some will forfeit their reconciliation, deliberately refusing to be made righteous. This is equivalent to Adam's original sin and erases what Christ did on the cross. We must have direct knowledge of God, in a similar way that Adam had a direct knowledge of God, in order to erase the work of reconciliation that Christ did on the cross. Those who do not refuse justification will eventually be made righteous. Therefore, salvation is something to be lost, not gained.

Some translations, such as the ESV, say that the one act of righteousness "leads to" justification and life. However, in the Greek this verse does not have a word for "leading," or "leads to." The verb is actually absent and assumed. Therefore, it would literally be translated "it is," like Young's Literal Translation.

Romans 5:18 YLT So, then, as through one offence to all men it is to condemnation, so also through one declaration of 'Righteous' it is to all men to justification of life;

Therefore, the crucifixion is a justification of life (resurrection) for all men. This is also known as reconciliation. The only way anyone can lose this gift is to reject the gift by hardening their hearts to the point where they no longer hear Christ's voice.

Chapter 11

General Revelation

Everyone can understand about God through the Creation and we understand about God through our own conscience. Also, men have often understood aspects of God through reason and deduction. God has even given people dreams and visions. God speaks to people's hearts. This is called general revelation, and is available to all people, at all times, and at all places. In chapter 10 of this book, we discussed some of the reasons from Romans why people can have faith in God and will be resurrected without specific knowledge of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, God revealed Himself to Abraham with a special promise. This type of revelation is not just for the benefit of Abraham and his family. This was a promise of blessing to all nations. Later, these revelations were written down and became Scripture. Special revelation is for the benefit of everybody. Historically, most Christians have believed that special revelation, recorded in Scripture, is required for salvation. No man comes to the Father except through Christ. This, of course, is special revelation about Jesus Christ. But the New Wine System is about God's plan of salvation through general revelation, yet eventually requiring the special revelation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for eternal life.

11.1) Was Melchizedek Saved?

Melchizedek was the king of the city called Salem, in the land of Canaan, at the time of Abram. We are told that Melchizedek, the king, was also a "priest of God Most High" (Gen 14:8). Melchizedek blessed Abram, and Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of the goods that had been recovered from the kings that had captured Lot. The author of Hebrews considers this to have been a tithe, and confirmed that Melchizedek was a "priest of God Most High" (Hebrews 5:10, 7:1, 7:9-10).

From this Scriptural evidence, we must conclude that Melchizedek was saved. Melchizedek, however, had no special revelation from God. The promise of a Messiah did not come down through Melchizedek. He was a priest of God only by way of general revelation. He may not have even understood that there was to be a Messiah, yet he was saved. Salvation does not depend how well we understand God's doctrines. Salvation does not depend upon knowledge of the Messiah.

The author of Hebrews teaches that Christ is the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:8, 7:17). Would Christ be the High Priest in the order of

Melchizedek if Melchizedek himself were not saved? If Melchizedek was saved, then those of his order who have true faith in the “God Most High” are saved as well. People who have faith in God through general revelation are saved. They too are of the “order” of Melchizedek.

Can people today be saved through general revelation, like Melchizedek? If not, then when did this form of salvation expire? Did God’s special revelations to Abraham cause Melchizedek’s Canaanite grandchildren to have no hope of salvation? Would God’s revelation ever cause anyone to be excluded from salvation? Did Christ’s crucifixion and the revelations thereof cause people on the other side of the world to be disqualified for salvation? Would Christ’s crucifixion ever cause anyone to be barred from salvation?

Some people may argue that once someone has heard about Christ, then they would no longer have the opportunity for salvation under general revelation. That, however, would place a terrible burden on the missionary. What if he failed to identify some cultural barrier that prevents the person from understanding? Could the missionary’s witness actually cause a person to lose his salvation? If they manage to avoid the missionaries, and thus remain eligible for salvation under general revelation, how would that work with the requirement that you can’t be saved without Christ? Christ is the only way to the Father.

Some people argue that anyone can hear God’s voice, and thus they will have no excuse (Romans 1:20). In other words, the claim is that God will reveal his Son to anyone who wants to hear God’s voice. Missionaries have often reported remarkable knowledge of God in primitive tribes. Missionaries have witnessed many remarkably accurate general revelations about God. However, knowledge of the Son of God, who died for our sins, has never been revealed by general revelation. God does not send angels to spread the gospel. The gospel only comes through the witness of Christians.

No man can be saved other than by the name of Jesus Christ. There is no other way to the Father, except through Him. Despite this absolute truth, God seems to have a provision for salvation through general revelation, in the order of Melchizedek. How is this possible? How can both be true?

The only possible answer is the fact that there will be a millennial reign of Christ. Everyone saved by general revelation will be resurrected, and then they can be saved by the special revelation of Jesus Christ during the millennium. This alone should convince the amillennialist that there has to be a millennium.

If general revelation, without faith in at least the promise of Christ, were to allow people to get into the wedding banquet right after the resurrection, then they would be getting there other than through Christ. And yet they will be resurrected, because people like Melchizedek will be saved. They won't be at the wedding banquet. They won't be a part of Israel, which is the true Church. Nevertheless, they will be saved from death by being resurrected.

Psalms 19:1-4 NIV A psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (2) Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. (3) There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. (4) Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun.

11.2) Pagan Cultures

Some people will argue that people under religions of more than one God, such as Hinduism, cannot be saved, because they would not know God the Creator. The general thinking, by some, is that Jews might be saved by faith in the Creator, but Muslims are much less likely. And Hindus are completely out of the question. The basic idea seems to be that the closer one's religion is to Christian truth, the more likely they might be saved.

Some people from dispensational backgrounds believe that Jews can still be saved under the Old Covenant. One such person told me:

I was addressing the fate of the Jews, who out of ignorance don't yet understand who Jesus is. Does the devout Rabbi who devotes his life to God go to hell, or do his actions under the old covenant still do anything? It is clear that God has brought them back to Israel, and it seems that God has made them victorious in their wars to date.

Yet, this person completely rejected the idea that a devout Hindu could be saved. I can't see a difference between the devout Rabbi who rejects Jesus out of ignorance, and the devout Hindu who also rejects Jesus out of ignorance. There was never salvation through keeping the Old Covenant, "because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). There was never salvation through worshiping Hindu idols. Salvation has always been through faith in whatever revelation that person has personally received. If God

has a plan to bring a Rabbi who has died without Christ to salvation through Christ, then God can also have a similar plan to bring a Hindu who has died without Christ into salvation through Christ.

Many Christians have a misunderstanding about Hinduism. Moreover, pagan cultures in the past have all been similar to modern-day Hinduism. Many Christians don't understand that Hindus also believe in the One God, whom they call Brahma. They even have a trinity that is strikingly similar to ours. (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Vishnu is many incarnations of God, where God becomes a man. They also have a bunch of lesser gods that are worshiped. It's similar to the Catholics who pray to saints. By the way, not all Hindus believe in reincarnation, which they call "life after death." Many Hindus say they don't believe in "life after death." Instead, they believe in heaven and hell just as Christians do. (I lived in India for a year and a half and learned this directly from them.)

Hinduism is certainly wrong. It's no doubt an invention of Satan. But they do believe in God the Creator, who is above all other gods. In English, they even refer to him as God. Actually, the Creation itself is God (Brahma) in Hinduism. But just how much doctrinal error does God allow before he says, "Sorry, you have too much doctrinal error. Your faith doesn't count?"

Romans 1:20 NIV For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities -- his eternal power and divine nature -- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Without doubt, Hindus see God's invisible qualities in the Creation. They attribute those qualities to the One God. How can it then be said that they have no excuse for their lack of faith in the Creator? Hindus despise the Theory of Evolution. Paul was probably thinking about the pagan culture of the time when he wrote Romans 1 (above).

Ancient Greek Paganism was very similar to modern-day Hinduism. They had multiple gods, and One Supreme God over them all. They worshiped idols. There are several Greek words for this supreme God. One is Zeus. Another is Theos. Theos is the source of the English word Theology. Theos is the Greek word that was used for God in the New Testament.

The belief in Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva goes way back. Hinduism is believed to be at least as old as Abraham. Some Hindus claim 10,000 years. Hindu writings don't include dates like the Bible. That's the problem. However, their writings probably go back at least as far as Abraham (2000 BC.) Furthermore, most

modern-day eastern religions are offshoots of Hinduism from 500-600 BC. All of the major western religions are offshoots of Abraham. Basically, there are only two major religious roots, Abraham and Hinduism, both from around 2000 BC.

The Christian concept of the Trinity was not firmly established (or understood) until around 325 AD. Hence, the Hindu idea of a trinity did not come from Christianity. What's more likely is that the Hindu trinity is an imitation invented by Satan. Just as Brahma is the Creator, Shiva is the Destroyer. (He destroys things that need destroying.) His statue looks like a multi-armed person with snakes around his neck. I think Shiva is found in Revelation:

Revelation 9:11 They have over them as king the angel of the abyss. His name in Hebrew is "Abaddon," but in Greek, he has the name "Apollyon."

The words Abaddon and Apollyon both mean Destroyer. The snakes around the neck of Shiva sure remind me of Satan. Shiva is the Destroyer. This angel of the Abyss is a king over demons. I don't think this king of demons is meant to be Satan himself. He is just a demonic king. In the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit goes out and does the works of God. The demons go out and do the destructive works of Satan. Therefore, I think this was Satan's imitation of the Trinity.

Speaking of Satan in Revelation; what about the dragon?

Revelation 12:9a The great dragon was thrown down, the old serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.

Where does this word "dragon" come from? The dragon is from ancient Chinese culture. In ancient Chinese culture, the dragon spews out fire and water. He causes floods, and other weather related problems.

Revelation 12:15-16 The serpent spewed water out of his mouth after the woman like a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream. (16) The earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon spewed out of his mouth.

The Chinese say the dragon is a snake before he lost his legs. This reminds me of Genesis 3:14, where the serpent was cursed and made to crawl on the earth.

This aspect of Chinese culture is not related to Buddhism. In other words, this goes way back prior to Buddhism. (Buddhism came from Hinduism around

500 BC.) Remember that the Chinese, like everybody else, are descendants of Noah. These aspects of Chinese culture are probably what is left of their knowledge about Adam and Eve. They also believe that Man was created from clay. However, there were different lumps of clay for each race.

From this earlier aspect of Chinese culture comes the word "Shang-Dea," which means, "King on High." It's their word for God. Most ancient cultures retain traces of the original truth about the Creator. Each of the hundreds of different languages of the world has a name for the One God. Missionaries often make use of the name for God in their own native language. Then they introduce the Son of God, and how he died, using God's name in their own language. I think that faith in the Creator, for all cultures, is true faith in God.

For more information about how God has preserved knowledge about Himself as the One God Creator in every culture of the world, read the book entitled, "Eternity in Their Hearts," by Don Richardson. This book is divided into two major parts, which are sub-titled, "The Melchizedek Factor," and "The Abraham Factor." This parallels what theologians call general revelation and special revelation. General revelation is based on understanding about God the Creator from observations of the Creation, as well as by logic and reason.

Richardson writes:

When, however, Abram and his caravan traveled *deeper* into Canaan, a delightful surprise awaited them. They passed near a city which took its name from the Canaanite word for "peace" – *Salem*. The Canaanite name of that very city, incidentally, would later give rise to the very meaningful Hebrew greeting *Shalom* and also its Arabic equivalent *Salaam*. Salem would later contribute its five letters to form the last part of the name *Jerusalem* – "the foundation of peace." Even more interesting than Salem itself, however, was the king who ruled over it – Melchizedek!

His name is a combination of two other Canaanite words: *melchi* – "king," and *zadok* – "righteousness."

A "king of righteousness" among the Canaanites, who were notorious for idolatry, child sacrifice, legalized homosexuality, and temple prostitution? Surely Melchizedek must have been grossly misnamed! (pages 27-28, emphasis his)

Richardson's book does an outstanding job of showing how Melchizedek represents God's general revelation, given to all nations. He shows that Abraham represents God's special revelation, given initially only to the Jews. Richardson gives example after example of traditions, about the one true God, that have come down through the ages from sources other than the Jews.

This study of the progressive nature of God's revelation has shown us that God's redemptive plan is for everybody. Everybody has some degree of revelation from God. God expects those who are given more revelation to lead others to God's righteousness. Those who are given the most revelation are the firstfruits of the harvest in God's redemptive plan for everybody.

Calvinism teaches just the opposite. Calvinism teaches that God's redemptive plan of salvation is only for an elected few. So next we will look at the problems with Calvinism.

Would a loving God have a merciful plan for our loved ones who have died having never heard or understood about Jesus Christ? Solved by applying Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church.

Chapter 12

Problems with Calvinism

Calvin lived in the 16th century at the time of Martin Luther. Both Calvin and Luther believed in election. However, Luther did not believe in all the five points of Calvinism. One could say that anything Calvin taught could be considered as Calvinism. Election, however, goes back to Augustine.

The doctrine of election states that God chose, before the foundation of the world, who would be saved and who would not be saved. In other words, God chose who would spend eternity in heaven and who would spend eternity in hell. This choice has nothing to do with how good or bad one would be.

The opposing doctrine is called Arminianism. This doctrine states that God foreknew who would ask for God's salvation, and thus this foreknowledge is a type of election. Yet each person has the free will to choose for themselves whether or not to follow Christ.

The New Wine System, as described in this book, is in the middle of the two. The truth hides in the middle. There is an election. But the choice was not, strictly speaking, who would be saved. (Of course the elect are all saved.) God's election is who would be chosen to reign with Christ during the millennium. It's exactly the same thing as God's chosen people of Israel in the Old Testament. Everyone not chosen still has the free-will to follow Christ and then to mature in Christ during the millennium. The elect are those in the true Church, which is the true Israel.

The foundation of Calvinism is all about the glory of God. Calvinists believe that God has greater glory when it's understood that we can do nothing. All decisions are made by God. However, if it is truly the desire of God to save all people (1 Timothy 2:4), then how can it glorify God to say that God chooses to send people to hell in defiance of His own desire? Would it not be a much greater glory for God to see that God provided a way for every person, from all generations and nations, to have the free-will opportunity to mature in Christ for eternal life? Is it to God's glory to say that Christ's blood was sufficient to atone for all sins of all people, and yet God failed to provide a plan for everyone to have the true opportunity to be reconciled with God? Is it to God's glory to say that only the few who find the narrow gate would be saved, and that most will never even have the opportunity to hear the gospel?

Calvinism is often taught with five points, known by the acronym T.U.L.I.P. However, Calvin himself did not come up with this list of points.

Total Depravity

Unconditional Election

Limited Atonement

Irresistible Grace

Perseverance of the Saints

12.1) Total Depravity

The first point of Calvinism asserts that our entire nature is totally sinful. Under slavery to sin, we are blind to the truth, unable to save ourselves, or even to humbly seek after God. Our very nature is so sinful that we would automatically choose to continue in sin instead of follow God. Scripture supports this view.

Romans 3:10-12 As it is written, "There is no one righteous; no, not one. (11) There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks after God. (12) They have all turned aside. They have together become unprofitable. There is no one who does good, no, not, so much as one."

Because of our sinful nature, nobody will come to the Father unless the Father draws him.

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day.

The total depravity of man is without question true. No one will seek Christ unless the Father draws him, because everyone is blinded by their sins. However, Calvinists sometimes miss the fact that everybody will someday be drawn to Christ.

John 12:32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

The same Greek word for "draw" is used in both John 6:44 and in John 12:32. No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him. Yet everyone will be drawn to Christ. Thus, being drawn to Christ is not irresistible. Some will not be eternally

saved, even though they are drawn. This, then, is a strong argument against the doctrine of election for salvation.

Also, note the fact that everyone, at some point, will be drawn to Christ. How can one be drawn to Christ if one has never heard about Christ? For this verse to be true, death cannot be the end of God's plan of salvation.

Many people who argue against the five points of Calvinism understand that to defeat total depravity would defeat the whole system. This would be true. Romans 3:10-12 and John 6:44 prove the principle of total depravity. What is always missed is John 12:32. Everyone will someday be drawn to Christ.

12.2) Unconditional Election

The second point of Calvinism asserts that God's choice for who is chosen to be saved is unconditionally grounded in God's own sovereign decision, and is not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith. Thus, believers have no reason to boast about themselves as being saved. Salvation is by God's grace alone.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, that no one would boast.

John 15:16 You didn't choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you will ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Central to the teaching of the doctrine of election is Romans 9. The context of the passage is Paul wrestling over the fact that Israel had rejected the Messiah. "But it is not as though the word of God had failed," Paul says. Paul's response is that not all Israel is Israel (verse 6). Not all are children of Abraham simply because they are his descendants. Then Paul goes into the doctrine of election.

Romans 9:7b-9 "In Isaac will your seed be called." (8) That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as a seed. (9) For this is a word of promise, "At the appointed time I will come, and Sarah will have a son.

Notice that the focus here is being elected to be heirs of the promise of Abraham. In other words, election is about being chosen to be a part of the true Israel. The

“children of the flesh” had rejected the Messiah. God, by his sovereignty, elects those who will be a part of the true Israel, who will not reject the Messiah. This is not to say that God is electing those who will be saved.

Romans 9:10-23 Not only so, but Rebecca also conceived by one, by our father Isaac. (11) For being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him who calls, (12) it was said to her, "The elder will serve the younger." (13) Even as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (14) What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? May it never be! (15) For he said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (16) So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy. (17) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might show in you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (18) So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. (19) You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" (20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" (21) Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? (22) What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made for destruction, (23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory,

Election is proven without a doubt by this passage. Election is not based on merit. Paul makes the point that the younger twin was given the promise, before they were born, before either had done anything good or bad. Therefore, election is unconditional.

For what are we being elected? The context of the passage is still the election of Israel. Did the people of Israel, at that time, believe that only the “children of the flesh” would be saved? When did being a part of Israel become a requirement for being saved? If so, we would need a very explicit verse of Scripture that says this. We should interpret Romans 9 in the context of the culture of that time.

Here are some verses that argue against salvation election.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; **(4)** who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Why would God elect only specific people to be saved, if it's His desire for all to be saved?

Romans 2:11 NIV For God does not show favoritism.

The context of this verse is that of Jews and Gentiles. Paul is saying that God does not show favoritism of Jews over Gentiles or Gentiles over Jews. If being a part of Israel in Old Testament times was the only means of salvation, then how is that not God showing favoritism of Jew over Gentile? But if this was not the case, then Gentiles in Old Testament times could be saved without being a part of Old Testament Israel. Thus, Old Testament election is not the same as salvation. It's simply being elected to be a part of God's chosen people of Israel. Yet this famous Calvinist election passage of Romans 9 uses God's election of Old Testament Israel to illustrate election.

Also, if God really does not show any kind of favoritism, then God could not elect some to be saved and not others. Salvation election is favoritism. But it's not favoritism for God to choose those who will lead others into a saving relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ.

One could argue, however, that those elected to be in Israel (the Church) is a favoritism of God. It's true that those in the church are elected. But those in the church are simply the firstfruits (Jeremiah 2:3, Romans 8:23, James 1:18) of the harvest. The firstfruits often have to go through persecution in order to bring the good news to the rest of the harvest. God's purpose is to allow all to be saved, within the boundaries of their free-will. All who continue in their desire to follow God will eventually inherit eternal life. Within this purpose, from the eternal perspective, God does not show favoritism, which disproves unconditional election.

12.3) Limited Atonement

The third point of Calvinism asserts that the purpose in Christ's death was only for the forgiveness of those God elected to be saved. Limited atonement does not limit the value of Christ's death. Calvinists say that the amount of Christ's suffering was not based on the number of people that were to be saved. If God were to have elected additional people for salvation, it would not have caused Christ to suffer more. Calvinists would say that if God had chosen for everyone to be saved, that Christ's suffering would still be the same.

Limited atonement simply states that God's purpose in Christ's death only applies to the elect. For example, God does not choose to save the fallen angels. Therefore, the purpose of Christ's death does not apply to them. Likewise, the purpose of Christ's death does not apply to those not chosen for salvation.

Election for salvation logically requires limited atonement. If God chose, before the foundation of the world, which of us were to be saved, then God's plan for Christ's death could only involve the people he chose. God could not justify the sins of those he did not choose for salvation.

Here are some verses that argue against limited atonement. Notice that many of these verses also argue against election itself.

1 Timothy 2:3-6 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; (4) who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth. (5) For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (6) who gave himself as a ransom for all; the testimony in its own times;

1 John 2:2 And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

Romans 5:18 NIV Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.

Romans 11:32 For God has shut up all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

1 Timothy 4:10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we have set our trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. (15) He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again.

2 Corinthians 5:19 Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation.

John 1:29 The next day, he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (17) For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

Notice that many of these verses not only argue against limited atonement, they actually make it clear that everyone has been reconciled. How can anybody wind up being condemned if they have been reconciled? The answer is that only the wicked, who forfeit Christ's gift of salvation, wind up being condemned.

Do Calvinists have verses in favor of limited atonement? When compared with Arminianism, the answer is yes.

Matthew 26:28 For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins.

The context of this verse is that of the new covenant. The new covenant is with the Church, which is Israel. The Church is limited in number to the elect. Therefore, the bread and the wine of the new covenant is for many, but not all. As we have seen, when other verses speak of salvation for the world, the blood is for "all." When it's understood that people in the age to come will be saved that are not under the new covenant, then we can see how this "many" does not contradict the "all" in the previously quoted verses.

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

The argument of limited atonement here is that the Good Shepherd lays down his life only for his sheep. The context of the parable is Jesus' comparison between

the common people of Jerusalem, and the Pharisees. Some of the Pharisees had committed the unpardonable sin. Others were in danger of doing so. Jesus considers all who have not rejected him to be his sheep. Everyone in the Lamb's Book of Life is Christ's sheep.

For those who had already had their names blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life, before the crucifixion, it could be argued that Christ's sacrifice was not made for them. Therefore it could be argued that Christ's atonement was not for everybody. Christ's atonement would not be applied to those very few who had already rejected Christ's sacrifice before the sacrifice was even made. However, when one realizes that names are blotted from the Book of Life, and when one realizes that the Book of Life is not a book of predestination, then it becomes understandable that this type of limitation on atonement does not argue for the election of salvation.

John 17:9 I pray for them. I don't pray for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

Jesus is praying for the elect. That is not to say that only the elect will be saved.

Acts 20:28 Take heed, therefore, to yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the assembly of the Lord and God which he purchased with his own blood.

Ephesians 5:25 ESV Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Jesus obtained the elect with His own blood. That doesn't mean that the blood of Jesus doesn't also reconcile everyone else.

The preponderance of Scriptural evidence indicates that Christ died for everyone. Everyone has been reconciled. If Christ's sacrifice applies even to people who do not profess faith in Christ, then why must they be punished? Divine justice requires that the sinner be punished, either himself, or the substitute. However, if the sins were already paid for by the substitute, then why would the unrighteous sinner require punishment?

Romans 5:18 says Christ's sacrifice was justification that brings life for all men. And it's not an 'all' that's assumed to be 'all who believe.' In the same context, only the "many will be made righteous." This greatly discredits limited atonement. Without limited atonement, Calvin's election has serious problems.

Romans 5:18-19 So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, ALL men were justified to life. (19) For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, MANY will be made righteous.

These problems are only resolved when we realize that everyone has been “justified to life.” Everyone has been reconciled, meaning everyone can be resurrected. And the only way they will be condemned, is for them to harden their heart and reject their free gift, and to get their names blotted from the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Election for salvation logically requires limited atonement. If God chose, before the foundation of the world, which of us were to be saved, then God’s plan for Christ’s death could only involve the people he chose. God could not reconcile those not chosen for salvation.

Many who believe in salvation election don’t subscribe to limited atonement. The reason, probably, is the clear verses of Scripture for election, and at the same time the clear verses of Scripture that limited atonement is not true. However, it’s impossible to have salvation election without limited atonement. Calvinists had to include it in their five points for good solid logical reasons. God could not reconcile those He never intended to save.

In mathematics one can disprove an assumption by making the assumption, and then following the logic of the assumption. The mathematician applies previously proven theorems to the assumption, and eventually comes up with either a false statement or a contradiction. In so doing, the mathematician disproves the assumption. This is not numbers and formulas. However, we should realize that if limited atonement is false, then salvation election must also be false.

Election itself is without question true. But when one realizes that election does not necessarily mean an election of salvation, then one should see that all the verses against limited atonement should completely eliminate salvation election.

12.4) Irresistible Grace

The fourth point of Calvinism asserts that everyone God has chosen is forced to have faith for salvation. They cannot resist. For those chosen, the Holy Spirit calls the person in such a way that the person cannot refuse the call.

Irresistible Grace is another necessary logical conclusion that must be made from the assumption of salvation election. If God predestines all who will be saved,

then how can one who has been chosen by God decide against Christ? Doing so would invalidate God's predestination.

Is the draw of the Holy Spirit irresistible? Would the Holy Spirit bother to draw someone who is not elected to be saved? Consider the following verse.

Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit! As your fathers did, so you do.

Jesus chose the disciples, not for salvation, but to go and bear fruit (John 15:16). Calvinists would probably agree that Jesus' choice of the disciples is election, except for one problem that they have.

John 6:70-71 ESV Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.

Jesus chose the twelve. Yet Judas rejected Christ. This discredits irresistible grace. Judas was able to resist God's choice. When God reveals Himself to us, we must respond to that voice with faith. Refusing to respond to God's voice can cause one's name to be blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life. Remember John 12:32?

John 12:32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

God will draw all people to Christ. That draw is God's grace. Christ being lifted up from the earth was God's grace. But that draw is not irresistible. Just as Adam had the free-will to disobey, God still allows man the free-will to reject God.

Therefore, even the elect are not unconditionally predestined. The elect were chosen before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5). And yet it is possible for some to choose to reject God, and become wicked. We all have free-will. Election is simply God's choice to reveal himself to the person in a strong undeniable way. If the strong undeniable draw of the Holy Spirit is rejected, the sin is unpardonable.

Irresistible grace would seem to be false. And if irresistible grace is false, then salvation election must also be false. One cannot be true without the other. Man's free-will ability to resist God's grace invalidates salvation election.

12.5) Perseverance of the Saints

The fifth point of Calvinism asserts that you cannot lose your salvation. This point is better known as, “Once saved always saved.” If one is truly saved, then Calvinism would state that it’s because one has been unconditionally predestined to be saved. Therefore, if one were to lose that salvation, it would invalidate the unconditional predestination of salvation. Therefore, the perseverance of the saints must go hand-in-hand with salvation election. One cannot be true without the other.

There are indeed verses of Scripture that support an assurance of salvation. The New Wine System also supports an assurance of salvation. As long as one desires to follow Christ, they have an assurance of salvation.

The distinction between assurance of salvation in Calvinism, and that of the New Wine System, is that Calvinism does not allow for the free-will of the saved to become unsaved. Calvinism does not allow for one to reject Christ after he or she has truly accepted Christ. They would simply argue that the person had not been saved to begin with.

Here are some verses Calvinists use to argue perseverance of the saints:

John 10:27-28 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. (28) I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

It’s true that nobody, including Satan, can cause one of Christ’s sheep to lose their salvation. But these verses say nothing about whether the sheep would leave the hand of Christ out of their own free-will.

John 6:47 Most certainly, I tell you, he who believes in me has eternal life.

If one continues one's belief in Christ, then one has an assurance of eternal life. But if one purposefully and knowingly discontinues one's faith in Christ, then this very verse could be used to argue that one does not have eternal life. (In the Greek, faith and belief are basically the same thing.)

Romans 8:1a There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Those who reject Christ, even if they were once saved, are no longer in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6 ESV And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

This verse does not deny our free-will ability to reject Christ. Those who know Christ and love Him would never want to reject Christ. However, we have the ability to do so. Also, for those who know and love Christ, God will be faithful to bring them through full sanctification. They will mature in Christ. Does Scripture teach that there is a danger for Christians if they were to reject Christ?

Hebrews 6:4-6 ESV For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

The warning here is for true Christians who shared in the Holy Spirit. This is not about sins in weak moments. This verse is talking about the intentional rejection of Christ after one has truly believed and received the Holy Spirit. This is the theme of Hebrews. It was discussed in much more detail back in chapter 8 of this book.

Many people consider Hebrews 6:4-6, and the entire book of Hebrews, to be hard to understand. So let's look at a verse in Romans:

Romans 11:17-24 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them, and became partaker with them of the root and of the richness of the olive tree; (18) don't boast over the branches. But if you boast, it is not you who support the root, but the root supports you. (19) You will say then, "Branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in." (20) 'True; by their unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by your faith. Don't be conceited, but fear; (21) for if God didn't spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. (22) See then the goodness and severity of God. Toward those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness; otherwise you also will be cut off. (23) 'They also, if they don't continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. (24) For if you were cut out of that which is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature

into a good olive tree, how much more will these, which are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

How must a Calvinist interpret these verses? The root, in verse 18, is Christ. It's also Israel. Compare this with John 15, where those who abide in Christ are the branches of the vine.

Can someone who is truly in the vine be cut out off from the vine? If not, then why does Paul warn us against it? If he is not really in the vine, then how can he be cut off from the vine? Is Paul's warning consistent with Calvin's perseverance of the saints? This passage cannot be consistent with the Calvinist view of the perseverance of the saints.

These verses would tend to strongly discredit "once saved always saved." And if "once saved always saved" is false, then salvation election cannot be true. How can a person be cut from the vine if they were predestined to be saved before the foundation of the world? And if it were to be said they were not really saved to begin with, then how could they have really been in the vine to begin with?

Notice that people can be cut off from the vine, and then be grafted back in again (verse 23). On the other hand, the verse in Hebrews 6:4-6 states that "it is impossible to restore again to repentance those ... who fall away." How are these two verses reconciled? With only two types of people in the grave, these two verses cannot be reconciled. One says you can lose your salvation, and then get it back again. The other says that if you lose you salvation, you cannot get it back again.

However, with three types of people in the grave, these two verses are easily reconciled. The verse in Hebrews is talking about rejecting Christ after receiving the revelation of Christ. Doing so causes one's name to be blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life. These people move to the wicked group.

On the other hand, the verses in Romans are talking about being in the vine of Israel. Those who are completely sanctified are in the wise group. The vine is about abiding in Jesus, and comes from John 15. The vine is Christ. Those who abide in the vine are in Christ. A branch could be cut off because of pride (verse 20). However, pride is not an unpardonable sin. A branch cut off is no longer abiding in Christ. The branch could later repent and come back into the vine of Christ. Those who are temporarily in and out of Christ are moving in and out of the wise group. This is very different from having one's name be blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life. The elect are those who, in the age to come, are in the wise group. In the meantime, we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. But it's God that does the greater work within us. (Philippians 2:12-13).

Calvinism vs. Arminianism (election vs. free-will). Solving this major Church divider without the use of paradoxes, or two sides of the same coin. Solved by applying Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church.

12.6) Concluding Thoughts for Part Three of This Book

Faith in the Creator can be a starting point for faith that ultimately leads to a relationship with Christ. But what happens if there is no faith in the Creator?

The theory of evolution has caused many people to embrace atheism. Atheism is the one religion that can really be damning to the soul. The theory of evolution and atheism is all about looking at the evidence of the Creator in the Creation, and then denying there is a God. Basic personal revelations from God about Himself are denied. Is this the unpardonable sin? Will atheist evolutionists have no excuse when they stand before the judgment of God?

Hopefully, for most, God will see this as more of Satan's lies and have mercy. Hopefully, God will continue waiting in love and not yet blot out their names. But others, who know the real truths of science, who know down deep that God is their Creator, yet who nevertheless continue to "suppress the truth" (Rom 1:18), could get their names blotted out. Only God knows for sure the people who have, for too many times, rejected His personal revelations.

2 Thessalonians 2:11 speaks of a powerful delusion, sent by God, so that they will believe the lie, and so be condemned. Simply believing a lie does not make one lose out on the possibility of salvation. But when there are personal revelations from God, and people still choose to believe the lie instead of God, then they can be condemned. Apparently, during the great tribulation, this happens on a massive scale as people take the mark of the beast and worship the antichrist. The theory of evolution is probably not the entire lie spoken of in this verse. But it certainly must be a major aspect of that lie.

Does science really deny the Creator? As it turns out, almost every field of science today is affirming the existence of the Creator. Many scientists from many different fields are writing about the theory of Intelligent Design as an alternative to evolution. Intelligent Design does not look at the Bible, nor does it look at the teachings of any religion. Intelligent Design is simply a study of the universe and the reasons why the universe had to have been designed by a super intelligence.

Part Four

God's Grace

Part Four of this book is all about Law vs. Grace. Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will inherit the kingdom, but only those who do the "will" of the Father (Mat 7:21). This "will" is talking about the overall purpose that God has for us. We find God's purpose ("will") and do it out of love for the Father. We help our neighbors because the Father's love is in us. This became possible under the New Covenant because of the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which did not happen in Old Testament times. God is love. As our love and God's love come into harmony, Christ is "in" us and we are "in" Christ because of a common purpose. This is God's grace. We are favored by God in that we have a new way of living, where God lives in us and through us.

God's grace causes our focus to get off of ourselves and onto others, and onto the Father's purpose in our lives. As that happens, we completely, one hundred percent, overcome all sinful habits in our lives. But if you are looking at self, feeling guilty about not measuring up, or if you are trying to overcome by self-effort, then it becomes all about self and not about God's purpose. Doing so keeps you under the law and not knowing the true freedom of God's grace. Without that true freedom, we would fall back into the bondage of sinful habits. This then, literally fulfills the law and the prophets. We literally become able to obey the law perfectly, whereas that was not possible without God's love in us and flowing from us as we work in our God-given purpose.

This is nothing new. A similar doctrine is known as lordship salvation. But free grace advocates have opposed lordship salvation because it seems to add a requirement to salvation other than faith in Christ. But the New Wine System shows us that the wise live the life of "lordship salvation" without saying that those who don't won't be saved. The wise will enter the narrow gate to inherit the kingdom. But the foolish can still enter through the wide gate and eventually be saved by God's grace (way of life) during the millennium.

Chapter 13

Lordship Salvation vs. Free Grace

The New Wine System solves seven major problems of Scripture that have divided the churches over the centuries. (See section 4.1 for a list, or just look at the title page of this book.) The controversy of lordship salvation vs. free grace is in this list. All the others in the list have been ongoing controversies for centuries. This controversy is much more recent. It's been ongoing for just a few decades.

Lordship salvation can also be called discipleship salvation. The controversy is about whether or not one must be a true disciple of Christ in order to be saved. Or does simple belief in Christ as Savior suffice? Both sides have very good arguments of Scripture. Both sides have their truths. Both sides have their problems. And of course the New Wine System clearly resolves the issue without stretching verses.

13.1) The Lordship Salvation Side of the Debate

One of the best-known advocates for the lordship salvation side is John MacArthur. He has published three editions of his book titled *The Gospel According to Jesus - What is Authentic Faith?* The third edition of this book is called the "Revised and Expanded Anniversary Edition." In the preface to the first edition, page 16, MacArthur writes:

Because of the state of the gospel in contemporary evangelicalism, there is no way to teach about salvation without dealing specifically with this issue, which has come to be known as "lordship salvation." No more serious question faces the church today. It can be phrased in many ways: What is the gospel? Must a person accept Jesus as Savior *and* Lord in order to be saved? What is saving faith? How should we invite men and women to Christ? and What is salvation?

That there is so much controversy over this most foundational subject testifies to the effectiveness of the enemy's work in these latter days. Several who disagree with my views have said in print that the lordship controversy is a matter of eternal consequence. Whoever is wrong on this issue is seriously wrong about the most basic of Christian truths.

On that we agree. I went through a phase of thinking that the whole dispute might be a misunderstanding or semantic argument. But as I studied the issues, I came to realize that this is a fundamental difference in doctrine. After many conversations with those who disagree and hours of studying what they are saying, I am now convinced that the two sides in this argument have distinctly different views of salvation. The average person in the pew is confused, having heard two conflicting messages from the same conservative, fundamentalist, evangelical camp.

Another author on the lordship salvation side is Walter J. Chantry. In his book titled, *Today's Gospel - authentic or synthetic?*, in the introduction on page 4, Chantry writes:

In the central issue of the way of salvation, large segments of Protestantism are engrossed in neo-traditionalism. We have inherited a system of evangelistic preaching which is unbiblical. Nor is this tradition very ancient. Our messages and manner of preaching the gospel cannot be traced back to the Reformers and their creeds. They are much more recent innovations. Worse, they cannot be traced to the Scriptures. They have clearly arisen from superficial exegesis and a careless mixture of twentieth-century reason with God's revelation.

The resulting product is a dangerous conglomerate - just the sort that Satan uses to delude the souls of sinners. What cult has not learned to use verses of the Bible and half truths to establish their lies? That has been the devil's strategy from the beginning [*Gen. 3:5*]. By selling another gospel to our generation, Satan has been employing many sincere men in preaching a dethroned Christ. The glories of the Saviour are being hidden even from his servants because preachers will not give careful attention to the gospel of God's Word alone.

Later on in his introduction, on page 6, Chantry continues:

All of this is related to the use of a message in evangelism that is unbiblical. The truth necessary for life has been hidden in a smoke screen of human inventions. On the shallow ground of man's logic, large numbers have been lead to assume they have a right to everlasting life and have been given an assurance which

does not belong to them. Evangelicals are swelling the ranks of the deluded with a perverted gospel. Many who have 'made decisions' in modern churches and have been told in the inquiry rooms that their sins have been forgiven, will be as surprised as Tetzels customers to hear, 'I never knew you; depart from me' [*Matt. 7:23*].

And later, on page 7 in the introduction, Chantry writes:

Pastors, this is no idle question. Have you not wondered about those 'converts' who are as carnal as ever? What about those who have 'decided for Christ' and you cannot tell what they decided? They are not godly like the Saviour they profess, nor zealous for his cause. They do not study the Word and do not mind if they are absent when it is preached. Consequently, you know that they give no evidence of true conversion. Have you considered the possibility that they were never evangelized at all? Have your preaching and methods led them to comfort apart from Christ?

The bottom line is that lordship salvation advocates say that countless numbers of Christians believe they are saved, but in fact they will die and go to hell. Unlike the New Wine System, lordship salvation does not distinguish salvation from inheriting the kingdom.

While writing this chapter, I received an email from a person who had quickly glanced at my web page without carefully reading it. People have a tendency to assume what you write if it's not what they already believe. Here is his entire email:

Sanctification is not about or necessity for salvation. That means salvation by works. Paul denies such thing. Sanctification is for saved people. They are saved. How can an unsaved person do sanctification? If you don't believe in eternal security how can you really believe in God's election? It seems you confuse a lot of things.

Man's holiness? There is NO such thing apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in believers. If holiness is required for salvation, what role does justification has? You are very wrong.

You clearly have a dangerous theology.

He starts out by saying that sanctification is not necessity for salvation. It's easy to see that churches have been teaching that salvation is basic belief in Jesus Christ as Savior, without including Christ's message of holiness and discipleship. I wondered

what on my website made him negatively react and think that I had said sanctification is necessary for salvation. (Sanctification is necessary for eternal life, but not for salvation.) The first paragraph of my "Quick Introduction to the New Wine System" mentions sanctification. So this is what he probably read:

The gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Mat. 24:14). The gospel (good news) of the kingdom is that anyone can choose to completely overcome sin (all sinful habits), which is to be completely sanctified (1 Thess. 5:23), through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. No one who abides in Christ keeps on sinning (1 John 3:6), because in Christ there is no sin. No one born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God (1 John 3:9).

Notice that I never associated salvation with sanctification. I just said that the gospel (good news) is a message about sanctification. He probably associated salvation with the word "gospel" in his head and immediately concluded that I was talking about salvation.

It would seem that any time you mention the overcoming of sin in our churches today, that you automatically get a negative reaction. The only thing you really hear about sin in our churches today is, "Nobody is perfect. We accept you just the way you are." The gospel has become all about "getting saved" and cannot include anything about holiness.

One might notice that this controversy seems to be only happening in the Protestant circles. The Roman Catholics do not have this problem of doctrine. That's because Catholics do not recognize a "decision for Christ" as being a point of salvation. Catholics would not agree that if one were to die before some moment of "decision for Christ," that they would go to hell. And anytime after this one "decision for Christ," that they would then be destined for heaven. The Catholics see salvation as a journey, beginning with infant baptism.

The New Wine System agrees with the Catholics that salvation is a journey. Everyone has been reconciled and then the journey begins with a profession of faith. But that's only the start of our journey to righteousness. Salvation is a free gift that can be lost or forfeited. Salvation is not gained with a moment's "decision for Christ." Because everyone is reconciled, everyone can be resurrected.

At the same time, the only way to inherit eternal life is to be a true disciple of Christ, and to overcome all sinful habits through that relationship with Christ. The decision to follow Christ must be ongoing. The holiness aspect of salvation goes much further than even the lordship salvation advocates would claim.

Let's look at what MacArthur has to say about carnal Christians. On page 19 of his introduction, again in his book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, MacArthur writes:

The gospel in vogue today holds forth a false hope to sinners. It promises them that they can have eternal life yet continue to live in rebellion against God. Indeed, it encourages people to claim Jesus as Savior yet defer until later the commitment to obey Him as Lord. It promises salvation from hell but not necessarily freedom from iniquity. It offers false security to people who revel in the sins of the flesh and spurn the way of holiness. By separating faith from faithfulness, it teaches that intellectual assent is as valid as wholehearted obedience to the truth.

Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners. It is not the same message as Jesus proclaimed.

This new gospel has spawned a generation of professing Christians whose behavior is indistinguishable from the rebellion of the unregenerate. Statistics reveal that 1.6 billion people worldwide are considered Christians. A well-publicized opinion poll indicated nearly a third of all Americans claim to be born again. Those figures surely represent millions who are tragically deceived. Theirs is a damning false assurance.

The church's witness to the world has been sacrificed on the altar of cheap grace. Shocking forms of open immorality have become commonplace among professing Christians. And why not? The promise of eternal life without surrender to divine authority feeds the wretchedness of the unregenerate heart. Enthusiastic converts to this new gospel believe their behavior has no relationship to their spiritual status - even if they continue wantonly in the grossest kinds of sin and expression of human depravity.

It now appears that the church of our generation will be remembered chiefly for a series of hideous scandals that have uncovered the rankest exhibitions of depravity in the lives of some

highly visible media evangelists. Most troubling of all is the painful reality that most Christians continue to view these people as insiders, not as wolves and false shepherds who have crept in among the flock (cf. Matt. 7:15). Why should we assume that people who live in an unbroken pattern of adultery, fornication, homosexuality, deceit, and every conceivable kind of flagrant excess are truly born again?

Yet that is exactly the assumption Christians of this age have been taught to make. They have been told that the only criterion for salvation is knowing and believing some basic facts about Christ. They hear from the beginning that obedience is optional. It follows logically, then, that someone's one-time profession of faith is more valid than the evidence of that person's ongoing lifestyle in determining whether to embrace him or her as a true believer. The character of the visible church reveals the detestable consequence of this theology.

MacArthur certainly makes a valid point. It's very difficult today to tell any real difference between the people in our evangelical churches and unbelievers in the world. The churches of today have become social groups that pretend to be holy on the outside, but the inside of their cups are filthy. Churches of today's evil generation are really no different than the Pharisees and Sadducees of Christ's evil generation.

In chapter 7, page 80 of his book, MacArthur writes:

Those who argue against lordship salvation have a tendency to identify the object of faith as a basic set of biblical facts. To them, the gospel is largely an academic issue, historical and doctrinal data about Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Trusting those things alone constitutes saved faith, they say. Everything else is peripheral. Any talk of obedience, submission, or Jesus' right to rule is refuted as adding to the gospel, an illegitimate attempt to turn the pagan into a theologian.

Lest you think I'm unfairly presenting someone else's position, let me quote from an essay written to argue that lordship salvation corrupts the gospel: "This [referring to 1 Corinthians 15:3-4] is the essential message of the good news that must be believed for salvation. It contains these facts: (1) man is a sinner, (2) Christ is

the Savior, (3) Christ died as man's substitute, and (4) Christ rose from the dead." The writer then goes on to argue that surrender to Christ's authority has no place in the gospel message: "Everyone who believes in the gospel believes that Jesus is Savior (1 Cor. 12:3). But not everyone who believes the gospel realizes that the Savior has the right to be sovereign over his life. The Child of God should also let Christ be sovereign over his life (Rom. 12:1-2), but obedience to that command is not a condition for salvation... All that is required for salvation is believing the gospel message."

(Thomas L. Constable, "The Gospel Message," in *Walvoord: A Tribute* (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 203-4, 209.)

Of course the position of the New Wine System is that you don't even need to believe that Jesus is Savior in order to be resurrected and live in the millennium. Christ died for everyone. Everyone has been reconciled and can be resurrected. However, Christ must be Lord over one's life in order to inherit the kingdom. Therefore, I would not characterize anyone as "Christian" who does not consider Christ to be Lord over their life - actively endeavoring to be like Christ.

Let's take a look at a few verses that would be used by advocates of lordship salvation. Notice that none of these verses actually use the words "saved" or "salvation." Thus, to say that these verses are talking about salvation is making use of some doctrinal rule or assumption. These verses talk about entering the kingdom, discipleship, becoming like children, going through tribulations, overcoming sin, doing the will (works) of the Father, and even getting thrown into Gehenna. Getting thrown into Gehenna is certain a loss of salvation. However, salvation itself simply means being saved from the grave. And Gehenna (the lake of fire) is a thousand years after the resurrection.

Luke 14:26-27 "If anyone comes to me, and doesn't hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can't be my disciple. (27) Whoever doesn't bear his own cross, and come after me, can't be my disciple."

Luke 14:33 So therefore whoever of you who doesn't renounce all that he has, he can't be my disciple.

Matthew 5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:22 But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna.

Matthew 5:48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 6:15 But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 7:20-23 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. (21) "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' (23) And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Matthew 18:3-4 and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (4) Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Mark 9:47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell.

Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Or don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, (10) nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor extortioners, will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 25:11-12 Afterward the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' (12) But he answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, I don't know you.'

Matthew 25:28-30 Take away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. (29) For to everyone who has will be given,

and he will have abundance, but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away. (30) 'Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Matthew 25:41-46 Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; (42) for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; (43) I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me.' (44) "Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?' (45) "Then he will answer them, saying, 'Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.' (46) These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

John 5:28-29 Don't marvel at this, for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice, (29) and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

Now let's take a look at the other side of this debate. What do the free-grace doctrine advocates have to say about lordship salvation?

13.2) The Free Grace Side of the Debate

One of the best-known advocates for the free grace side of the debate is Charles C. Ryrie. In his book titled, *So Great Salvation*, page 15, Ryrie writes:

First, grace is unmerited favor. As a concise definition of grace, this serves well. More elaborate definitions have their place; but simply stated, grace is unmerited favor. It is undeserved on the part of the recipient. It is unearned and unearnable.

Skipping down a few paragraphs, on page 16, Ryrie writes:

Second, grace is not cheap. Grace is expensive. It is free to the recipient but costly to the donor. ... But to use the word *cheap* in the same breath with the grace of God in salvation seems almost blasphemous. It cost our Lord Jesus His life.

Skipping down a paragraph, on page 16, Ryrie writes:

Human works are like termites in God's structure of grace. They start small, but if unchecked, they can bring down the entire structure. And what are such works? Anything I can do to gain any amount of merit, little or much. Water baptism could be one such work if I view it not as an important or even necessary result of being saved, but as a requisite to be saved. It is a work even if I insist that it is God who gives me the desire to want to be baptized that I might be saved.

The same is true for surrender. If surrender is something I must do as part of believing, then it is a work, and grace has been diluted to the extent to which I actually do surrender.

On page 23, Ryrie writes:

Most readers of this book will probably agree that *baptism* and *works* are words that should not be used in the Gospel message simply because they mean something that is not a part of the Gospel message. That seems clear enough.

But what about the meaning of a word like *repentance*? That does not seem so clear. Is it part of the Gospel message? Is it a requirement to be saved? Is it only a matter of indifference whether one uses the word or not in presenting the Gospel?

Or what about the word *Lord*? What does it mean if it is made a part of the Gospel message? What about *Messiah*? *God*? *Master*?

Or what about the word *give*, as in "Give your heart to Christ"? Is that actually what has to be done if one is going to be saved? Is *give* another way of saying *trust*? And if it is, then is it true that in order to be saved, I must trust my heart to Christ? Or should I say, "Give my life to Christ?"

These are important semantic difference because they give different messages to the Gospel message. Some give a wrong message; others, an unclear one. But we must strive to use the words that give a clear witness to the grace of God. It is not that God cannot use an unclear message; doubtless He does more often that He would prefer to. But why should He have to? Why don't we sharpen our understanding of what the Gospel is about so that

we can present it as clearly as possible, using the right words to herald the Good News correctly?

Words are crucial. How terribly important they are in statements like these: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and ... He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). "These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

Notice how Ryrie carefully separates salvation from anything that is done on our part. Discipleship hopefully comes after salvation. But discipleship is not a requirement for salvation, according to free-grace theologians.

The New Wine System would agree that all our sins are completely forgiven when we become a believer. That is in agreement with free-grace theologians. Before we were even born, we were reconciled with God through the death of his Son. You don't even have to know about Christ's sacrifice for that.

Romans 5:10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life.

The next two chapters of this book are all about the Law vs. Grace from the New Wine System perspective. Chapter 14 is about grace and being filled with the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Then chapter 15 is about Law vs. Grace in the New Testament. It contains a complete commentary on Romans chapters 2 through 8.

Bottom line is that in the New Wine System we do not have to split hairs between belief and discipleship. As we will see, grace is all about living a life for Christ, which is discipleship. Faith without works is dead. Likewise, belief without works is dead. In the Greek, faith and belief are basically the same thing.

The important points are: (A) don't lose your salvation, and (B) continue your journey of righteousness by becoming a believer and a disciple of Christ. So under the New Wine System, becoming a believer and a disciple is indistinguishable. It's all a part of the journey. And yet the New Wine System does not require either belief or discipleship in order to be resurrected to live in the millennium.

Some free-grace advocates acknowledge that some amount of fruit of the Spirit will be present in any true believer. But then they are quick to say that the amount of fruit can be very small, even to the point of being unnoticeable. The more you get into the need of splitting hairs between belief and discipleship salvation, the

more into trouble you get. Salvation is a journey in both the Catholic system and the New Wine System. With salvation being a journey of righteousness, you don't have to spit hairs between belief and discipleship.

Next, Ryrie has a good point in that if any aspect of lordship or discipleship is associated with salvation, then you cannot say how much discipleship is necessary in order to be saved. On page 43, Ryrie writes:

Those who hold to a lordship/discipleship/mastery salvation viewpoint do not (perhaps it would be more accurate to say "cannot") send an unambiguous message about this matter. On the one hand, they say that the essence of saving faith is "unconditional surrender, a complete resignation of self and absolute submission." True faith, we are told, "starts with humility and reaches fruition in obedience." "Salvation is for those who are willing to forsake everything. ... Saving faith is commitment to leave sin and follow Jesus Christ at all costs. Jesus takes no one unwilling to come on those terms." Denying self is essential to salvation: "Eternal life brings immediate death to self. ... Forsaking oneself for Christ's sake is not an optional step of discipleship subsequent to conversion; it is the *sine qua non* of saving faith.

But what if I do not follow Christ at all costs? What if later on in life I become unwilling to forsake something? Suppose I lack full obedience? What if I take something back that earlier in my experience I had given Him? How do I quantify the amount of fruit necessary to be sure I truly "believe" in the lordship/mastery sense of the term? Or how do I quantify the amount of defection that can be tolerated without wondering if I have saving faith or if I in fact lost what I formerly had?

The lordship response, in spite of its stringent demands on the nature of what the view calls saving faith, must either say that (1) a disobedient Christian loses his salvation or (2) some leeway exists for disobedience within the Christian life. Since many lordship people hold to the security of the believer, they opt for the latter.

So we read statements like this: "A moment of failure does not invalidate a disciple's credentials." My immediate reaction to such a statement is to want to ask if two moments would. Or a week of defection, or a month, or a year. Would two years? How serious a

failure and for how long before we must conclude that such a person was in fact not saved? Lordship teaching recognizes that "no one will obey perfectly," but the crucial question is simply how imperfectly can one obey and yet be sure that he "believed" in the lordship/mastery salvation since? If "salvation requires total transformation" and I do not meet that requirement, then am I not saved? Or if my transformation is less than total at any stage of my Christian life, was I not saved in the first place?

A few paragraphs down, on page 45, Ryrie writes:

Frankly, all this relativity would leave me in confusion and uncertainty. Every defection, especially if it continued, would make me unsure of my salvation. Any serious sin or unwillingness would do the same. If I come to a fork in the road of my Christian experience and choose the wrong branch and continue on it, does that mean I was never on the Christian road to begin with? For how long can I be fruitless without having a lordship advocate conclude that I was never really saved?

A few paragraphs down, on page 45, Ryrie writes:

Should the worker on the college campus insist that a collegian who wants to receive Christ hold off until he or she breaks off an immoral relationship? Could such a person be saved at the dorm meeting one evening and yet spend that same night in a continuing adulterous relationship? Or could he or she have two or three days to break off the relationship? Or two weeks or several months? In the meantime, is that person born again?

Free grace salvation advocates distinguish as independent from salvation each of the following: discipleship, lordship, mastery, abiding in Christ, surrender, fruitfulness, being spiritual (not carnal), and repentance from sin. All these are considered to be aspects of Christian growth, but not requirements for salvation.

On page 89 of his book, Ryrie writes:

To return to the main point of the chapter. Is repentance a condition for receiving eternal life? Yes, if it is repentance or changing one's mind about Jesus Christ. No, if it means to be sorry for sin or even to resolve to turn from sin, for these things *will not save*. Is repentance of sin a precondition to faith? No, though a

sense of sin and desire to turn from it may be used by the Spirit to direct someone to the Savior and His salvation. Repentance may prepare the way for faith, but it is faith that saves, not repentance (unless repentance is understood as a synonym for faith or changing one's mind about Christ.) Our Lord came to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10) simply because those who are healthy do not need a physician; only those who are sick do (Matthew 9:12).

So it would seem that the splitting of hairs between belief and discipleship must get down to two different types of repentance. One wonders if the New Testament authors really had that in mind.

13.3) Dispensationalism, as it Relates to Free Grace Theology

As it turns out, most of the free-grace advocates who have written books on the subject are also dispensational. Some free-grace advocates believe that Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and other similar verses, were only directed to the dispensation of law. This allows them to easily separate Paul's gospel from the preaching of Jesus because they say it was two different messages to two different groups of people in two different dispensations. They would say that the message of Jesus was for Israel and the message of Paul was for the Church.

A friend of mine, who is a retired pastor, graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary. This seminary is considered the center for dispensational teaching. Most of the famous dispensational authors were professors at this seminary. My friend does not agree with everything that's said by the dispensationalists. But he is very dispensational in his thinking. He told me he believes Jesus' message about the holiness that's needed for salvation changed at the cross.

The dispensationalists who hold this view might want to consider Matthew 7:20-23, quoted above, which is a part of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is saying that those who will preach in his name, and even do mighty works and cast out demons, will hear, "I never knew you." This verse is clearly in the context of wolves in sheep's clothing, who bear bad fruit. Surely these preachers believe in Jesus as Savior. The fault is that they do not do the will (works) of the Father. If this message of Jesus changed at the cross, then who are these preachers who cast out demons in the name of Jesus?

Sometime later, this retired pastor and friend wrote a book on free grace. He calls it radical grace. The book is titled *Peace Seekers* and is written by Jim Abrahamson. This book has an appendix devoted to addressing the problem verses

that free grace advocates face. Abrahamson addresses this verse in Matthew 7:20-23 as follows (page 169):

Matthew 7:15-23
"He who does the will of My Father"

In verse 21-23, Jesus seems to suggest our acceptance before God is based not upon our confession but our obedience to the law. *"Not every one who says to Me, 'Lord Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven"* (vs. 21).

Jesus' concern in this context is to distinguish between true and false prophets in Israel (vs. 15). His argument is centered upon the nature of their fruits. Those who speak for God are also going to follow after God. A person who fashioned himself a prophet of God, but was living independently of God's covenant requirements, was not recognized as a true prophet. Furthermore anyone who claimed to be of God and then ignored God's covenant law (practiced lawlessness) had no reason to feel secure. In applying this teaching to ourselves today, we must ask - What is God's covenant with us in Christ? The answer is seen in three texts - Romans 8:1-2, Hebrews 7:12, and 1 Corinthians 9:21. Anyone who confesses Christ and yet does not accept or abide within the covenant of grace through His blood is not to be received as a true child of God. We are expected to live exemplary moral lives in response to God's grace, but the central issue in New Covenant orthodoxy is faith not moral perfection.

Notice how Abrahamson effectively uses a dispensational argument? He applies this verse to "false prophets in Israel." And he applies the verse to the old covenant of law. Then he makes an application of the verse to us today. This effectively removes any requirement for doing the will of the Father in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, as the verse literally states.

Thus Abrahamson has eliminated any salvation requirement for today's pastors to do the will of the Father. They are still saved as long as they totally depend of Christ's blood for redemption, even if they are not doing the will of the Father. The point here is that this use of dispensationalism allows for almost anything Jesus said to be altered from its literal meaning and to simply find a similar moral application for us today.

However, this specific verse causes dispensationalists some additional difficulty. If they simply apply the verse to an earlier dispensation, as Abrahamson has done, they have to ignore two problems. First, Jesus warns his disciples to watch for these false prophets, saying that they will come in the future. He says, "By their fruits you will know them" (verse 16). So these Old Covenant prophets must appear sometime after the Sermon on the Mount. Secondly, these false prophets claim to have prophesied in the name of Jesus, cast out demons in the name of Jesus, and did mighty works in the name of Jesus. If these are old covenant false prophets, then their false ministry would have to have occurred between the time of the Sermon on the Mount and Pentecost. That's because Pentecost marks the new covenant dispensation, according to dispensationalists.

So it's theoretically possible that Jesus was warning about a very few false prophets during the time-frame of his ministry. But it's very unlikely. Jesus is speaking of a future time, saying "Many will tell me in that day" (verse 22). Thus, Jesus says these false prophets are "many" in number. It's very unlikely that many, if any, false prophets who preached in the name of Jesus existed during the time of Christ's ministry before Pentecost.

Mark 9:38-40 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone who doesn't follow us casting out demons in your name; and we forbade him, because he doesn't follow us." (39) But Jesus said, "Don't forbid him, for there is no one who will do a mighty work in my name, and be able quickly to speak evil of me. (40) For whoever is not against us is on our side.

Of course the New Wine System does not recognize a dispensational change in Christ's teachings. In the New Wine System, this verse easily applies all the way from the time of Jesus to the second coming. The pastors who don't do the will of the Father are still saved. They will be resurrected. They simply will not "enter the kingdom of heaven," as the verse says. When Christ tells them, "I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity," he was not saying they will go to hell. He was saying they had not grown to know Christ in a discipleship relationship. They will be resurrected and live during Christ's millennial reign. They cannot "enter the kingdom of heaven." But they can still live in the nations.

Let's go back to John MacArthur's book titled *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Remember that MacArthur is the big lordship salvation advocate. On page 39, MacArthur writes:

In 1918 Lewis Sperry Chafer published *He That is Spiritual*, articulating the concept that 1 Corinthians 2:15 - 3:3 speaks of two classes of Christians: carnal and spiritual. Chafer wrote, "The 'carnal' Christian is ... characterized by a 'walk' that is on the same plane as that of the natural [unsaved] man." That was a foreign concept to most Christians in Dr. Chafer's generation. Dr. Chafer's doctrine of spirituality, along with some of his other teachings, have become the basis of a whole new way of looking at the gospel. It is therefore essential to confront what he taught.

Lewis Sperry Chafer was the founder and first president of the Dallas Theological Seminary. He was highly influential in shaping modern dispensationalism. MacArthur also considers himself to be a dispensationalist. But he thinks they have gone too far. Personally, I believe the validity of any system should be questioned if, when it's carried to its logical conclusion, becomes obviously in error. In other words, MacArthur should reconsider whether the original premises of dispensationalism are in fact correct if those premises naturally lead to these conclusions. On page 41, MacArthur continues:

There is a tendency, however, for dispensationalists to get carried away with compartmentalizing truth to the point that they make unbiblical differentiations. An almost obsessive desire to categorize and contrast related truths has carried various dispensationalist interpretations far beyond the legitimate distinction between Israel and the church. Many would also draw hard lines between salvation and discipleship, the church and the kingdom, Christ's preaching and the apostolic message, faith and repentance, and the age of law and the age of grace.

The age-of-law/age-of-grace division in particular has wreaked havoc on dispensationalist theology and contributed to confusion about the doctrine of salvation. [Skipping the rest of the paragraph]

Chafer's view of all Scripture was colored by his desire to maintain a stark distinction between the age of "pure grace" (the church age) and the two ages of "pure law" (the Mosaic era and the millennial kingdom) he saw sandwiching it. He wrote, for example, that the Sermon on the Mount was part of "the Gospel of the kingdom," the "Manifesto of the King." He believed its purpose was to declare law, not grace, and concluded it made no reference

to either salvation or grace. "Such a complete omission of any reference to any feature of the present age of grace, is a fact which should be carefully weighed," he wrote.

Other dispensationalist writers did weigh those ideas and went on to state in more explicit terms what Chafer only hinted at: that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount "have no application to the Christian, but only to those who are under the Law, and therefore must apply to another Dispensation than this." This lamentable hermeneutic is widely applied in varying degrees to much of our Lord's earthly teaching, emasculating the message of the Gospels.

It is no wonder that the evangelistic message growing out of such a system differs sharply from the gospel according to Jesus. If we begin with the presupposition that much of Christ's message was intended for another age, why should our gospel be the same as the one He preached?

But this is a dangerous and untenable presupposition. Jesus did not come to proclaim a message that would be invalid until the Tribulation or the Millennium. He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came to call sinners to repentance (Matt. 9:13). He came so that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17). He proclaimed the saving gospel, not merely a manifesto for some future age. His gospel is the only message we are to preach.

Dispensationalism, therefore, seems to be the root in the modern-day free-grace sharp-line distinctions between salvation and discipleship.

13.4) Inheriting the Kingdom According to Hodges

Is discipleship or some level of holiness required in order to "enter the kingdom" as Jesus says, or "inherit the kingdom" as Paul says? Can you be saved and not enter or inherit the kingdom? The issue of inheriting the kingdom cannot be simply dismissed as words of Jesus to another dispensation, because Paul talked about inheriting the kingdom and about believers being heirs.

Ryrie seems to have been silent on this question. There is one dispensational free-grace advocate, however, who is not. In his book titled *The Gospel Under Siege*,

Zane Hodges has a chapter titled "Romans 8: Who are the Heirs?" Just as Ryrie decided to define two types of repentances, Hodges feels the need to define two types of heirs. One type of heir, Hodges believes, is for all believers. The other type of heir is for believers who suffer in fellowship with Christ. On page 128 of his book, Hodges writes:

The concept of two kinds of heirship is very natural indeed in the light of Old Testament custom. As is well-known, in a Jewish family all the sons shared equally in their father's inheritance, except for the oldest, or firstborn, son who received a "double portion." That is, he inherited twice as much as the other sons.

Against this background, Paul can be understood as saying that *all* of God's children are heirs, simply because they are children. But those who suffer with Christ have a special "joint heirship" with Christ. It is of great significance that later in this chapter Christ is actually described as "the *firstborn* among many brethren" (829).

Skipping down a few paragraphs, on page 129, Hodges writes:

But in Romans 8:17, Paul speaks also of a "co-heirship" that results in "co-glory." This contrast is a bit easier to see in Greek than it is in English.

In the Greek text, Paul juxtaposes two words for "heir," one of which is the simple word for this, and the other a compound word roughly equal to our word "co-heir." Likewise, two other compound words in Paul's text expresses the thought of "co-suffering" and "co-glorification." As Paul's words make clear, such an heirship is dependent on something more than saving faith. This heirship is contingent on our experience of suffering with Christ.

Romans 8:17 thus confronts us with a double heirship. One of these is for all believers. The other is for believers who suffer in fellowship with Christ.

There may be some small amount of truth to what Hodges is saying. The New Wine System sees a journey of righteousness, with the final destination being inheritance of the kingdom. And yes, there is a definite distinction between the elect who complete this journey during this age, and the nations who must continue the journey during the millennium. But I don't believe Paul is explicitly talking about two types of inheritances. The passage does not seem to be comparing two

groups, or making a distinction between two groups. But Paul's words, in their context, can be seen as showing a progression as we suffer in Christ. Here is the verse that Hodges was talking about in its context.

Romans 8:15-19 For you didn't receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (16) The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God; (17) and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him. (18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed toward us. (19) For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

Everybody is on the path of righteousness because of Christ's sacrifice. So everybody is a child of God. Therefore, everybody is an heir. But as we suffer with Christ, in our journey back to the Father, we become joint heirs with Christ. But this happens only if we suffer with Christ. So again, I see this as more of the progressive nature of being an heir, inheriting greater things as we suffer with Christ. Our rewards are in heaven.

Hodges continues his discussion of heirs in reference to the "wicked servant." Read carefully whether Hodges believes the wicked servant is destined for hell.

On page 131, Hodges writes:

The "wicked servant" in Jesus' parable failed to engage in his lord's "business" with the mina he had been given. He was not involved in "serving" his master. Whether or not he did other commendable things is not the point of the parable. At least he did not *labor* for his lord. As a result, he does not co-reign with his master over even a single city!

That he also went to hell would be an absurd and unfounded deduction from this parable. [emphasis mine.]

All Christians, then, are heirs of God. But they are not heirs to an equal degree. Their fidelity to the service of Christ, with all its attendant hardships and sufferings, will be the gauge by which that hardship will be measured out to them. *Not* to teach this simple truth is to deprive believers of one of the most powerful motivations to endurance which the Scriptures contain.

How anyone can read this parable and conclude that the wicked servant is not destined for hell, or even that the wicked servant's final destination to hell was not directly related to his lack of service? Why is the servant called wicked? It's because the servant rejected Christ's lordship over his life. This rejection was because the servant despised his Master. The servant rejected his Master. The wicked servant lost his salvation because he rejected Christ's lordship over his life after he became a servant and understood who Christ really is. This is the unpardonable sin. This parable was also discussed back in section 5.9, titled "The Parable of the Talents."

Matthew 25:26-30 "But his lord answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant. You knew that I reap where I didn't sow, and gather where I didn't scatter. (27) You ought therefore to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back my own with interest. (28) Take away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. (29) For to everyone who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away. (30) Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Hodges does a good job in dealing with 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. His position is basically the same as the New Wine System with regard to those who do evil. Those who do evil do not inherit the kingdom, but they are still saved. This is why Hodges decided to define two types of heirs. Hodges believes Paul is saying that carnal believers do not inherit the kingdom, in that they are not heirs with Christ. But they are heirs of God in that they are children of God and are saved.

Then on page 135, Hodges asserts the idea that to inherit the kingdom is not the same as entering the kingdom. Hodges believes one is a matter of ownership and the other is a matter of dwelling. In other words, Hodges believes the carnal Christian will live in the kingdom but will not own the kingdom.

Paul never spoke about entering the kingdom. This was only said by Jesus. Yet Hodges fails to address any of the verses of Jesus, quoted earlier, that say you must be righteous (Matthew 5:20), doing the Father's will (Matthew 7:20-23), become like children (Matthew 18:3-4), overcome sin (Mark 9:47), and endure many tribulations (Acts 14:22) in order to "enter" the kingdom of heaven. In other words, Hodges believes carnal Christians can "enter" the kingdom to dwell there, but not to own it. Yet he fails support this with the relevant verses.

Does salvation require fruits of the Spirit? Solving the friction between Lordship Salvation and Free Grace Theology. Solved by applying Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church.

13.5) A Slightly Different Definition for Grace

Free-grace advocates, and probably even lordship salvation advocates, tend to view grace as associated with an age or dispensation. They would say we are living under grace and not under law. God's people under the old covenant were under the law. We are in the age of grace. But there is more to it than just an age. The age of grace (favor) is an age where grace is available to the believer.

Everyone views grace as God's mercy. But additionally, the New Wine System views grace as being filled with the Holy Spirit so that you cannot sin. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit changes us on the inside, and that is grace. In other words, Christians can drift back and forth between being under the law and being under grace. We can simply drift in and out of God's grace, but not by God's choice. It's by our own choice as we fall into the temptations of sin.

When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you cannot sin because God is in you and God cannot sin. Your purpose is God's purpose, which is not going to involve self-oriented motivations. All sins are related to self. Thus, when there is no self-motivation, there is no sin. Of course there are times when you drift back into self-motivation instead of the Father's purposes. The Holy Spirit leaves you, and you can yield to the temptation of sin. During these times, you are not under grace.

Being under the law is trying to obey the law for self-oriented reasons. Being under grace is obeying the law as a result of living for Christ and doing the good works that the Father has for us. In other words, being under grace is equivalent to discipleship/lordship/mastership. Being under grace means it's not you who live but Christ lives in you. Obviously, the free-grace advocates would object to this definition. But when grace is thought of in this way, when inheriting the kingdom is separated from salvation, and when salvation is seen as a journey, there is no conflict whatsoever between the words of Jesus and the words of Paul.

The journey, or "race" as Paul says, must be applied to our view of salvation by faith and through God's grace. God's grace is the Holy Spirit changing us on the inside. In other words, we are on a journey of faith in Christ which results in doing the will of the Father. Doing the will of the Father is equivalent to the fruit of the Spirit. It matters not how much fruit one has at the moment, because the whole process is a journey that can continue even after death. If it's not completed in this age, it can be completed in the age to come.

One must get to the point of being filled with the Holy Spirit all the time, always being under God's grace, before the journey is complete. The journey can continue on the other side of the grave. Eventually everyone who has ever lived, or who will ever live, will complete their journey of righteousness, or they will harden their hearts against Christ to the point of forfeiting their salvation.

To understand law and grace better, we need to think about a few aspects of what is Israel. Also, remember that Gentiles are grafted into Israel. Israel is a theocracy. Israel is also a promise given to Abraham. So Israel is a promise of a theocracy. It has never been completely fulfilled. What little Old Testament fulfillment there was of that theocracy was just a shadow of the theocracy that will come. And Gentiles are grafted into that promise.

Romans 4:16-17 NIV Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring--not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. (17) As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Galatians 3:27-29 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise.

Back in sections 3.10 and 3.11, we learned that Christ is Israel because Christ is the King of Israel, which is a theocracy. In a kingdom, the king is not distinguished from the kingdom because the king's word is law. In this chapter of Galatians, Paul argues that the promise given to Abraham was a promise for one seed of Abraham, which is Christ. Thus, all who are in Christ are heirs to the promise given to Abraham.

Paul uses this argument to establish the fact that Gentiles are grafted into Israel if they are in the Messiah of Israel. However, Paul was not diminishing the fact that the promise given to Abraham was a promise for all of Israel. That's because there is no difference between the king and the kingdom, or between the Messiah and those who are in the Messiah. If you are in the Messiah, you are in the kingdom of Israel and heirs to the promise of Israel. But Israel itself is a promise. Israel is a promise of a theocracy that will rule over all the nations of the world. The Law of Moses is a shadow of that theocracy. The Word of the Messiah is the Law of that theocracy. One could even say that the Law of Moses is Christ's Word, a shadow of the kingdom that will come.

Hebrews 10:1a NIV The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves.

Does this mean that all the detailed ordinances of the law will be reinstated in the millennium? No, because the detailed ordinances of the law can change as times change. The Word of the Messiah, when he returns, will be a fulfillment and a continuation of the Law of Christ.

Matthew 5:17-18 ESV "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (18) For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

What does it mean to "fulfill" the Law? Remember, Israel is a promise of a theocracy which will come, and the Law is the Word of the Messiah as he reigns in that kingdom. The Law of Moses is a shadow of that future kingdom. The prophets foretold about this kingdom that will come. Christ did not come to abolish that kingdom. Christ came to fulfill, or bring about that kingdom, which is Israel. Christ will reign for a thousand years, until the heaven and the earth pass away by fire.

But before the literal earthly kingdom of heaven can come, the people of Israel must overcome all our sinful habits and become like Christ. Those who reign with Christ must do so without sin, just as Christ walks without sin. In order for that to happen, Christ had to die on the cross.

The wages of sin is death. But Jesus died for all our sins, past, present, and future. Thus, Jesus paid the price for our salvation. God no longer counts our sins against us. This is justification before God. It's called the great exchange.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Christ definitely became sin for us so that we "might" become righteous. Of course the word "might" can be argued to be the condition of our belief on Christ. But from the perspective of a journey of righteousness, I think Paul meant it as saying Christ paid the price for our resurrection, and paid the price for all our sins, so that we could have that journey. Then, we will be completely reconciled with God, no longer sinning, and all sins that were committed along the journey forgiven. We are saved from the grave. But in order to make this permanent, in order to inherit eternal life, we must complete the journey.

Titus 3:4-7 NIV But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, (5) he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, (6) whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

So again, we have been saved (given resurrection from the grave) in order that we "might" become heirs and have the "hope" of eternal life. We must complete the journey, through God's grace, in order to become an heir and inherit eternal life.

We have been justified BY his grace "through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit." Grace literally means favor. In the Old Testament, those who were living in God's favor filled with the Holy Spirit and were doing the will, or works, of God. Justification by his grace is something that Christ did. Christ did a great work for the Father by dying on the cross. Christ did this because Christ was living in the Father's favor, or under the Father's grace. Therefore, since Christ did this huge work, through the Father's grace, we have the opportunity to live a journey of righteousness by living in the Father's grace.

What does it mean to live (or journey) in the Father's grace? When we are living in the Father's grace, we are living with the Holy Spirit inside us, doing the Father's will, so that we cannot sin. The Father's purpose becomes our purpose. We are consumed with the Father's purpose. There is no longer any room in our lives for sin. Thus, Christ is living in us, from the perspective that we are doing what Christ would be doing, if Christ were living our lives. It is no longer me who lives, but Christ lives in me; and Christ cannot sin.

This is the great exchange. Christ became sin because he was living in the Father's grace (favor). This allows us to live in the Father's grace (favor) by being filled with the Holy Spirit to do the Father's good works, which is the fruit of the Spirit. When we drift back out of the Father's will, into self-motivation, we are no longer acting under the Father's favor. So we are no longer under grace; we are either back under the law of self-righteousness, or simply back into sin.

But this is not salvation by works. Christ paid the price for our resurrection. And Christ paid the price for us to be able to live in the Father's favor. Christ paid the price for us to be able to journey back to the Father by becoming righteous. And the only real way to continue in the Father's favor (grace) is to continue to do the will of the Father. Even the angels continue to do the works of the Father. It's not salvation by works.

2 Corinthians 4:15-18 ESV For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. (16) So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. (17) For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, (18) as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

We are saved by faith in the Creator. Or as we learn more about God, we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. If we truly have faith in the Father, then we do the will of the Father, as best as we know. Our faith is credited as righteousness. In other words, because of the blood of Christ, God treats us as righteousness as long as we are on the journey of righteousness back to the Father. God gives us credit for having completed that journey of righteousness because all our sins have been forgiven. Believers have God's grace because of Christ's sacrifice, yet during that journey, we can drift in and out of actually living in that grace.

Chapter 14

Law vs. Grace in the Old Testament

What does it mean to be under the law, or under grace? Does being under grace mean sins are more forgivable than under law? If being under grace still means that we must overcome sin, then why is it easier than being under the law?

We do the good deeds of God's law because we love the Father and our neighbors. But those deeds do not save us. We are saved by faith. However, faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26).

Hebrews 10:1-4 For the law, having a shadow of the good to come, not the very image of the things, can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. (2) Or else wouldn't they have ceased to be offered, because the worshippers, having been once cleansed, would have had no more consciousness of sins? (3) But in those sacrifices there is yearly reminder of sins. (4) For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.

As the writer of Hebrews says, under the law, people kept sinning and would have to sacrifice more animals every year. Does that mean that we don't keep sinning under grace? If we keep sinning under grace, then how is grace better than the law?

Does grace somehow make continual sins be covered, and forgiven, whereas they were forgiven under the law only by animal sacrifice? No, because Hebrews 10:4 says that it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, it has always been the blood of Christ by which sins have been forgiven. Animal sacrifice was simply a shadow and teacher of that which was to come.

Romans 6:14-18 For sin will not have dominion over you. For you are not under law, but under grace. (15) What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? May it never be! (16) Don't you know that to whom you present yourselves as servants to obedience, his servants you are whom you obey; whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? (17) But thanks be to God, that, whereas you were bondservants of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto you were delivered. (18) Being made free from sin, you became bondservants of righteousness.

It's not just a covering by the blood of Christ. We are actually free from the slavery of sin. So why do we keep sinning? If we have been set free from sin, why do Reformed preachers say that we cannot completely stop sinning?

In Romans 6-8, Paul is discussing the difference between being under the law, and being under grace. Is Paul simply talking about a theological difference, with all Christians under grace and Old Testament believers under the law? Or is Paul teaching that each of us today can still be either under the law or under grace? If we have been set free from sin, as Paul seems to be saying, then what do we have that allows us to be free from sin, which Jews under the law did not have?

The major practical (not just theological) difference between Jews under the law, and Christians under grace, is Pentecost and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. During Old Testament times, some people were filled with the Holy Spirit at times. After Pentecost, every believer can now be filled with the Holy Spirit at any time. To better understand the significance of being filled with the Holy Spirit, we need to look at passages in the Old Testament where people were filled with the Spirit.

Genesis 41:36-39 The food will be for a store to the land against the seven years of famine, which will be in the land of Egypt; that the land not perish through the famine." (37) The thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. (38) Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" (39) Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Because God has shown you all of this, there is none so discreet and wise as you.

Joseph was able to prophecy only because he had been filled with God's Spirit.

Exodus 31:1-5 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, (2) "Behold, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: (3) and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, (4) to devise skillful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, (5) and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of workmanship.

This was for the making of the Tent of Meeting, a precursor to the Tabernacle. God wanted to make sure the Tent of Meeting was made exactly right. So God filled the worker with his Spirit, and the worker did God's work directly under the will of God's Spirit.

Numbers 11:17 I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit which is on you, and will put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you not bear it yourself alone.

Here, the Spirit of God was only in Moses. But Moses needed help. So God tells Moses that he will put his Spirit on seventy elders in order to help Moses govern the people.

Numbers 11:25-30 Yahweh came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was on him, and put it on the seventy elders; and it happened that when the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did so no more. (26) But two men remained in the camp. The name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the Spirit rested on them; and they were of those who were written, but had not gone out to the Tent; and they prophesied in the camp. (27) A young man ran, and told Moses, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!" (28) Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his chosen men, answered, "My lord Moses, forbid them!" (29) Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all Yahweh's people were prophets, that Yahweh would put his Spirit on them!" (30) Moses went into the camp, he and the elders of Israel.

Only the few, such as these 70 elders are given the Holy Spirit. Notice that the people knew a person had been filled with the Holy Spirit because of the gift of prophecy. (This was not an unknown tongue.) They were shocked to see the prophecy happening outside the Tabernacle. Moses however, desired that all of the people could have this gift. This desire of Moses would seem to be prophetic of Pentecost.

Judges 14:6 'The Spirit of Yahweh came mightily on him, and he tore him as he would have torn a kid; and he had nothing in his hand: but he didn't tell his father or his mother what he had done.

Most of the time, the gift of prophecy is related to being filled with the Spirit, in the Old Testament. But in Samson's case, it was physical strength. (And this gift wasn't even on Paul's list of gifts.) Later, Samson had problems with sin, and the Spirit left him.

1 Samuel 10:6-9 and the Spirit of Yahweh will come mightily on you, and you shall prophesy with them, and shall be turned into another man. (7) Let it be, when these signs have come to you, that you do as occasion shall serve you; for God is with you. (8) You shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: you shall wait seven days, until I come to you, and show you what you shall do. (9) It was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs happened that day.

This is talking about Saul. Saul was given another heart. He was changed. "He turned into another man." But it didn't last. The Spirit would come and go.

1 Samuel 13:13-14 Samuel said to Saul, You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of Yahweh your God, which he commanded you: for now would Yahweh have established your kingdom on Israel forever. (14) But now your kingdom shall not continue: Yahweh has sought him a man after his own heart, and Yahweh has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept that which Yahweh commanded you.

1 Samuel 16:13-15 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers: and the Spirit of Yahweh came mightily on David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. (14) Now the Spirit of Yahweh departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Yahweh troubled him. (15) Saul's servants said to him, See now, an evil spirit from God troubles you.

The following story shows how Saul and his men could not sin when they were filled with the Spirit. Normally, the Spirit does not fill people to prevent them from sinning. We all have the free will to sin. If we decide to sin, the Holy Spirit will back off and allow us to sin. Sin and the Holy Spirit do not co-exist. Here we see that it's impossible to sin while the Spirit has filled someone.

1 Samuel 19:1,4-6,9-15,19-24 NIV

(1) Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan was very fond of David.

(4) Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not

wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. (5) He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?" (6) Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death."

(9) But an evil spirit from the LORD came upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. While David was playing the harp, (10) Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall. That night David made good his escape. (11) Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed." (12) So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped. (13) Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head. (14) When Saul sent the men to capture David, Michal said, "He is ill." (15) Then Saul sent the men back to see David and told them, "Bring him up to me in his bed so that I may kill him."

(19) Word came to Saul: "David is in Naioth at Ramah"; (20) so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men and they also prophesied. (21) Saul was told about it, and he sent more men, and they prophesied too. Saul sent men a third time, and they also prophesied. (22) Finally, he himself left for Ramah and went to the great cistern at Secu. And he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" "Over in Naioth at Ramah," they said. (23) So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. (24) He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

No doubt God could have sent angels to protect David and could have accomplished the same thing. Neither Saul's servants, nor Saul, wanted to be filled

with the Spirit. Saul wanted to kill David, and continued with his schemes to kill David after the Spirit left him. There was no repentance before or after being filled with the Spirit. This passage only goes to show us that you can't sin while you are filled with the Spirit.

1 Samuel 16:13-15, quoted above, says that the Spirit filled David from that day forward. While being filled with the Spirit, David would not have sinned. But later, David did sin. No doubt the Spirit left him as he yielded to the temptation of seeing Bathsheba bathing. But David was restored. This Psalm is about restoration after sinning.

Psalms 51:1-19 Have mercy on me, God, according to your loving kindness. According to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. (2) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin. (3) For I know my transgressions. My sin is constantly before me. (4) Against you, and you only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight; that you may be proved right when you speak, and justified when you judge. (5) Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity. In sin my mother conceived me. (6) Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts. You teach me wisdom in the inmost place. (7) Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. (8) Let me hear joy and gladness, That the bones which you have broken may rejoice. (9) Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all of my iniquities. (10) Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. (11) Don't throw me from your presence, and don't take your holy Spirit from me. (12) Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Uphold me with a willing spirit. (13) Then I will teach transgressors your ways. Sinners shall be converted to you. (14) Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation. My tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness. (15) Lord, open my lips. My mouth shall declare your praise. (16) For you don't delight in sacrifice, or else I would give it. You have no pleasure in burnt offering. (17) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (18) Do well in your good pleasure to Zion. Build the walls of Jerusalem. (19) Then you will delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, in burnt offerings and in whole burnt offerings. Then they will offer bulls on your altar.

Notice the relationship between "Don't throw me from your presence," and, "Don't take your holy Spirit from me" (verse 11). The Holy Spirit will not stay when there is sin. But repentance brings the Holy Spirit back.

1 Chronicles 12:18 ESV Then the Spirit clothed Amasai, chief of the thirty, and he said, "We are yours, O David, and with you, O son of Jesse! Peace, peace to you, and peace to your helpers! For your God helps you." Then David received them and made them officers of his troops.

This idea of the Spirit clothing a person can also be found in Judges 6:34 and 2 Chronicles 24:20. Not all translations are this literal. Others simply say the Spirit came upon the person and leave out "clothed." It's likely that Paul understood about this idea of the Spirit clothing us in the following verses:

2 Corinthians 5:1-5 NIV Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. (2) Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, (3) because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. (4) For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (5) Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

1 Corinthians 15:51-56 NIV Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— (52) in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (53) For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. (54) When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (55) "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (56) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

Paul states that the power of sin is the law. When we are filled with the Spirit, we don't sin. But when we in our own efforts try to stop sinning simply by doing the commandments, we will fail. We are operating under the law when we attempt to

obey the commandments with our own efforts. Such self-efforts have always failed, both in Old Testament times and in New Testament times. This self-effort, according to Paul, is the power of sin.

Isaiah 44:1-4 NKJV "Yet hear me now, O Jacob My servant, And Israel whom I have chosen. (2) Thus says the LORD who made you And formed you from the womb, *who* will help you: 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant; And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. (3) For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring; (4) 'They will spring up among the grass Like willows by the watercourses.'

Isaiah is a book of poetry. Many translations put in an implied "land", making it be translated as pouring water on thirsty land. But I believe the "floods on the dry ground" is simply a poetic metaphor of the Holy Spirit that was later poured out at Pentecost. Jesus uses this same metaphor with the woman at the well (John 4). (See also, John 7:37-39, springs of living water.)

Joel 2:27-32 You will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am Yahweh, your God, and there is no one else; and my people will never again be disappointed. (28) "It will happen afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. (29) And also on the servants and on the handmaids in those days, I will pour out my Spirit. (30) I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, fire, and pillars of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes. (32) It will happen that whoever will call on the name of Yahweh shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as Yahweh has said, and among the remnant, those whom Yahweh calls.

Peter quoted this prophecy of Joel at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). It's clearly a prophecy of Pentecost. It's thus a prophecy about the new covenant and the present age. The covenants are progressive in nature (see chapter 9 of this book.) In other words, this prophecy began to be fulfilled at Pentecost. But its fulfillment is not yet complete. The Holy Spirit is still being poured out on God's people.

The prophecy, and Peter's quote of the prophecy, says that the Holy Spirit was to be poured out on "all flesh." Reformed commentators will say that "all flesh" means Jews and Gentiles, but not all people. However, the final fulfillment of this prophecy is when Christ returns.

Notice the part about the sun turning to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is the millennial reign of Christ, beginning when Christ returns. (See section 17.9.) At that time, everyone who has not hardened their heart to the point of no longer being able to hear Christ's voice will be resurrected. And God will pour out the Holy Spirit on "all flesh." The fact that the Spirit is poured out on "all flesh" makes this verse be another strong verse in support of the New Wine System.

14.1) Sanctification by the Holy Spirit

In the Old Testament times, only those who had special favor with God would be filled with the Spirit. In both the Greek and the Hebrew, the word for "grace" is the same as the word for "favor." After Pentecost, all those who accept Christ as their personal Savior receive God's grace, which is God's favor. The grace of God is receiving the Holy Spirit.

Grace is doing God's will because God is in us. Our will is God's will, because the Holy Spirit is in us. Being under the law is trying to do God's will by obeying commandments. God is within us when the Holy Spirit is within us. Our will becomes God's will. There can be no sin when the Holy Spirit is within us.

When we do sin, the Holy Spirit leaves. However, we can be restored by repentance. The Holy Spirit fills us again, especially when we ask. In Old Testament times, few had God's grace (favor) to receive the Spirit. Sin would cause the Holy Spirit to leave, and perhaps never return. Under the new covenant, the Holy Spirit is poured out on all who believe. The Holy Spirit leaves when we sin. But he comes back and fills us again when we repent and ask to be filled.

It's the same as being under the light, or being in darkness. We go back and forth between light and darkness. We go back and forth between flesh and Spirit. We go back and forth between being under the law and being under grace.

The process of sanctification is getting to the point where we spend all our time in the light, with the Holy Spirit in us, and no time in darkness. Baptism of the Spirit is the first filling and occurs when we accept Christ as Savior. On the other hand, becoming a believer might actually be a slow process. But at some

point in that process the Spirit fills us for the first time and we become very much aware of God in us. We do not sin while we are filled with the Spirit. Then, we are filled with the Spirit time and time again as the Spirit changes us to overcome our addictive habits of sin. Eventually we can reach the point where we are filled with the Holy Spirit all the time. At that point, we are completely sanctified.

However, it's not for us to say that we are completely sanctified. Perhaps we may sense it, and believe it. But it's not something to be declaring. For some, sanctification may take a relatively short period of time. For others, it takes a lifetime. For each of us, there still may be some sanctification that the Holy Spirit needs to accomplish that we do not yet understand. So we must stay humble and continue seeking to overcome sin.

The important thing to know is that we can reach the point in which we are filled with the Holy Spirit all the time, to the point of complete sanctification. We need to believe that entire sanctification is possible, is God's plan for the elect, and does not have to take a lifetime. Without this belief, it's very easy to believe that sin cannot be completely overcome, and thus one would tend to remain addicted to sinful habits. The alcoholic must believe that he can stop drinking, with God's help, before he can overcome that habit. Likewise, any sinful habit can only be overcome if you believe you can overcome it with God's help. All sin is like that. All sin can be overcome through God's help.

We are saved by faith and through grace, which means favor. Being saved through grace means we are being changed by the Holy Spirit. Being saved by faith means we are trusting God, through the Holy Spirit, to make these changes in us. We become new creatures in our journey of salvation. Eventually, if we complete our journey in this age, we will be "born again" into new bodies that have eternal life. This is salvation by faith and through grace.

Chapter 15

Law vs. Grace in Romans

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we can't sin. This was seen in the previous chapter. However, in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit could leave and not return. Not all believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. All this changed at Pentecost.

Today, under the new covenant, in our struggle to overcome sin, we seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We can go into and out of that complete filling. Over time, we learn to stay filled more and more. When we get to the point of being filled all the time, we are entirely sanctified.

Being under the law is struggling with sin under our own power. Being under grace is being filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul speaks of law vs. grace as he describes the struggle of going back and forth between law and grace.

But how can we stay filled with the Holy Spirit more and more? If staying filled with the Holy Spirit is pursued simply through the struggle with sin, then we fall right back into being under the law. The answer goes back to the teaching of Jesus about Lordship and discipleship. The answer lies in that debate between those who preach salvation by free-grace alone, and those who preach lordship salvation.

We stay filled with the Holy Spirit by the power of the cross. The power of the cross is being willing to deny self and take up our cross to follow Christ. In other words, our purpose is no longer motivated by self-interest. Our purpose in living is solely for Christ's kingdom. Thus, we are crucified with Christ. We become dead to sin and alive in Christ. We no longer live, but Christ lives in us.

This is not to say that Christ's Spirit is inside us. It's true that the Holy Spirit is in us. And in that respect, Christ's Spirit is in us. But that's not the point that is being made. It is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (Galatians 2:20). This is simply a way of saying that our very purpose in living is not for self, but for Christ. As we live and work for Christ, doing Christ's righteous works, the Holy Spirit fills us. Over time, we become fully sanctified.

All sins have something to do with self. Lust is for self. Covetousness is for self. Profanity is for self. Anger is for self. Lying to benefit ourselves is for self. False witness is for self. When sin is gone, we love God and our neighbor in a way

that self is no longer a part of the motivation for love. We are willing to die for Christ. This is denying self and taking up our cross to follow Christ. This makes the very purpose of our lives be solely for Christ and his kingdom. As all self-oriented motivations disappear, all sins disappear, because all sins are for self. So we become filled with the Holy Spirit all the time, and we completely overcome all sinful habits that are in our lives.

Under traditional Christian theology, election is equivalent to salvation. Therefore grace becomes equivalent to salvation. Only the elect receive God's grace. If you believe that salvation results in a single "decision for Christ," then it becomes natural to assume that you are constantly living under God's grace after that point of decision. But when salvation involves a journey of righteousness, and when it's recognized that grace means favor and not election, then grace can easily be seen as being favored by God to be filled with the Holy Spirit even if it's for a short period of time. This is much more in line with the Old Testament view of God's grace/favor.

15.1) A Complementary View of Law and Grace

In my opinion, the traditional Christian theologian completely misses the New Covenant aspect of Scripture. I think this comes about as a result of not really understanding the meaning of the law and grace. Law and grace are dogmatically seen as opposite. But in some respects, they are not opposite. Before the coming of the Holy Spirit, the overcoming of sin was mostly self-discipline and self-effort. That's what Paul was talking about when he referred to being under the law and not grace. Being under grace is having help from the Holy Spirit to overcome sin. But both have the same goal. Both are to overcome sinful habits and thus be under God's true law. Thus grace is not totally the opposite of law. But grace, driven in love for God and love for neighbors, is far more successful than self-effort. Yet even with grace, some amount of self-effort is needed. The Holy Spirit is a Helper. Helpers help. They don't do it all for us. It's a new Help that was not available before the New Covenant. Law and grace are not total opposites.

It really does come down to not knowing how to interpret the New Testament in the context of the Old Testament. And that dates back to at least the second century when the church deliberately tried to divorce themselves from the Old Testament. They interpreted the New Testament like a Greek because Pagan culture was their background.

Understanding of the Law is as follows:

Jesus said that not one iota of the Law will be abolished until all is accomplished and the heavens and earth pass away. That means the purpose of the Law continues through the millennium, and then its purpose is finished. Then Jesus goes on to say that anyone who teaches others to disobey any of the commandments will be least in the kingdom. Notice that the kingdom is being spoken of as being in the future. The misunderstood aspect is that you can't have the law without a King and a Kingdom. Jesus fulfills the law by being the King of Israel. Israel is the Kingdom and Jesus is the King. That's what was always missing from Israel – the Messiah – the King.

Before the Messiah came, Israel was only a promise (a shadow) of a holy nation. That's why not all Israel is Israel. That's why not all of Abraham's children are Abraham's descendants. The Law of Moses was a stand-in for that promise. The promise (covenant) of Abraham was for land and descendants. Land and descendants adds up to a kingdom. And Abraham was promised that this future kingdom will bless all the other nations.

Old Testament Israel was just a shadow (promise) of the true Israel with the true King. True Israel, the fulfillment of that promise, had to wait on the true King. And with Jesus as the King, certain rules and regulations of the kingdom can change or be abolished now that the King is present. The law does not change, but rules and regulations, that are no longer needed, can and will change. That's true in every kingdom. And it matters not if some changes occur even to regulations that predated Moses, such as dietary laws. The Law of Moses was simply a further revelation of what the promised Kingdom of Israel will be in the future. That revelation of a future theocracy did not start with Moses. It started with Abraham.

Understanding of Grace is as follows:

In order to have a kingdom that rules the world under a truly righteous King, you must have people in that kingdom who are truly righteous. From a practical sense, Jesus does not rule the world by himself. He must have firstfruits who will rule with Him. In order for that to happen, they must also become truly righteous and overcome all sinful habits. Otherwise, even with new rulers, the world of suffering would continue because all suffering is due to sin, and sinful rulers are the primary reason for all suffering in the world. This is especially true since the purpose of that rule is to bring the same level of righteousness to the nations. All the nations must eventually become perfect as the Father is perfect if they are to inherit eternal life. It's all part of saving the world from sin and death.

Jesus died for the world, so that everyone is reconciled with God. But his death also brought the Helper (Holy Spirit) for those who believe in Christ personally. This was not possible before our sins were atoned for. The Helper helps us to overcome sinful habits. When God is in us, we cannot sin because God cannot sin. But when we decide to sin, the Helper backs off. However, because of the cross, because sins have been atoned for, the Helper can come back again and again as we seek forgiveness. Over time, with the Helper in us, we learn to completely overcome all our sinful habits. Thus, we become ready to reign with Christ in the kingdom (age) that is to come. This view of Grace is not only in harmony with the teaching of Jesus, it's also in harmony with the teaching of Paul. And with God in us, we no longer need shadows of the kingdom.

When law and grace are misunderstood, when law and grace are considered to be complete opposites, some are going to adopt misunderstood aspects of the law, and others are going to adopt misunderstood aspects of grace. Dispensationalists and especially hyper-dispensationalists tend to adopt a misunderstood aspects of grace. There are other groups who get into observing the Old Testament shadows and often become very legalistic. They adopt misunderstand aspects of the law.

Romans reads very differently, and is much easier to understand, when one understands that grace is not a constant state for the believer. The believer moves back and forth between being under the law and being under grace. We are under grace when our total purpose for living is to further the kingdom and to do the will of the Father. This only happens while we are filled with the Holy Spirit and thus cannot sin. When under the law we strive to obey God's law under our own efforts. Self-effort can lead to selfish motives, which is fundamental to sin. When under grace, we naturally obey the law because our total motivation is not self-oriented, and thus we cannot sin because all sin is about self. When we are under grace, our total purpose for living is to serve Christ and to do the will of the Father. When that is pure and originating from the Holy Spirit, there can be no sin.

In chapter 10 of this book, we covered beginning of Romans up to verse 2:16. Paul was talking about the Gentiles who are justified because they do God's good works, even though they don't know about the law. So now let's go through Romans 2-8, reading it from this perspective. We will pick back up with Romans 2:13, to get back into the context.

15.2) Romans 2:13-29: Outward Obedience to the Law

Romans 2:13-15 For it isn't the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified (14) (for when Gentiles who don't have the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves, (15) in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying with them, and their thoughts among themselves accusing or else excusing them)

Romans 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; (29) but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God.

The law teaches us that stealing, adultery, and idol worship is sin. But those who simply learn the law without obeying the law are not justified by the law. And we must obey the law on the inside as well as the outside. Paul views circumcision as an outward sign. But he considers true circumcision as one who inwardly fulfills the law.

What is the distinction between outward and inward obedience to the law? Outward obedience is self-motivated. Outward obedience is to make others believe you obey the law, which becomes all about self. All sins are for self. So the outward obedience of the law actually cultivates sin, which is all about self-motivation.

But the true Jew, according to Paul, is one who obeys the law inwardly. Paul sees the Gentile who obeys the law as one who does so for righteous motivations, because they do so without having learned the law. They obey the law having no motivation for showing others out of pride that they are obeying the law. Their obedience to the law must be coming out of love, because they have not been taught the law. Gentiles who obey the law must be doing so out of true love for God and for their neighbors.

Thus having the law can be a curse that causes us to obey the law in order to show others, in a prideful way, that we are righteous. Obedience of the law becomes all about self, and so it becomes impossible to fully obey the law.

15.3) Romans 3:1-9: The Need for the Law

Romans 3:1-2 Then what advantage does the Jew have? Or what is the profit of circumcision? (2) Much in every way! Because first of all, they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

The law caused the Jews to become prideful as we strive to overcome sin in hopes that others will see us as righteous. And many Gentiles of that day were righteous because they had love but didn't have the law to become a stumbling block. Does this mean that God should have not given law to the Jews?

No, because God himself is righteous, and it's only right that the Jews were given God's words. God entrusted the Jews with the Scripture because ultimately we need God's word to become justified and forgiven of our sins. It's unfortunate that having God's word can lead to pride, and having God's word can lead to self-motivation, which is the very nature of sin. But that does not mean that God made a mistake, or that God himself is unrighteous. Without love and self-denial, God's word can be problematic. But even the Old Testament included the commands to love God and to love our neighbors. It's simply man's nature to sin which finds ways to distort God's message.

Christians today can have the exact same problem. We have the Scripture. Just like the Jews, we have God's word in the Scripture and we know what is good and what is evil. So we have the law. We go to church. We want others to believe that we are good Christians, and that we are not involved in the sins of the world, such as adultery and pornography. But inwardly we lust. That lust leads to pornography. And that pornography leads to sex outside of marriage and adultery. But outwardly we try to maintain the illusion of being a good Christian. We are caught in the same trap that the Jews had, because most Christians still live under the law instead of under grace. Most Christians, including many pastors, have not found the power of the cross.

Thus, we can be caught in the same trap that Paul taught about the law. The Jews thought they were righteous simply because they obeyed the rules on the outside, and were Abraham's descendants. Christians are in the same trap because they obey the rules on the outside, and have professed faith in Christ as Savior.

Matthew 23:25 ESV "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

15.4) Romans 3:10-26: Works of the Law

Romans 3:10-12 As it is written, "There is no one righteous; no, not one. (11) There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks after God. (12) They have all turned aside. They have together become unprofitable. There is no one who does good, no, not, so much as one."

Paul says that nobody understands the real problem. Seeking righteousness is all about seeking God in selfless love. That alone brings God's peace, which even those who have the Scripture have not known. The true fear of God is a fear that forgets about self and seeks after God in humility. All attempts to overcome sin through self-effort is not the fear of what God might think. It's the fear of what others might think.

Romans 3:20-12 Because by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. For through the law comes the knowledge of sin. (21) But now apart from the law, a righteousness of God has been revealed, being testified by the law and the prophets; (22) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all those who believe. For there is no distinction, (23) for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; (24) being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; (25) whom God set forth to be an atoning sacrifice, through faith in his blood, for a demonstration of his righteousness through the passing over of prior sins, in God's forbearance; (26) to demonstrate his righteousness at this present time; that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus.

No flesh is justified (declared righteous) by the works of the law. This is true because works of the law is self-righteousness. Therefore, we have a redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Redemption means to be made right with God.

Those who have faith in Christ are not only made justified. Faith in Christ credits us with righteousness. We are credited with righteousness because faith to be like Christ means faith to deny self and follow Christ's example. Christ's example was the denial of self and the love for the Father and others. As we follow Christ's example, we become like Christ. As we follow Christ's example, we forget about self without forgetting about God's will for us. We forget about self without forgetting about the law. God's law becomes fulfilled inside us, in our hearts, instead of outwardly.

Faith in the Creator can put one on the path of righteousness. But faith in the Creator can never bring complete righteousness. One needs faith in Jesus Christ, to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ, in order to complete the journey of righteousness. Only by completing the journey of righteousness can we inherit eternal life.

15.5) Romans 3:27-31: Apart From the Law, There Can Be No Boasting

Romans 3:27-31 Where then is the boasting? It is excluded. By what manner of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. (28) We maintain therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. (29) Or is God the God of Jews only? Isn't he the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, (30) since indeed there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith, and the uncircumcised through faith. (31) Do we then nullify the law through faith? May it never be! No, we establish the law.

Under this system, there can be no boasting. We do not boast about our own holiness, because (1) that would be self-righteousness, and (2) we did nothing to gain that righteousness. All of our work is for God and for others, not for ourselves. So there is no boasting about ourselves. We are not saved by works. Everyone is already reconciled because Christ did all the work for everyone on the cross.

Not even my belief in Christ brings me salvation, because if it did, then I could boast about it. On the other hand, if someone seems to be on the path of forfeiting their own salvation, I don't boast that I haven't forfeited my own salvation. Instead I mourn their actions and I seek to turn them back to the path of righteousness in any way that I can.

We must have faith to continue believing that God will save us. We must have faith in God if we are going to overcome self and sin. It's faith in seeing God in the Creation, or in the Scripture. It's faith that causes us to love God and to love others. It's faith that causes us to want others to find God, just as we have found God. And it's faith that causes us to be obedient to God and to do God's works of righteousness because of that love.

15.6) Romans 4:1-12: Abraham Credited With Righteousness

Romans 4:1-5 What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather, has found according to the flesh? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not toward God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted [credited] to him for righteousness." (4) Now to him who works, the reward is not counted as grace, but as debt. (5) But to him who doesn't work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted [credited] for righteousness.

Paul is saying works that are done not involving grace are all about debt. In other words, if a person is saying that the works make up for one's own short-comings, then they are paying a debt. Thus, it's all about making yourself righteous. But when you know your sins have been forgiven by faith, and thus you do works out of love, then your faith is credited as righteousness. In other words, you will become righteous because you have this faith. And that type of faith cannot be separated from doing the Father's works. These works are good works of righteousness. This faith is credited as righteousness because your sinful habits are overcome as you become consumed in your work for the Father.

Romans 4:10-12 How then was it counted? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. (11) He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they be in uncircumcision, that righteousness might also be accounted to them. (12) The father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had in uncircumcision.

Then, Paul relates faith back to circumcision. Circumcision is about showing that you are righteous outwardly, in the flesh. Thus, circumcision is related to the law. Uncircumcision is about being righteous on the inside, in the Spirit. Paul argues that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised. Paul is saying this is grace, which is to live by faith. Abraham's justification was because of faith, acted out by the work of obeying God and leaving his home to go to the promised land.

15.7) Romans 4:13-18: God's Purpose for Abraham's Life

Romans 4:13-18 For the promise to Abraham and to his seed that he should be heir of the world wasn't through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. (14) For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is made of no effect. (15) For the law works wrath, for where there is no law, neither is there disobedience. (16) For this cause it is of faith, that it may be according to grace, to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. (17) As it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations." This is in the presence of him whom he believed: God, who gives life to the dead, and calls the things that are not, as though they were. (18) Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "So will your seed be."

Abraham obeyed God because he loved God. It was not because of the Ten Commandments, which had not as yet been given. Obedience and love go hand-in-hand. We obey God, and do the things God wants us to do, because we love God. Abraham was not trying to show others that he was righteous. Abraham's actions were not self-motivated.

Over time, God revealed much of his planned purpose to Abraham, after he had demonstrated his faith by being obedient to what little God had revealed to him. Abraham was credited with righteousness as he demonstrated his faith. Likewise, the Gentiles can be credited with righteousness, apart from the law and apart from knowledge about Jesus Christ, by demonstrating their faith in what little they know about God. Such faith and obedience is entirely motivated by love, and not out of self-motivation.

As Abraham followed God's purpose for his life, God began to give Abraham an idea of God's far-reaching reasons for that purpose. Abraham was given a promise. God promised that his seed would be blessing to all the nations. That seed would someday rule the world and righteousness would be brought to all the nations through that seed. Of course that seed is Christ. But Abraham was given a task to perform. Abraham would become the father of many nations. Abraham continued to believe God and knew that God would work out his purposes in Abraham's life.

15.8) Romans 4:19-25: Faith and Works Go Hand-In-Hand

Romans 4:19-25 Without being weakened in faith, he didn't consider his own body, already having been worn out, (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. (20) Yet, looking to the promise of God, he didn't waver through unbelief, but grew strong through faith, giving glory to God, (21) and being fully assured that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (22) Therefore it also was "reckoned to him for righteousness." (23) Now it was not written that it was accounted to him for his sake alone, (24) but for our sake also, to whom it will be accounted, who believe in him who raised Jesus, our Lord, from the dead, (25) who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.

The need for faith cannot be understated. The Jews would have considered faith and works to go hand-in-hand. In the Greek, the word for "faith" also means "belief." You act upon that which you believe. If you believe in yourself, you will work for yourself. If you believe in God, you will work for God and for others. If you have faith in God, you will work for God and for others. If you have faith in yourself, you will work for yourself.

Jesus told us to watch for false prophets, and that we would know them by their fruit (Mat. 7:15-19). In other words, if you believe in God, having faith in God, your works will bring fruit that benefits the kingdom and others. But if you believe in yourself your works will benefit yourself. Then, Jesus goes on to say:

Matthew 7:20-22 Therefore, by their fruits you will know them. (21) Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?'

Again, the false prophet is judged by his works. If his works produce fruit that benefits God, the kingdom, and righteousness in others, then it is good fruit. Jesus will say that he knows them when he returns. If the works of the prophet benefit themselves, as in works of the law instead of works of grace, then Jesus will say "I never knew you." They are like the foolish who build their houses on the sand. They work to build their houses that benefit themselves instead of working to build houses that benefit the kingdom and others.

15.9) Romans 5:1-11: Peace, Suffering, and Enemies of God Reconciled

Romans 5:1-11 Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; (2) through whom we also have our access by faith into this grace in which we stand. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (3) Not only this, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering works perseverance; (4) and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope: (5) and hope doesn't disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (6) For while we were yet weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For one will hardly die for a righteous man. Yet perhaps for a righteous person someone would even dare to die. (8) But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him. (10) For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life. (11) Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Paul brings up three points here: (1) the peace of God, (2) rejoicing in suffering, and (3) the fact that we were reconciled with God while still enemies of God.

When do we have the peace of God? One person wrote me asking how they would know when they had overcome all their sinful habits. How do you know when you are ready for Christ to return? It's when the Holy Spirit gives you peace. It's entering God's rest. It's the Holy Spirit's work to help you overcome the sinful habits. Ask the Holy Spirit to not give you rest until all your sinful habits have been overcome. And always be open to the possibility that the Holy Spirit may show you something later on that was hidden from you in the past.

I never say that no sinful habits will crop up again. But I can and do have a peace that as far as I know, I'm ready for Christ to return. As long as you have peace from the Holy Spirit, you can be confident that you are ready for Christ to return. And you can be confident that the Holy Spirit will complete this work in your life as long as you truly seek God's rest through Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6 ESV And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, Paul says that we should rejoice in our sufferings. Our sufferings produces character. Paul received comfort from the Lord in his own suffering, because he knew that his own suffering lead to the comfort and salvation of others (2 Corinthians 1:3-10). In other words, our very purpose for living is not for our self, but for Christ. To that end, we will suffer. All of Christ's true disciples suffered. John was the only disciple who was not martyred. To be a disciple of Christ will generally lead to suffering. But it's through that suffering that God can bring maturity in us, even to the point of overcoming every sinful habit.

Then Paul talks about the suffering that Christ endured. Christ died for us on the cross. We must take up that cross and follow him.

Matthew 16:24-27 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. (25) For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. (26) For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? (27) For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds."

Thirdly, in verse 10, Paul makes an important point. "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son." We were reconciled with God before we became believers. And this was accomplished through the suffering of Christ. Therefore, our salvation began at the cross, before we were even born.

Over time, God reveals himself to us just as God revealed himself to Abraham. If we respond to that revelation with faith, it's credited to us as righteousness. When we become believers, God credits us with righteousness. Over time, we really do become righteous as all our sinful habits are overcome. But this must be a process through living a life that is solely for Christ. All motivations of self in our purpose, and in what we do, must disappear. All motivations must be to do the will of the Father.

15.10) Romans 5:12 - 5:16: Christ is the Last Adam

Romans 5:12-16 Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned. (13) For until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not charged when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those whose sins weren't like Adam's disobedience, who is a foreshadowing of him who was to come. (15) But the free gift isn't like the trespass. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. (16) The gift is not as through one who sinned: for the judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification.

Paul has a much shorter version of this in 1 Corinthians 15, which is the chapter on the resurrection:

1 Corinthians 15:20-22 But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruits of those who are asleep. (21) For since death came by man, the resurrection of the dead also came by man. (22) For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

Adam sinned, causing all his descendants to be under the bondage of sin. But Christ had no sin. Christ was raised from the dead. Because of this, all of Adam's descendants will be resurrected. Of course this excludes the exceptions of those who harden their hearts against Christ and forfeit their salvation. The world "all" means at least the high majority of all people who die because of Adam's sin will be resurrected. It's not just the believers who will be resurrected. And this is solely because of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection.

So now let's look at Paul's longer version of this doctrine at this place in Romans. Verse 12 states that all have sinned because of Adam's sin. Verse 13 says that sin was in the world, but sin was not charged against us until the law came through Moses. What does this mean? Before Moses, people knew about sin. The very sin of Adam gave Adam the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:4-7). Nevertheless, even at that time, God had a plan to redeem man. In this same chapter of Genesis we have the first hint of that plan:

Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."

In other words, God planned on sending his Son to die in our place, and thus defeat Satan. The payment for all the world's sins was made so that all could be resurrected and given life again. But sins become habits. We were in bondage (slavery) to sin. Sinful habits must be overcome before we can finally be given eternal life. So God had to lay down the law. He did so through Moses. Before the law, men knew they were sinning. But all these sins are forgiven. With the introduction of the law, it became possible for men to refuse the law, and thus refuse God's plan of redemption.

When Moses first brought the Ten Commandments down from the mountain, many of the people of Israel, who had been given direct revelation about God, refused God's law and turned back to idol worship. They built the golden calf. For the first time, those who had sinned in this way were blotted from the book of life (resurrection) that God had written (Exodus 32:32).

Sin is not counted where there is no law. This is a direct connection back to chapter 2, especially verses 12-16, where Paul says, "When Gentiles who don't have the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves." In other words, Paul connects the fact of everyone being reconciled at the cross with the fact that faith in the Creation counts for salvation where further direct revelation from God has not been given. We are all saved by faith.

The last part of verse 14 says that Adam is a foreshadowing of him who was to come. The ESV says Adam was a "type" of him who was to come. As Paul said in his resurrection chapter, quoted earlier, "For in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." Adam brought death to all. Christ brought the resurrection to all. But because of the law, and because of God's revelations of himself, it's possible for man to reject Christ's salvation just as Adam rejected God. And when this is done, it's impossible to come back into repentance because it would require the crucifixion of Christ all over again (Hebrews 6:4-6).

This is why Paul considers Christ to be the last Adam. "Thus it is written, The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45). One man brought death to everybody. Another man brought the free gift of the resurrection to everybody.

15.11) Romans 5:17 - 6:3: Two Gifts; Reconciliation and Righteousness

Romans 5:17 - 6:3 (17) For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. (18) So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. (19) For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous. (20) The law came in besides, that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly; (21) that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (1) What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (2) May it never be! We who died to sin, how could we live in it any longer? (3) Or don't you know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

What is the gift of righteousness (verse 17)? Does this righteousness mean sins are to be covered, overcome, or both? Is Paul saying that we could be living as we have always lived? Or is the free gift of righteousness spoken of in this verse, a gift wherein God works inside us to change us and overcome sin? Everyone received the gift of “justification to life” (verse 18), when Jesus died on the cross. The gift in verse 17 is another gift. This gift is one that “reigns in life,” according to verse 17. For those who trust in Jesus Christ, God gives us a special gift that brings about true changes in our lives. This is the process of sanctification, and we must work to not resist these changes in our lives. Eventually we will become mature in Christ through this gift. It’s the gift of the Holy Spirit.

What is the difference here between the free gift of righteousness (verse 17) and the “justification to life” for all men (verse 18)? In the case of the gift of justification, the gift is associated with “one act of righteousness.” That one act was Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. The death of Jesus on the cross, therefore, is reconciliation for all men so that everyone can be resurrected. Compare the “all” of verse 18 with the “many” of verse 19. This draws a clear distinction between the reconciliation for “all” men and the fact that “many” (but not all) will be made righteous. Being made righteous is the process of sanctification. Everybody was reconciled. However, not all who are reconciled will be entirely sanctified. Sanctification is the process of becoming righteous.

All men are reconciled. But not all men mature in Christ, allowing the Holy Spirit to work in their lives to overcome sin through Jesus Christ. Not all men learn to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9).

Verse 21 says that "grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life." For grace to "reign" means it's an on-going process. And that process "might," or might not, be happening. If grace reigns, meaning it rules over our lives, then it leads to eternal life. But for grace to reign, we must forget about self and take up our cross and follow Christ. We must do the will of the Father.

Now look at chapter 6, verses 1 and 2. This verse says we have died to sin. If we have died to sin, can we still live in sin? Does this mean that we can no longer sin? If we have died to sin, we don't sin. While grace reigns, we are not sinning. But then we can turn around and sin again because of its addictive nature. When we do, grace is no longer "reigning" (or ruling) over our lives. The Father is no longer ruling. We are ruling ourselves.

Paul says, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? May it never be!" Look at Paul's words this way: If we do continue in sin grace is not abounding. That's not the way you interpret the meaning of grace. We have died to sin. So we cannot sin. That's the true meaning of grace.

15.12) Romans 6:4-7: No Longer in Bondage to Sin

Romans 6:4-7 We were buried therefore with him through baptism to death, that just like Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will also be part of his resurrection; (6) knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin. (7) For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Being dead to sin (verse 11 below) is not sinning. Is Paul equating the resurrection body that we will receive with our not sinning now (verse 5)? Verse 6 says that sin in us, "might be brought to nothing." This same verse speaks of the addictive nature of sin, which is slavery to sin. When there is continual sin, it's because we are addicted to that sin. If one is addicted to a sinful habit, is he free from sin? Or is he a slave to that sin?

15.13) Romans 6:8-14: Sin Should Not Have Dominion Over Us

Romans 6:8-14 But if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him; (9) knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no more has dominion over him! (10) For the death that he died, he died to sin one time; but the life that he lives, he lives to God. (11) Thus consider yourselves also to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (12) Therefore don't let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. (13) Neither present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (14) For sin will not have dominion over you. For you are not under law, but under grace.

Like Christ, when we receive our spiritual bodies, death will no longer have dominion over us (verse 9). (Dominion means to have power over or rule over). What is the difference between considering ourselves dead to sin (verse 11), and continuing to sin just a little bit? If we are dead to sin, then we are “alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

What does Paul mean by sin not having dominion over us (verse 14)? Compare this with verse 9, where Paul tells us that death will not have dominion over us. The time when death will not have dominion over us waits for our spiritual bodies. However, does the time that sin will not have dominion over us wait for our spiritual bodies? No, because Paul says it's because we are under grace and not the law (verse 14).

Why is this true, that being under grace but not under the law causes sin to not have dominion over us? In the context of these verses, does Paul mean that sin has a little dominion over us? No, Paul seems to be comparing the lack of dominion of sin right now with the lack of dominion of death in the future. The key to breaking the enslavement of sin, therefore, is in the difference between being under grace and being under the law.

If this is true, then one may ask, “Are not we all under grace today? Then why do Christians still sin?” Could it be that we are not always under grace? The two big differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament is the cross and Pentecost. The cross, however, was for people of all generations, even generations of the Old Testament.

15.14) Romans 6:15-23: Slaves to Sin or Slaves to Righteousness

Romans 6:15-23 What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? May it never be! (16) Don't you know that to whom you present yourselves as servants to obedience, his servants you are whom you obey; whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? (17) But thanks be to God, that, whereas you were bondservants of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto you were delivered. (18) Being made free from sin, you became bondservants of righteousness. (19) I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh, for as you presented your members as servants to uncleanness and to wickedness upon wickedness, even so now present your members as servants to righteousness for sanctification. (20) For when you were servants of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (21) What fruit then did you have at that time in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. (22) But now, being made free from sin, and having become servants of God, you have your fruit of sanctification, and the result of eternal life. (23) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Can we sin while under grace? Yes, we can slide out of grace by sinning. But we do not have to choose sin. We no longer need to be a slave to sin. However, if we continue sinful habits, we continue to be slaves to the sin. Paul speaks very much in a black-and-white way. We are either slaves to sin, or we are slaves to righteousness. We cannot be slaves to both sin and righteousness. Being slaves to righteousness leads us to sanctification (verse 19).

What does Paul mean by "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord?" (verse 23) I've been saying that we cannot inherit eternal life until we mature in Christ to the point where we no longer sin. Salvation and eternal life are both free gifts from God. But notice the context of the verse. We must be "slaves to righteousness for sanctification." In other words, we will receive the free gift from God as a result of our discipleship relationship with Christ Jesus. We cannot serve two masters. If we are still slaves to sin, then we are not in that discipleship relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives. Verse 22 says that because we are servants that our works, as servants, leads to sanctification. Then sanctification leads to eternal life. Verse 23 is usually quoted out of this context.

15.15) Romans 7:1-6: The Covenant of Marriage as an Example

Romans 7:1-6 Or don't you know, brothers (for I speak to men who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man for as long as he lives? (2) For the woman that has a husband is bound by law to the husband while he lives, but if the husband dies, she is discharged from the law of the husband. (3) So then if, while the husband lives, she is joined to another man, she would be called an adulteress. But if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she is joined to another man. (4) Therefore, my brothers, you also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you would be joined to another, to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit to God. (5) For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were through the law, worked in our members to bring forth fruit to death. (6) But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter.

Paul uses the analogy of being married until death. Marriage is a covenant. We are married to the law (old covenant) until death. Christ had to die, and we die with Christ. With this death, we are released from our marriage to the law. When we give up our self, there is no longer a struggle between our desire to please ourselves and wanting to obey the law. God replaces this with desire to please Christ. And this can only happen when it's not our self living, but Christ living in us. The Holy Spirit living in us is the same as Christ living in us.

But does this happen all at once? No, because we still have the free will to sin and temptations tend to draw us back to sin. Sin causes the Holy Spirit to back off. But He will come back when we repent. It is by God's grace that He has given us the Holy Spirit. When we live dead to self and sin, it's only by God's grace. Our old selves are dead because Christ died. But we can still sin. Temptation awakens our old desires. Therefore, we go back and forth between being under the law, and being under grace. We must overcome sin by the power of God; by asking the Holy Spirit to come when temptations comes.

15.16) Romans 7:7-13: The Law is Holy

Romans 7:7-13 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! However, I wouldn't have known sin, except through the law. For I wouldn't have known coveting, unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." (8) But sin, finding occasion through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of coveting. For apart from the law, sin is dead. (9) I was alive apart from the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. (10) The commandment, which was for life, this I found to be for death; (11) for sin, finding occasion through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. (12) Therefore the law indeed is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good. (13) Did then that which is good become death to me? May it never be! But sin, that it might be shown to be sin, by working death to me through that which is good; that through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful.

Notice that Paul is not just talking about God's laws that were nailed to the cross. "You shall not covet" is one of the Ten Commandments. To covet is to desire things that others have in order to satisfy self. To covet does not consider the desires or even the needs of others. Under grace, we no longer covet because we are completely consumed with the desire to please Christ instead of ourselves.

We were sinning all along. The commandments showed the sin. But in the flesh, our attempts to overcome sin made sin even stronger. Apart from the Spirit, we can do nothing.

In the following verses, is Paul talking about his experiences under law or his experiences under grace?

15.17) Romans 7:14-23: The Struggle To Stay Under Grace

Romans 7:14-23 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, sold under sin. (15) For I don't know what I am doing. For I don't practice what I desire to do; but what I hate, that I do. (16) But if what I don't desire, that I do, I consent to the law that it is good. (17) So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. (18) For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For desire is present with me, but I don't find it doing that which is good. (19) For the good which I desire, I don't do;

but the evil which I don't desire, that I practice. (20) But if what I don't desire, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. (21) I find then the law, that, to me, while I desire to do good, evil is present. (22) For I delight in God's law after the inward man, (23) but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members.

Is Paul talking about this struggle under the law, or under grace?

Paul says the law is spiritual. But we are of flesh. Notice verse 18, where Paul says that he has the desire to do good (under the flesh) but does not have the ability to carry it out. The Holy Spirit is required to change our nature, so that our desire is to please Christ instead of ourselves.

These verses are often taken out of context, under Reformed theology, to say that we cannot overcome sin, even under grace. When you consider the overall context, Paul is talking about the struggle to live under grace instead of trying to overcome sin in our own power, which is to live under the law. It's a comparison and contrast between the two. These verses describe Paul's experiences at struggling with sin without relying on grace. These verses are about living under the law. These verses should not be used to say that it's impossible to live without sin under grace. Doing so is taking them out of context.

15.18) Romans 7:24-25: Jesus Christ Delivers Us From Sin's Bondage

Romans 7:24-25 What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord! So then with the mind, I myself serve God's law, but with the flesh, the sin's law. (1) There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who don't walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. (3) For what the law couldn't do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh; (4) that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Those who do not walk after the flesh do not sin. Thus, if you continue to sin, you are not in Christ Jesus.

15.19) Romans 8:1-4: No Condemnation

Romans 8:1-4 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who don't walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. (3) For what the law couldn't do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh; (4) that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Being in Christ Jesus is the same as being filled with the Spirit.

15.20) Romans 8:5-14: We Set Our Minds On the Works of God

Romans 8:5-14 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace; (7) because the mind of the flesh is hostile towards God; for it is not subject to God's law, neither indeed can it be. (8) Those who are in the flesh can't please God. (9) But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if it is so that the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his. (10) If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness. (11) But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (12) So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. (13) For if you live after the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (14) For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are children of God.

Only those who are led by the Holy Spirit are to be sons of God. We can be considered sons of God now. But the reality is when we receive our spiritual bodies. Then we will be literally “born again,” by the Holy Spirit, into spiritual bodies.

15.21) Romans 8:15-18: The Spirit Tells Us we are Heirs

Romans 8:15-18 For you didn't receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (16) The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God; (17) and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him. (18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed toward us.

The Holy Spirit in us bears witness (shows us) that we are being led by the Spirit.

We are not promised good times as we follow the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, we are fellow heirs with Christ provided that we suffer with Christ. This leads to our being glorified with Christ. That is to say, our suffering leads to sanctification, which leads to glorification, the receiving of our spiritual bodies like Christ.

We are heirs of God. This is the same as being heirs of God's promises to Abraham, because in Galatians 3:16-18, Paul explains that the promises given to Abraham were given to Christ, the one seed, as well as all who are in Christ.

Galatians 3:16-18 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He doesn't say, "To seeds," as of many, but as of one, "To your seed," which is Christ. (17) Now I say this. A covenant confirmed beforehand by God in Christ, the law, which came four hundred thirty years after, does not annul, so as to make the promise of no effect. (18) For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by promise.

15.22) Romans 8:19-25: The Creation Waits for God's Heirs

Romans 8:19-25 For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. (20) For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope (21) that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. (23) Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we

ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body. (24) For we were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for that which he sees? (25) But if we hope for that which we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

The symbol of the pains of childbirth comes from the metaphor of the pregnant woman, about to give birth. This metaphor is used throughout Scripture in reference to the resurrection.

We wait for the adoption as sons. In other words, we consider ourselves as sons of God. But it's literally fulfilled at the resurrection.

15.23) Romans 8:26-28: The Holy Spirit Prays For the Saints (Heirs)

Romans 8:26-28 In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we don't know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which can't be uttered. (27) He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God. (28) We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

All things work for the good of those who are called according to His purpose. This does not mean that we won't suffer. As it said in verses 15-19, we will suffer with Christ. But this suffering, if nothing else, leads us to righteousness.

15.24) Romans 8:29-30: The Heirs were Predestined

Romans 8:29-30 For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (30) Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified.

Notice the progression of sanctification. The glorification is in the future, when we will receive our gloried bodies. This is an example of the use of past-tense verbs for unquestionable future-tense events. This practice comes from thinking in Hebrew.

15.25) Romans 8:31-39: The Heirs are More Than Conquerors

Romans 8:31-39 What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) He who didn't spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how would he not also with him freely give us all things? (33) Who could bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies. (34) Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. (35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) Even as it is written, "For your sake we are killed all day long. We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter." (37) No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Are "all things" material things or spiritual things? When it says that God will give us all things, does that mean now? Or does it mean when we are glorified? What does Paul mean by "more than conquerors? What do we conquer? If we overcome (conquer) sin, then giving us "all things", would be more along the lines of spiritual things. Under grace, we more than conquer sin and death.

Salvation is a free gift. But inheriting the Kingdom requires lots of work. Solving the friction between grace and holiness verses. This historically included the friction between the Wesleyan view of "complete sanctification," "the second blessing," and "Christian perfection," against the older Whitefield and Reformed positions that perfection cannot be obtained this side of the grave. Solved by applying Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church.

Chapter 16

Law vs. Grace in Galatians

In Romans, we learned many doctrinal truths about law and grace. The law was needed to teach us the nature of sin. But we are saved by faith, not by doing works of self-righteousness. You can either be a slave to righteousness or a slave to sin. We learned that living under grace is a way of life, and that we can still be living under the law even today. Believers who are still slaves to sin are living under the law. Living under grace is being filled with the Holy Spirit, to do the works the Father has for us to do. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we cannot sin because God is in us, and God cannot sin.

This is a letter written in response to teachers who were saying that you must observe self-righteousness works of the law in addition to having faith in Christ. They were saying that you must be circumcised and observe certain religious festivals. Paul reacts very strongly against this teaching, saying that faith in anything other than Christ alone effectively nullifies one's faith in Christ.

16.1) Galatians 1: Only One Gospel

Galatians 1 Paul, an apostle (not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead), (2) and all the brothers who are with me, to the assemblies of Galatia: (3) Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, (4) who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father-- (5) to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

In the next few verses below, Paul moves quickly from his greeting, getting straight to the point of the letter. There is only one gospel, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul is astonished that after such a short period of time, the people are listening to another gospel, other than the one which had been preached by Paul.

Today, many have observed that there seems to be a difference between the gospel of Paul and the gospel of Jesus Christ. It would seem that Paul would be the first to disagree. Paul says there is only one gospel, and it's the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul may be placing more emphasis on certain aspects of the gospel. But there is only one gospel.

Some will argue that they are interpreting the gospel of Jesus through the "lens" of Paul. Stated another way, they reinterpret the words of Jesus in the light of Paul. And yet these same dispensational theologians say we should not reinterpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. We should interpret the New Testament in context of the Old Testament.

In the same way, I would argue that we should interpret the words of Paul in the context of the words of Jesus. The words of Jesus were taught in a very plain and easy to understand language. The words of Paul, being a Pharisee, were taught more from a perspective of doctrine, which can be more difficult to understand. In other words, if Paul's commentary about Jesus seems to be in contradiction to the simple words of Jesus, we much assume that we are interpreting Paul's complex doctrine incorrectly. Our interpretation of Paul's doctrine must be validated by the simple words of Jesus.

(6) I marvel that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different "good news"; (7) and there isn't another "good news." Only there are some who trouble you, and want to pervert the Good News of Christ. (8) But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you any "good news" other than that which we preached to you, let him be cursed. (9) As we have said before, so I now say again: if any man preaches to you any "good news" other than that which you received, let him be cursed.

Did Jesus ever preach strict observance of the Sabbath, or observing certain festivals, or even the need for circumcision? No, Jesus taught to us to "believe on him" for eternal life. Jesus taught us to have faith in Him who could walk on water and command the waves to be still. And Jesus also taught us to obey his commandments and to do the will (works) of the Father. So as long as Paul's gospel is understood that we must do the works of the Father in order to inherit the kingdom, there is no conflict between the gospel of Paul and that of Jesus.

The false teachers Paul is attacking are not preaching faith in Christ alone. Doing the commands of Christ is the same as living by faith in Christ alone. But doing acts of self-righteousness to make one appear to be conforming to the teachings of the Pharisees and teachers of the law is to compromise against a pure faith in Christ. Thus, you are living under the law and not under grace. This allows sin to return and one becomes a slave to sin instead of righteousness. Paul severely curses the ones who are teaching this false gospel.

(10) For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? For if I were still pleasing men, I wouldn't be a servant of Christ. (11) But I make known to you, brothers, concerning the Good News which was preached by me, that it is not according to man. (12) For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ.

Notice that Paul is not just a believer in Christ. He is a servant of Christ. Paul does the works of Christ. I don't think Paul would consider one who is not a servant of Christ to really be a true believer in Christ. Those who are truly servants of Christ will inherit eternal life because they live under God's grace.

(13) For you have heard of my way of living in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the assembly of God, and ravaged it. (14) I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of my own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. (15) But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, (16) to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I didn't immediately confer with flesh and blood, (17) nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia. Then I returned to Damascus. (18) Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter, and stayed with him fifteen days. (19) But of the other apostles I saw no one, except James, the Lord's brother. (20) Now about the things which I write to you, behold, before God, I'm not lying. (21) Then I came to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. (22) I was still unknown by face to the assemblies of Judea which were in Christ, (23) but they only heard: "He who once persecuted us now preaches the faith that he once tried to destroy." (24) And they glorified God in me.

Paul is addressing his own credentials as an apostle and thus as one who has Christ's authority to take this strong position against other teachers who proclaim Christ. Paul even brings up the time when he confronted Peter about this very issue. Should Gentiles who profess faith in Christ be required to be circumcised and observe religious festivals? No, after being corrected by Paul, Peter agrees that faith in Christ is all that is required for believers in Christ. Anything else brings one back under slavery to the law which in turn becomes slavery to sin.

16.2) Galatians 2: Paul's Authority

Galatians 2 Then after a period of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with me. (2) I went up by revelation, and I laid before them the Good News which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately before those who were respected, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. (3) But not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. (4) This was because of the false brothers secretly brought in, who stole in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage; (5) to whom we gave no place in the way of subjection, not for an hour, that the truth of the Good News might continue with you. (6) But from those who were reputed to be important (whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God doesn't show partiality to man)-they, I say, who were respected imparted nothing to me, (7) but to the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the Good News for the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the Good News for the circumcision (8) (for he who appointed Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision appointed me also to the Gentiles); (9) and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision. (10) They only asked us to remember the poor--which very thing I was also zealous to do. (11) But when Peter came to Antioch, I resisted him to his face, because he stood condemned.

Peter had been given a vision of unclean food coming down from heaven, and being told to eat. This taught Peter that he can eat with the Gentiles because no food is unclean when you are in Christ. But apparently some people came from James and Peter backed off and no longer ate with the Gentiles. Paul considers this to be hypocrisy and publicly confronts Peter about the problem.

(12) For before some people came from James, he ate with the Gentiles. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. (13) And the rest of the Jews joined him in his hypocrisy; so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. (14) But when I saw that they didn't walk uprightly according to the truth of the Good News, I

said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live as the Gentiles do, and not as the Jews do, why do you compel the Gentiles to live as the Jews do? (15) "We, being Jews by nature, and not Gentile sinners, (16) yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no flesh will be justified by the works of the law.

Jesus died for our sins. No amount of ritual work, or following customs, will atone for any sin. We can live in our own culture without confusing that culture with Christ's atonement. But we should not impose such culture or rituals upon others simply because they are part of our own culture. Doing so would strongly imply to others of different cultures that following such rituals is necessary for salvation.

That is exactly what these false teachers were doing in the church of the Galatians. They were imposing their own customs upon the Gentile believers, making them believe that circumcision and other Jewish customs are needed for salvation. Anything that we teach which detracts from faith in Jesus Christ alone is false teaching.

This reminds us of the parable of the wise and wicked servant, discussed in section 6.2 of this book. The wicked servant distorts Christ's teaching for his own selfish benefit. Those who have been given an undeniable understanding of God's revelations, yet in their hardened hearts reject Christ's lordship over their lives, commit the unpardonable sin. They will not be resurrected when Christ returns. It's all about a hardened heart so that you no longer hear Christ's voice. The wicked servant knew his Master was coming. Yet he beat his fellow servants. Something along these lines may be what Paul believes is happening to the Galatians.

(17) But if, while we sought to be justified in Christ, we ourselves also were found sinners, is Christ a servant of sin? Certainly not! (18) For if I build up again those things which I destroyed, I prove myself a law-breaker. (19) For I, through the law, died to the law, that I might live to God. (20) I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me. That life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me. (21) I don't make void the grace of God. For if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing!"

Paul speaks against living under the law. Paul says that it is no longer I who live, but Christ is living in me. This means Paul is doing the works that Christ would have done if Christ were in Paul's place. Paul is living for Christ, doing the works that Christ would have him do. That is what it means to live under grace instead of the law. So again, Paul is preaching against these false teachers who are trying to bring the customs of the law to the Gentile believers.

16.3) Galatians 3: Only One Seed

Galatians 3 Foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you not to obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth among you as crucified? (2) I just want to learn this from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith?

When the Galatians were filled with the Holy Spirit, they had the mindset of Christ. They were excited about living as Christ would want them to live. This means turning from sin and obeying the commandments of the Father, to do the good works that the Father has for them to do. Such a Spirit does not think about self, but only about doing the will of the Father.

Then, these false teachers start imposing religious requirements on the Galatians. These religious requirements have the effect of turning their minds away from helping others to matters of self. They are no longer being led by the Spirit. They are no longer filled with the Spirit and living under grace.

(3) Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now completed in the flesh? (4) Did you suffer so many things in vain, if it is indeed in vain? (5) He therefore who supplies the Spirit to you, and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith? (6) Even as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness."

Abraham's belief included selfless actions. Abraham left his home and set out for a promised land because God had told him to do so. His motivations were totally to obey God, and were not for self or personal gain. This is the model of faith from which we are to learn. The Galatians had this kind of faith originally when they heard the Good News from Paul. They were filled with the Holy Spirit because they were ready and willing to obey God just as Abraham had done. Thus, God counted it as righteousness and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

(7) Know therefore that those who are of faith, the same are children of Abraham. (8) The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Good News beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you all the nations will be blessed." (9) So then, those who are of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham. (10) For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who doesn't continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them."

Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father. That faith must be like Abraham's faith, which does not involve self. Once we start relying on self to justify us, we become obligated to make ourselves perfect. We cannot do that. But as we live by faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes and we progressively become perfect. That's the difference between living by law and living by grace.

But that doesn't mean that the law itself promotes living for self. In the age to come, the priests and rulers will be Christians who live by faith in Jesus Christ, and have no self-motivations. In other words, they will be perfect as the Father is perfect. Living under the law will actually work. In the age to come, living under the law will be the same as living for Christ, because Christ will be the law and King. When everyone is living in love for God and love for neighbors, self-motivation will disappear and everyone will learn to live without sin.

(11) Now that no man is justified by the law before God is evident, for, "The righteous will live by faith." (12) The law is not of faith, but, "The man who does them will live by them." (13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree," (14) that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Thus today, we must live as if we were living in the kingdom that will come. We must act for and believe in Jesus Christ the King. The "blessing of Abraham" is a promise of a kingdom. It's a promise of the land and of many descendants. Land and many descendants add up to a kingdom. Gentiles can inherit that very same promise through the same type of faith that Abraham had, directed toward the King of that promised nation.

(15) Brothers, speaking of human terms, though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been confirmed, no one makes it void, or adds to it. (16) Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He doesn't say, "To seeds," as of many, but as of one, "To your seed," which is Christ. (17) Now I say this. A covenant confirmed beforehand by God in Christ, the law, which came four hundred thirty years after, does not annul, so as to make the promise of no effect. (18) For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by promise.

Paul makes this point to show that the coming of the Law of Moses did not change the promise that was given to Abraham which Paul equates with grace and faith. The law was needed because most people were not living by selfless faith in God.

Also, Paul says that the promise to Abraham was to a single "seed", meaning Christ. This does several things. First, it brings home the fact that only those who live for the Messiah are beneficiaries of the promise. And Gentiles who live for the Messiah are included as those who will inherit the promise of Abraham. And again, the promise is that God will make Abraham's descendants into a nation. But Paul is saying that those who actually serve the King of that nation are those who will inherit the promise of that nation. To serve the King is to live by faith for that King. To live by faith is to do the good works that the King would have us do. The promise is for one "seed" only because the King of a nation is the same as the Kingdom. Those in the King are the Kingdom.

It can be argued from verse 17 (above) that the law is all that was given to Moses and that everything which predated Moses is not a part of the law that Paul condemns. Some Christian groups believe the dietary laws are still in effect because they are alluded to in the "clean" and "unclean" animals as seen in Genesis at the time of the flood. But the Law of Moses is simply a theocracy and can incorporate laws that predate Moses.

To argue that the law is strictly everything given to Moses breaks down a bit when you consider that circumcision itself was a covenant with Abraham. Thus, circumcision is often viewed as the sign of the Old Covenant whereas baptism is seen as the sign of the New Covenant. Bottom line is that anything that can be considered to be a requirement for pleasing God, which is in addition to faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ, is to be condemned.

(19) What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise has been made. It was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator. (20) Now a mediator is not between one, but God is one. (21) Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could make alive, most certainly righteousness would have been of the law. (22) But the Scriptures imprisoned all things under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

The Law of Moses was given because the people were not living by faith as Abraham had done, doing the good works of the Father. Thus, the Law of Moses was a temporary measure until Christ came. However, not being under the Law of Moses does not invalidate the fact that with Christ we are now under the Law of Christ. The Law of Moses was simply a shadow of the Law of Christ, which in reality is the Kingdom of Christ that will come. Again, there is no difference between the King and the Kingdom. And there is no difference between the Kingdom and the Law of the King. The King's Word is the Law.

(23) But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, confined for the faith which should afterwards be revealed. (24) So that the law has become our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. (25) But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (26) For you are all children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. (27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise.

Those who are in Christ will inherit the promise of Abraham, which was for a nation that will be a blessing to the world. This nation will rule over the world. Those who are in Christ are a part of that promised holy nation. But to be in Christ you must live for Christ, which is to live without sinful habits. The Law of Moses was a tutor for doing just that. But now that we have Christ, we should not be obligated to obeying the ordinances of that tutor. After tasting the gift of the Holy Spirit, going back to the tutor would be rejecting Christ and His grace.

16.4) Galatians 4: Abraham Has Two Types of Children; Two Mothers

Galatians 4 But I say that so long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a bondservant, though he is lord of all; (2) but is under guardians and stewards until the day appointed by the father. (3) So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental principles of the world. (4) But when the fullness of the time came, God sent out his Son, born to a woman, born under the law, (5) that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of children.

Paul is saying that Israel was a servant, like a slave, to the law because they were still like children. Yet because they were Israel, they were in fact heirs of the promise of Abraham, which is a Kingdom. Then when Christ the King of Israel came, they could mature and be set free from the slavery to the law.

(6) And because you are children, God sent out the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" (7) So you are no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (8) However at that time, not knowing God, you were in bondage to those who by nature are not gods. (9) But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, why do you turn back again to the weak and miserable elemental principles, to which you desire to be in bondage all over again? (10) You observe days, months, seasons, and years.

The people of Israel were bondservants to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Yet they were "by nature not gods." In other words, they were full of sin. Now, the Galatians want to adopt that old system, and start observing Jewish festivals. This would put them back under that old system of bondage.

(11) I am afraid for you, that I might have wasted my labor for you. (12) I beg you, brothers, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong, (13) but you know that because of weakness of the flesh I preached the Good News to you the first time. (14) That which was a temptation to you in my flesh, you didn't despise nor reject; but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. (15) What was the blessing you enjoyed? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. (16) So then, have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? (17) They zealously seek you in no

good way. No, they desire to alienate you, that you may seek them.

(18) But it is always good to be zealous in a good cause, and not only when I am present with you.

Paul goes back to the time when an illness diverted his plans and he winds up preaching to the Galatians. They were extremely glad to hear Paul's message. But now, these false teachers are alienating the people away from Paul's teaching.

(19) My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ is formed in you-- (20) but I could wish to be present with you now, and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. (21) Tell me, you that desire to be under the law, don't you listen to the law?

Scripture uses the metaphor of a pregnant woman in childbirth in talking about the time of the resurrection. Israel is the woman. The earth will give birth to the dead. (Refer back to section 3.8 of this book.) Here, Paul borrows from that metaphor and uses it to describe his own painful emotions in how he feels about the Galatians. Paul uses the metaphor to describe his own desire that they become like Christ so that they will be resurrected with eternal life and inherit the kingdom.

(22) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the handmaid, and one by the free woman. (23) However, the son by the handmaid was born according to the flesh, but the son by the free woman was born through promise. (24) These things contain an allegory, for these are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children to bondage, which is Hagar. (25) For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to the Jerusalem that exists now, for she is in bondage with her children. (26) But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is the mother of us all. (27) For it is written, "Rejoice, you barren who don't bear. Break forth and shout, you that don't travail. For more are the children of the desolate than of her who has a husband." (28) Now we, brothers, as Isaac was, are children of promise.

Paul illustrates the distinction of law and grace with an allegory. Children of the slave woman are slaves. Slaves to the law are associated with the Old Covenant and the Old Jerusalem. Children of the free woman associated with the promise of Abraham and with the New Jerusalem that will come when Christ returns.

It's interesting to note that both types of children are sons of Abraham. The Jew who is not a believer in Jesus is still a slave to the law. He is born of the flesh. This would have a double meaning. He is physically Abraham's descendent, so

being born of the flesh is a statement of being Abraham's descendent. But being born of the flesh also means being a slave to sin.

The sons of the free woman are born of the promise. They are children of Abraham in the fact that they are in Christ, who is Abraham's son. This makes them be children of the promise that was given to Abraham. Again, the promise was that his children would become a great nation and would inherit the land that God showed to Abraham. Paul points out that when this happens, it will be via a New Jerusalem that is from above (verse 26).

(29) But as then, he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. (30) However what does the Scripture say? "Throw out the handmaid and her son, for the son of the handmaid will not inherit with the son of the free woman." (31) So then, brothers, we are not children of a handmaid, but of the free woman.

16.5) Galatians 5: Those with Fruit of the Spirit will Inherit the Kingdom

Galatians 5 Stand firm therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and don't be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

(2) Behold, I, Paul, tell you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing. (3) Yes, I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. (4) You are alienated from Christ, you who desire to be justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace.

Here, Paul is getting very blunt. A desire to be justified by the law forfeits salvation. Your name can be blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life. These are clearly people who have received the Holy Spirit. So they are true believers. They can fall away from grace, which means they reject the Holy Spirit. Paul is warning that they can lose their salvation by turning to the law for self-justification.

(5) For we, through the Spirit, by faith wait for the hope of righteousness. (6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision amounts to anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love. (7) You were running well! Who interfered with you that you should not obey the truth? (8) This persuasion is not from him who calls you.

Paul is making reference to his metaphor of running a race. It's a metaphor that means living in grace and thus becoming holy as the Father is holy. It's a race that involves doing the good works the Father has for us, so that we become holy as we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Those who complete the race will inherit the kingdom and reign with Christ when he returns.

(9) A little yeast grows through the whole lump. (10) I have confidence toward you in the Lord that you will think no other way. But he who troubles you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.

The yeast working through the dough is a metaphor that Jesus often used. It can refer to either righteousness or unrighteousness. Either will spread to other people. Paul is concerned that the false teaching will spread.

(11) But I, brothers, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been removed. (12) I wish that those who disturb you would cut themselves off.

Paul makes the point that if he were to preach circumcision, even if it included a false type of faith in Jesus, then he would no longer be persecuted. Circumcision and apparent obedience to the law were very important to Jewish culture. It really did not matter what you believed as long as you were following their customs. This kept the Pharisees and teachers of the law in their positions of authority.

(13) For you, brothers, were called for freedom. Only don't use your freedom for gain to the flesh, but through love be servants to one another. (14) For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (15) But if you bite and devour one another, be careful that you don't consume one another. (16) But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you won't fulfill the lust of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, that you may not do the things that you desire.

If you "walk by the Spirit", you are walking in grace, doing the will of the Father. Walking by the Spirit is the opposite of walking by the flesh, or self-effort.

(18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (19) Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, (20) idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, (21) envyings, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Some who advocate free grace have admitted trouble with this verse. They believe salvation is the same as inheriting the kingdom. Distinctions are made between believers and unbelievers who do the same things. Back in section 13.3, I quoted Jim Abrahamson. He is a retired pastor and personal friend of mine. In class notes on Galatians, Abrahamson makes two points about this verse:

(1) Those who “practice” (live in the flesh) shall not inherit the promised salvation because they are not in Christ. (2) A Christian may “do” fleshly things but they are not “in” the flesh if they have the Spirit of Christ. They live in a moral tension created by the Spirit of Christ, which keeps them from being given over fully to the lusts of the flesh.

The promise God made to Abraham was not explicitly for salvation. It was for a kingdom. Also, I do not believe Paul makes a distinction between sins that are done "in" the flesh and sins that are simply done. I would argue that some true believers, during some parts of their lives, completely give themselves over to the flesh. Verse 18 makes it clear that those who are led by the Spirit are not under the law. Immediate context shows us that those who are under the law do these things because they are not being led by the Spirit. This verse has much less friction when it's understood that people can go back and forth between being led by the Spirit and being under the law. Those who learn to stay led by the Spirit all the time will inherit the kingdom. They no longer have sinful habits.

(22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, (23) gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (24) Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts. (25) If we live by the Spirit, let's also walk by the Spirit. (26) Let's not become conceited, provoking one another, and envying one another.

16.6) Galatians 6: Learning to Walk by the Spirit

Galatians 6 Brothers, even if a man is caught in some fault, you who are spiritual must restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself so that you also aren't tempted. (2) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Those who walk by the Spirit will seek to help others walk by the Spirit. But it must be done in a gentle way. Paul is doing just that in this letter. He knows that this church is no longer walking by the Spirit. So he is stern in his corrections, and at the same time he is being kind by showing his love for the Galatians.

(3) For if a man thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (4) But let each man test his own work, and then he will take pride in himself and not in his neighbor. (5) For each man will bear his own burden. (6) But let him who is taught in the word share all good things with him who teaches.

Paul is talking about good works that are done while walking in the Spirit. We must test (judge) our own works. Some who walk in the Spirit will be teaching. This is also good works that must be done only while walking in the Spirit.

(7) Don't be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (8) For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Paul is still talking about works. Those who do works out of self-effort will fall into sin. But to sow into the Spirit means to do the good works according to the leading of the Spirit. Those who do good works while walking in the Spirit will reap eternal life. This is a difficult verse for free grace advocates. Good works bring about inheritance of the kingdom and spiritual bodies for eternal life. Those who don't inherit must continue working at it in the age to come.

(9) Let us not be weary in doing good, for we will reap in due season, if we don't give up. (10) So then, as we have opportunity, let's do what is good toward all men, and especially toward those who are of the household of the faith.

Walking in the Spirit can be frustrating if you are not seeing results. But they will come. We should not give up. The righteous live by faith.

(11) See with what large letters I write to you with my own hand. (12) As many as desire to look good in the flesh, they compel you to be circumcised; only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. (13) For even they who receive circumcision don't keep the law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh.

The false teachers were motivated out of the desire for control and power.

(14) But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Because of the cross, we walk for Christ. This means we should not be concerned about having power or control over the world. Let it wait for the age to come. And even then, reigning with Christ is only out of love.

(15) For in Christ Jesus neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (16) As many as walk by this rule, peace and mercy be on them, and on God's Israel. (17) From now on, let no one cause me any trouble, for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus branded on my body. (18) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Part Five

New Wine Eschatology

This New Wine System requires that the Church must be Israel. Gentile believers are grafted into Israel. Thus, the Church is Israel, both Jew and Gentile. The New Wine System does not work unless the Church is Israel.

At the same time, the millennial reign of Christ must exist. Christ's millennial reign is the climax of God's redemptive plan. It's during this time that all people from every nation, tribe, people, and language, from all generations, will have the opportunity to profess their faith in Christ, and to mature in Christ.

The nations, during the millennium, will need kings and priests who will have already become Sons of God to lead them down the path of Christ towards eternal life. Thus, it's not Jews who reign in the millennium. The Elect is the true Israel. The true Church is the true Israel. Therefore, the Elect reign in the millennium.

Chapter 17

New Wine Premillennialism

It's time to learn a couple of big words. Several times I've used the word eschatology. Eschatos is Greek for last. (As in, "The first shall be last and the last shall be first" (Matthew 19:30, 20:16, Mark 10:31, Luke 13:30).) Thus, eschatology means the study of last things, or the study of the end times. Practically no two people who study eschatology agree on everything. The range of different opinions of interpretation, even within the same churches, is frequently vast.

With the need to speak in generalities, there are two major directions that conservative theologians have taken. One is called amillennialism, and the other is called dispensationalism. (Post-millennialism is similar to amillennialism, especially when compared to dispensationalism.) In conservative seminaries, probably the number of seminary professors in each of these two camps is somewhat evenly divided. A few take a middle ground. The middle ground is often referred to as historic premillennialism. The truth hides in the middle.

We need to take a look at these two camps because the eschatology position that we need takes a major doctrinal position from both camps. Aspects of both camps are necessary for the views of eschatology of the New Wine System to work. Aspects of both camps are necessary for showing how people can die without knowing Christ, and at the same time be saved, when faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to have eternal life. Aspects of both camps are necessary to show why salvation is a free gift, by grace and through faith. At the same time, only those who overcome sin can expect to inherit the kingdom of God. Aspects of both theological camps are necessary to resolve the conflicts between election and free will. God chooses the elect. God chooses those who will inherit His kingdom. However, everyone has the free will to have faith in God for salvation.

Christians, who have put their faith in Jesus Christ, will be saved. However, Christians are told to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Only those who seek the kingdom will inherit the kingdom. The New Wine System of premillennialism gives us an understanding of the nature of the kingdom, for both to be true.

Eschatology Charts

Amillennialism or Post-Millennialism	Pre-Millennialism (*)
When Christ returns, eternity in heaven begins for all who are left alive and in Christ. The world comes to an end and a new world is made.	When Christ returns, the age to come begins and Israel rules the world for an age (millennium). After that, the world ends and a new world is made.
Matthew 24:3 KJV And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what <i>shall be</i> the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world ?	Matthew 24:3 NKJV Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age ?"
Satan was "chained" at the cross so that he can no longer deceive the nations (as much as he did before the cross).	Satan will be chained when Christ returns so that he will no longer be able to deceive the nations.
The <u>spiritual</u> Kingdom of Heaven is here and now.	The <u>literal</u> Kingdom of Heaven is future.

Note: George E. Ladd said the spiritual Kingdom is here and now, but is to be completed literally in the future millennium.

Preterism	Futurism (*)
Most of prophecy is interpreted as being already fulfilled, except for the actual return of Christ, the judgment, and the new heavens and new earth.	Prophecy that is not obviously already fulfilled is assumed to take place in the future.
Prophetic Scripture is interpreted symbolically or allegorically. The allegory is the truth, rather than the literal from which the allegory is taken.	Prophetic Scripture is interpreted as literally as is reasonable. Symbolism is used only when it's obvious. Preferably, the earlier Scripture is used to obtain the meaning of the symbols.
The great tribulation happens throughout the age, from 70 AD until the return of Christ.	The great tribulation is 3 ½ or seven years just prior to the return of Christ.

Matthew 24 and Luke 21 are seen as two accounts of the same speech. Thus, the abomination of desolation in Matthew is equated to Jerusalem being surrounded by armies in Luke.	Matthew 24 is seen as more futurist, with the abomination of desolation happening during the great tribulation. Luke 21, with Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, happened in 70 AD.
No new temple will be built. Or if it happens, it would be an abomination against Christ.	A literal temple will be built, and the antichrist will stop the offering and set himself up in the temple, proclaiming himself to be God.
Ezekiel's temple is seen as entirely symbolic of eternity. It's considered to be a similar vision of eternity to the also-symbolic vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22.	Ezekiel's temple is considered literal, and will exist during the millennium. The New Jerusalem is also literal, but is not the same as Ezekiel's temple.
Most of the events of Revelation, such as the seals, trumpets, and bowls of wrath, have already been fulfilled. Some say by 70 AD. Others by around 400 AD. Historical events have parallels to the trumpets and bowls.	The trumpets and bowls are literal and in the future. The seals can be more symbolic. Some would say the seals are symbolic of events that occur during the tribulation. I think the seals have already been happening during this baby-boom generation.
The seventy weeks of Daniel 9 were entirely fulfilled by 3 ½ years after the crucifixion. (The crucifixion was the stopping of the sacrifice and offering in the middle of the 70 th week.)	Portions of the 70 weeks are still to be fulfilled. Most futurists believe the 70 th week is the great tribulation of the future. I, on the other hand, believe the seven weeks (49 years) is currently being fulfilled.
The 1290 days of Daniel 12:11 is often interpreted as being about the time of the Maccabees.	The 1290 days of Daniel 12:11 is the time after the future abomination of desolation, during the second half of the great tribulation. (Some would say it's the entire tribulation, being only 3 ½ years long.)
Zechariah 14 (Armageddon) is interpreted as very symbolic, usually it's considered to be symbolic of events around 70 AD.	Zechariah 14 is literal and future. It's fulfilled just prior to the return of Christ, when he literally returns and sets his feet on the Mount of Olives.

Covenantal	Dispensational (Pre-Tribulation Rapture)
(*) The covenants are seen as all part of the same system. The covenants all apply to the Church. When you read the Old Testament, it applies to you as well as to them. Certain aspects of the law, such as animal sacrifice, are now obsolete.	The covenants are interpreted literally only for Israel. The New Covenant and the Abraham Covenant apply to the Church only in a spiritual way. The Covenants with Moses and David do not apply to the Church at all.
(*) The Church and Israel are the same thing.	Israel is separate from the Church. The Church is a “parenthesis” in God’s plan, between the Old Testament times and the millennium.
Most Covenantal theologians are Amillennialists. Old Testament prophecies about the Messianic Age are interpreted as being about the Church in the present age, using allegory and symbolism.	The purpose of the millennium is for Jewish Israel. The Jews will rule the world during the millennium. The Church, with spiritual bodies, will remain in heaven while the “tribulation saints,” with natural bodies, remain on earth. This separation of natural on the earth and spiritual bodies in heaven continues forever, even after the new heavens and the new earth.
The covenants are viewed as summarized into three covenants that are not explicitly in Scripture.	(*) The specific covenants given by Scripture are viewed individually.

Note: A new form of Dispensationalism, called Progressive Dispensationalism, rethinks the covenants and applies them equally to the Church. It’s almost completely covenantal. However, they would still hold that the Church is not Israel, especially in the millennium.

Full-Preterism (Hyper-Preterism)	Ultra-Dispensational
Absolutely everything in the Bible has been fulfilled. The New Covenant is the New Heaven and New Earth. The Resurrection is life after death in heaven.	Some portions of the New Testament are not intended for the Church. This includes Matthew 24 and the book of James. (James speaks of salvation by faith-plus-works, which is for Israel only – not for the Church, they say.)

Covenant Premillennialists	New Wine Premillennialists (*)
Associated with George E. Ladd	Associated with The New Wine System.
The Church is a spiritual Israel	The true Church is exactly the same as the true Israel.
Certain Old Testament prophecies, such as animal sacrifice in Ezekiel's Temple, should not be applied to the Church. Therefore, they are allegorized in a similar way as amillennialists.	Old Testaments prophecies are not allegorized. Ezekiel's Temple and animal sacrifice is used as a teacher to the nations. Not needed by the Church, which is Israel. One-world government for the nations will be similar in nature to OT Jewish Theocracy.

What is amillennialism and what is dispensationalism? Amillennialism is based on an allegorical interpretation of Revelation 20. Literally, the word means 'no millennium.' To be more correct, however, the belief is that we are in the millennium now, and that the thousand-year period is an arbitrary but long period of time.

Dispensationalism literally means that time is divided into seven systems (or economies) of God judging man, during seven different ages. Everyone believes in at least two ages. Scripture speaks of the present age and the age to come. But the simple belief in seven ages, with different rules of judgment, does not make one a dispensationalist.

To be more correct, dispensationalism says that there is a church age in a "parenthesis" between the first and the second coming of Christ. Believers living in the church age, according to dispensationalists, have a different purpose in God's plan than those living outside the church age. Those living in the church age have a heavenly purpose and will spend eternity in heaven. Those living after the rapture will have an earthly purpose and will spend eternity on this earth. Even after the thousand years, they spend eternity on the new earth. But those from before the church age will wind up spending eternity in heaven along with the church-age believers. Dispensationalism, thus, strongly distinguishes believers in the church age from believers living during the millennium.

The pre-tribulation rapture is derived from arguments of dispensationalism. This is not to be confused with simply a rapture, in which most amillennialists would believe. The question is whether the rapture occurs before the literal seven-year period as described in Daniel 9:27. Amillennialists will generally say the book of Revelation is talking about past events, or is entirely symbolic of the struggle between good and evil. Therefore, both amillennialists and dispensationalists believe that they personally will avoid going through a literal three and a half year (or seven year) period called the great tribulation.

Some of the modern-day Bible translations use the words “great distress” in these verses of Matthew 24. The KJV used the words “great tribulation.” Thus, it’s called the “great tribulation,” from Matthew 24:21. Dispensationalism and the widely held belief in the pre-tribulation rapture did not exist prior to Darby in 1830.

There are two big differences between amillennialism and dispensationalism. The first is a difference in how you choose to interpret Scripture. Do you believe prophetic Scripture is to be interpreted as literally as is reasonable, just like we interpret Scripture that’s not about the future? Or do you believe Scripture about the future is mostly allegorical and symbolic of much deeper meanings, while denying the literal? Amillennialists would say that prophetic Scripture should not be interpreted literally. On the other hand, dispensationalists would say that prophetic Scripture should be interpreted in what’s called the grammatical / historical method of interpretation. In other words, it’s interpreted as literally as is reasonable, only using symbolism where symbolism is obvious. Symbolism is used only when the literal interpretation makes no sense. In addition, it’s interpreted with close attention to the historical culture of the time.

This difference in the method of interpretation should not be confused with liberalism and conservatism. Liberals question the inerrancy of Scripture. They view Scripture as written mostly by men, with man’s lack of perfection. Therefore, liberals do not believe that Scripture can ever predict the future. The various opinions of eschatology are all within the boundaries of conservatism, with regard to our views on inerrancy. Prophecy cannot be prophecy without inerrancy.

Since dispensationalism holds to the grammatical / historical method of interpretation, Revelation 20 is interpreted exactly as it naturally reads. The millennial reign of Christ, as an earthly one-world government ruler, is interpreted literally. When Christ returns, there is the “first resurrection.” The thrones of verse 4 are about the millennial reign, along with Christ. Those who are resurrected sit

upon them. They rule the world with Christ. Satan is chained for a literal thousand years so that he cannot deceive the nations.

At the end of the thousand years, Satan is released for a short while, and goes out to deceive the nations again. A vast multitude marches the breadth of the earth to march against Jerusalem. This is obviously sin. They are all killed by fire from heaven. After these sinners are killed, the final judgment occurs. The last enemy, sin and death, (1 Corinthians 15:26) is not destroyed until the final judgment.

On the other hand, amillennialists have a hard time believing that sin and death could happen after Christ returns. The thousand years is interpreted as a long period of time between the first and second coming of Christ. The first resurrection is our spiritual born-again experience. The thrones of Revelation 20:4 are about the spiritual authority of the believer. Catholics see this as the authority of the saints in heaven and the Catholic Church on the earth. The second resurrection is the physical resurrection of our bodies when Christ returns.

Amillennialists believe that Satan was chained at the cross, reducing his ability to deceive the nations. He is released again just prior to Christ's return. The armies that march against the city that God loves are marching against Christians all over the world. Then Christ returns and puts a stop to it. The heavens and the earth are immediately destroyed by fire. Then new heavens and a new earth are created.

Thus amillennialists see Bible prophecy as very allegorical or symbolic in nature. By this same use of allegorical and symbolic interpretation, most Old Testament prophecies are seen as prophecies of Christ's first coming, or of the present age. Old Testament covenants and most prophecies are seen as completely fulfilled in the Church. The last enemy, sin and death, (1 Corinthians 15:26) is to be immediately destroyed when Christ returns.

The second major difference between amillennialism and dispensationalism is about the nature of Israel and the Church. Most amillennialists would hold that there is no difference between the Church and Israel. On the other hand, the core of dispensationalism is in drawing distinctions between the two.

Before Darby, in 1830, the high majority of Catholic and Protestant churches were amillennial. This goes all the way back to Augustine. Prior to Augustine, many, if not most, of the early church fathers believed in a literal thousand-year reign of Christ after he returns. So they were not amillennial. But they were not dispensational either. This is often referred to as historic premillennialism. Sir Isaac Newton and Charles Spurgeon were historic premillennialists. Their numbers, however, were few in church history after Augustine.

Amillennialism typically goes hand in hand with covenant theology. It's a basic part of Reformation Theology. (Calvin and Luther were amillennial.) Covenant theology holds that all Christians are recipients of the Old Testament system of covenants. The new covenant is the latest of that system, and replaces the old covenant. Being part of that system, all those in Christ are Israel.

The word 'Testament,' as in the Old Testament and the New Testament, means covenant. Some of the early Bibles were printed as the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, instead of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The KJV Bible uses the word testament instead of covenant when referring to the new covenant. But in Greek, the word still means covenant.

Covenant theology was fundamental to the Reformation. All who are in Christ are Israel. Therefore, all who are in Christ are part of the system of covenants, including the new covenant. Therefore, all who are in Christ do not have to be in the Catholic Church. The arguments of covenant theology allowed for an independence from the Catholic Church.

Dispensationalists deny covenant theology and often use a negative term for it, calling it replacement theology. Lately, however, there has been a new movement of dispensationalism called progressive dispensationalism. It's a movement back in the direction of covenant theology by claiming that all the covenants are fulfilled progressively; so all Christians are literally a part of the same system of covenants. With this I agree. Progressive dispensations, however, still draw distinctions between Israel and the Church. They would still hold that the purpose of the millennium is for Israel, and not for the Church.

Most modern-day seminary professors are either amillennial or dispensational. A few take the historic premillennialist position, which is attributed to the late George E. Ladd. He is well known for addressing issues about the kingdom of heaven. He argues that the Davidic covenant is partially fulfilled here and now in our hearts, but will be literally fulfilled in the millennium. Nevertheless, Ladd is rightly criticized for not addressing the nature and purpose of the millennium itself.

Dispensationalists hold that the purpose of the millennium is to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies, with the Jews being interpreted as Israel. However, if there is no distinction between the Church and Israel, and if you hold to a literal futurist millennium, then the purpose of the millennium must be for the Church.

17.1) Covenant Theology

Covenant theology holds that the Church is Israel. This is true. However, covenant theology also has problems. Instead of focusing on the covenants that are given in Scripture, covenant theologians tend to summarize what they see as the overall teaching of the covenantal system in three covenants that are not specifically defined in Scripture.

In covenant theology, the covenant of redemption is the eternal agreement within the Godhead in which the Father appointed the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit to redeem the elect from the guilt and power of sin. This sounds logical, but it's not specifically mentioned in Scripture. Also, the covenants in Scripture are always the formalization of relationships that had not previously existed. Covenants do not require specific agreements between the two parties. For example, Jonathan established a covenant with David simply because he loved him as a friend. I do not believe that the relationship between the persons of Trinity can be considered a covenant because it was never formally established. The Trinity relationship is eternal past, therefore could never have been formalized. Marriage is a covenant. But the members of the Trinity were never "married" to each other. The persons of the Trinity were never "covenanted" to each other. There cannot be a covenant of redemption.

Covenant theology also defines two other covenants that are not defined in Scripture. They are the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works is said to be applied to Adam. Salvation has always been by grace through faith in God (Hebrews 11). Salvation was never by works. Covenants are simply the formalized and progressive nature by which God re-establishes His personal relationship with Man. Jonathan loved David before he formally established a covenant. Likewise, God saves all who love Him regardless of when they happen to have been born.

Under covenant theology, since the Church is Israel, Old Testament prophecies about Israel are seen as being fulfilled in the Church. This is correct. However, most covenant theologians do not believe in a literal earthly reign of Christ. Therefore, they must allegorize or spiritualize the Old Testament prophecies in order to interpret them as being already fulfilled in the Church today.

17.2) New Wine Premillennialism

Every premillennial system tends to require three types of people. (1) The wicked are not resurrected when Christ returns. (2) The Bride attends the wedding banquet at the start of the millennium. (3) Any form of premillennialism tends to require a third group who are alive during the millennium, and yet are not a part of the Bride at the wedding banquet. Even the dispensational system has three types of people during the millennium. They have the Church, Israel during the millennium, and the wicked that are not resurrected until after the millennium.

The traditional interpretation of the New Testament, on the other hand, believes there are two types of people. There are the saved and there are the unsaved. Dispensationalism sticks with just saved and the unsaved during any given age, or dispensation. Dispensationalists believe everyone who is saved in all prior dispensations go to heaven and will never again live on the earth. This tends to remove all purposes for the millennium, and puts one on the path towards amillennialism. The only real stated purpose for the millennium, according to dispensationalists, is to fulfill Old Testament prophecy for the Jews. It's very anticlimactic, especially in light of the fact that Jesus Christ Himself is literally ruling during the millennium.

New Wine premillennialism, on the other hand, is very climactic. The millennium is a time when people of all generations have the opportunity to be led to righteousness living under the reign of Jesus Christ Himself. With New Wine premillennialism, the Messianic reign of Christ is a time when the majority of all people from all generations have the opportunity to complete their journey of righteousness and to be reunited with the Father. It's not just a literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. It gives purpose to that prophecy. It gives a glorious purpose to the Messianic Reign of Christ.

The New Wine System does not take the traditional interpretation of the New Testament. It can be easily argued that there are three types of people in New Testament Scripture. There are those who will inherit eternal life in the age to come. There are those who are wicked and will be condemned to the lake of fire. They will not be resurrected when Christ returns. And then there are those who are in the middle, for whom eternity has not yet been decided. Now, if these conditions remain through death and the resurrection, then these three types of people are also present during the millennium. This is New Wine premillennialism.

17.3) The Covenants As Seen By Dispensationalists

Dispensationalism uses the grammatical / historical method of interpreting Bible prophecy. This means that Bible prophecy is interpreted as literally as is reasonable given the historical culture of the authors and their audience. We must interpret Scripture in the same way ancient Jews, who wrote the Scripture, would have done at that time. The reasonably literal interpretation of Scripture indicates there is to be a Messianic reign of Christ before the heavens and the earth are destroyed. In order to allow for a literal fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies, dispensationalists force major distinctions between the Church and Israel, saying the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in Israel, but not the Church. This has a dramatic impact on how we interpret the covenants.

Under classical and revised dispensationalism, many of the covenants must be spiritualized with regard to the Church. The covenant with Abraham is considered to be literally fulfilled in Israel, and spiritually fulfilled in the Church. The covenant with Moses is literal with regard to Israel, and does not apply to the Church. Likewise, the covenant with David is only fulfilled in the Church. And then the new covenant gets real confusing.

Many dispensationalists have had long-lasting debates about the new covenant, because it's very difficult for them to make all the verses work. Hebrews 8:8 quotes Jeremiah 31:31. Both these verses say the new covenant is explicitly with the house of Judah and the house of Israel. There is no literal provision for Gentiles in the verse. Therefore, unless the Church is Israel, the Church does not participate in the new covenant.

Some dispensationalists say that the new covenant is literally for Israel, and does not really take place until Christ returns. But this does not fit what Hebrews says about the new covenant. It's here today and has made the old obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). These dispensationalists say there is another new covenant for the Church. In other words, they would say the new covenant that Jesus spoke of is not the same new covenant as in Hebrews and Jeremiah. Otherwise, we should not be remembering Christ by taking the bread and the wine.

Other dispensationalists say that the new covenant, spoken of in Hebrews 8:8, is literally for Israel, but is spiritually applied to the Church. How can one verse be interpreted literally for one group of Christians, and spiritually for another group of Christians? How does this fit their basic grammatical / historical hermeneutic principle?

Let's take a look at a few more reasons why dispensationalists must take these difficult positions with regard to the covenants. We must remember that the primary stated purpose of dispensationalism is to allow for a grammatical / historical fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messianic reign. Consider the following verse:

Galatians 3:27-29 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise.

What promise is Paul referring to? The promise of Abraham is God's covenant with Abraham. It was a promise of land all around Palestine and Saudi Arabia. Yet the dispensationalist, who holds a big distinction between the Church and Israel, would have to say this promise is literally for Israel, not for the Church. Yet Paul is saying the promise is for those in Christ, and that there is neither Jew nor Greek. We are all the same in Christ.

So what must the dispensationalist do? The dispensationalists interpret the original Old Testament covenant as literally for Israel only. And the dispensationalist allows for a "spiritual" application of the covenant to the Church. In other words, the Church really does not get the land. But the Church benefits in the "spiritual" aspects of the promise.

The covenant with David said that David's descendants will reign on David's throne forever. The grammatical / historical (literal) fulfillment of this covenant, from a premillennialist viewpoint, must be Christ's reign during the millennium. Paul doesn't relate the covenant with David to the Church in the same way as he related the covenant with Abraham. Therefore, dispensationalists are free to apply this covenant to be literally fulfilled in Israel, and not at all applied to the Church.

Lately, however, there has been a new movement of dispensationalism called progressive dispensationalism. With progressive dispensationalism, all the covenants are fulfilled literally in both the Church and Israel. The difference is that the covenants are fulfilled in a progressive way. With this I agree. It's basically a here-and-now-but-not-yet approach. As such, progressive dispensationalism draws far fewer distinctions between the Church and Israel. If the covenants do not distinguish two groups of people, then what does? When the Church becomes the same as Israel, one would no longer be a dispensationalist.

17.4) Who Will Dwell in Heaven During the Millennium?

New Wine premillennialism, like dispensationalism, sees the Old Testament prophecies as being literally fulfilled in a Messianic reign of Christ before the heavens and the earth are destroyed. But if there really is a Messianic reign, and there is no difference between the Church and Israel, then what do we do with verses like these?

John 14:2-4 ESV In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (4) And you know the way to where I am going."

Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; (21) who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself.

Dispensationalists simply say those caught up in the rapture will be in heaven, while those "left behind" will live on earth during the Messianic reign. Under the New Wine System, the wise, who mature in Christ to overcome sin, and walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:9), will have citizenship in heaven, and will dwell in these rooms in heaven. The foolish middle group, on the other hand, will dwell on the earth. The wise will have spiritual bodies, and will be able to come and go like the wind (John 3:8). Only the wise will be able to "enter the kingdom" in heaven.

In other words, dispensationalism distinguishes those living in heaven and those living on the earth as being the Church and Israel. On the other hand, New Wine premillennialism distinguishes those living in heaven and those living on the earth as being the wise and foolish, which is based on holiness. There is no distinction based on what time-period one happens to have lived in. There is no distinction based on whether or not one is a physical descendent of Abraham. There is no distinction of being in the Church or in Israel. The only distinction made is whether or not one has matured to overcome sin by the power of God.

Also, dispensationalism tends to keep the two groups very isolated from one another. Those in heaven stay in heaven. Those on the earth stay on the earth. But New Wine premillennialism says those who overcome sin will literally rule the nations (Rev. 2:26-27). So the wise, in heaven, will directly rule over those living

on the earth. Those who rule over the earth from heaven do so because of their maturity, not because of their bloodline or the age they were born.

Not all dispensationalists have completely separated the Church and Israel. Some have had the idea that the New Jerusalem could appear over the earth during the millennium, and that the Church will be in the New Jerusalem, while Israel dwells on the earth. J. Dwight Pentecost, in his book, “Things to Come”, on page 546, writes (emphasis mine):

The conclusion to this question would be that the Old Testament held forth a national hope, which will be realized fully in the millennial age. The individual Old Testament saint’s hope of an eternal city will be realized through resurrection in the heavenly Jerusalem, where, without losing distinction or identity, Israel will join with the resurrected and translated of this church age to share in the glory of His reign forever. The nature of the millennium, as the period of the test of fallen humanity under the righteous reign of the King, precludes the participation by resurrected individuals in that testing. Thus the millennial age will be concerned only with men who have been saved but are living in their natural bodies. This heavenly city will be brought into a relation to the earth at the beginning of the millennium, and perhaps will be made visible above the earth. It is from this heavenly city that David’s greater Son exerts His Messianic rule, in which the Bride reigns, and from which the rewarded Old Testament saints exercise their authority in government.

If such an interpretation be correct, there would be a solution to the perplexing problem that arises from placing resurrected saints on the earth to mingle freely with the unresurrected during the millennium. The fulfillment of Israel’s national promises would be realized, not in resurrected individuals, but rather in natural saved Israel who are living at the second advent. The unity of God’s redemptive purposes in Christ would be preserved by bringing the first resurrection group together into one place, where the Bride will share in His reign and His servants serve Him forever (Rev. 22:3). Such a view is in harmony with the Scriptures and solves some of the problems inherent in the premillennial system.

Thus Pentecost (a very famous dispensationalist) believes that having the New Jerusalem brought into a perhaps visible relation with earth would solve some problems. This is exactly what I believe will happen. However, the dispensational side of Pentecost must look at this possibility only through the dispensational eyes of a separate and distinct Israel and the Church. Pentecost places Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church as both dwelling together in the heavenly Jerusalem, but without losing their identity as Israel or the Church. However, if we can abandon the separation between the Church and Israel, and if we can start to view the separation as between the saints (holy ones) and those who have not yet matured, then this view of the millennium starts to make lots of sense.

The wise saints of all ages will rule during the millennium. The wise saints will live in rooms prepared by Christ in the New Jerusalem. And the New Jerusalem, called the Bride, the wife of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9), will be in orbit around the earth. The wise saints will have citizenship in heaven, in orbit around the earth.

The purpose of the millennium is not simply so that God can fulfill Old Testament promises. The purpose of the millennium is so that God can complete his redemptive plan for all men of all ages. Christ died for our sins. But now we must overcome sin and walk as Jesus walked. The millennium accomplishes this purpose for all people who do not reject Christ as King.

17.5) Where will Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob Dwell?

New Wine premillennialism has another major advantage over dispensationalism. It involves the dwelling of Old Testament saints, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Will they be in heaven or on earth?

Dispensationalism distinguishes the Church from Israel. Dispensationalism considers the Church to be a “parenthesis” between Old Testament Israel and the Messianic Age Israel. Most dispensationalists believe the Church will remain in heaven, while Israel remains on the earth. Does this mean that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will live on earth during the millennium?

Matthew 8:11 tells us the Old Testament saints will be in the wedding banquet, and thus be a part of the Bride of Christ. Indeed, many dispensationalists have concluded that Old Testament saints will remain in heaven with the Bride, because they will have resurrected spiritual bodies. What does this say about the “parenthesis?” Is Abraham still a part of Israel? Why does part of Israel remain in heaven with the Bride, while another part remains on earth?

According to dispensationalists, the reason for the millennium is to literally fulfill Old Testament prophecies and covenants. This includes the literal fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. This covenant promised all the land of Palestine, as defined by Genesis 15:18-21, to be given to Abraham's offspring. Does this mean that Abraham himself will be in heaven, and will not be able to literally inherit his own promise?

On the other hand, New Wine premillennialism says that Abraham is indeed part of the Church. The Church is Israel. The Church inherits the land on earth, and Old Jerusalem on earth becomes the capitol of a one-world government. Abraham, with his spiritual body, will dwell in the New Jerusalem, in orbit around the earth. Jesus has prepared a room for him there. Abraham will be at the wedding banquet in the New Jerusalem along with all of his offspring, both Jews and Gentiles.

Those who have not as yet matured in Christ will dwell on the earth. The Old Jerusalem, and the entire area of Palestine promised to Abraham, will be the capitol of the world. This is necessary because people who do not as yet have spiritual bodies cannot enter into the New Jerusalem in heaven (John 3:5). But they will be able to enter into Old Jerusalem on earth. People will be able to enter the capitol city of their seat of government.

As we have seen, God's purpose in the millennium is far more than just fulfilling promises. It's about bringing all who will be saved into holiness through Christ's literal reign. However, this purpose is not seen from the dispensational perspective. All distinctions between the Church and Israel must be discarded in favor of distinctions between the saints (holy ones) and those who have not yet overcome sin. To this end, the next chapter of this book will show Scriptural arguments as to why the Church is Israel.

Amillennialism vs. Premillennialism. Scriptural evidence for the purpose of Christ's Messianic reign. The millennium is the climax of God's plan for all generations. Solved by applying Old Testament Jewish eschatology to the New Testament Church.

17.6) The Pre-Millennial Appearing of the New Jerusalem

Sections 17.4 and 17.5 (above) give arguments against dispensationalism that favor a pre-millennial appearing of the New Jerusalem. The main point that J. Dwight Pentecost made was that people with spiritual bodies would not be living with people of natural mortal bodies. People with spiritual bodies will dwell in the Father's house, where there are many rooms or dwelling places. Pentecost realized that bring the Father's house into orbit around the earth would solve this problem.

The New Jerusalem is approximately 1400 miles wide, 1400 miles long, and 1400 miles high. If it were to sit on the earth it would tower high into space, much higher than the orbit of the international space station. In my opinion, it will not sit on the earth, but will be in orbit when Christ returns.

Later, in the chapter on Ezekiel's temple, section 19.3 is titled, "The Seven Heavens." The Jews believed there are seven levels of heaven and that Paradise is in the third level. Paul spoke of visiting Paradise in the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). Revelation tells us that the New Jerusalem will come "down out of heaven." But with seven levels of heaven, the New Jerusalem could simply be moved from the third heaven to the first heaven. It would then be in orbit around the earth. It does not actually need to sit on the earth.

Revelation 21:1-2 I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. (2) I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:9-10 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were loaded with the seven last plagues came, and he spoke with me, saying, "Come here. I will show you the wife, the Lamb's bride." (10) He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

The biggest objection to the pre-millennial appearing of the New Jerusalem is that it comes after the new heaven and new earth, with the first heaven and the first earth having passed away. But why does John report seeing the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven twice? Could it be that it happens twice?

Everything recorded from verse 21:1 through 21:8 is about the New Jerusalem coming down to the new earth, after the present heavens and earth have been destroyed. But then in verse 21:9, John is told to "Come here and I will show

you..." This is very much like the "Come up here and I will show you..." back in verse 4:1.

Revelation 4:1 After these things I looked and saw a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, like a trumpet speaking with me, was one saying, "Come up here, and I will show you the things which must happen after this."

Verse 21:9 should be read as if it is a new chapter in Revelation. John is being shown another major section of the vision. As we will see, starting with verse 9, there are several things stated that make more sense if it's during the millennium. So John really does see the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven twice. Verse 21:9 is about a pre-millennial appearing of the New Jerusalem.

One of the strongest arguments used by amillennialists is that the New Jerusalem is called "the wife, the Lamb's bride." But the marriage feast (wedding banquet) occurs when Christ returns, not a thousand years later. I've even heard one dispensationalist try to argue that the wedding banquet is after the thousand years so that those saved during the millennium could be included. But Revelation tells us the wedding banquet happens when Christ returns

Revelation 19:7 Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and let us give the glory to him. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready."

The New Wine System resolves this conflict with the pre-millennial appearing of the New Jerusalem. And, the New Jerusalem also comes down out of heaven to the new earth. Notice the slight difference in the way "bride" and "wife" is applied to the two appearances of the New Jerusalem. In the pre-millennial appearing, the New Jerusalem is called "the wife, the Lamb's bride." This is where the wedding banquet occurs for Christ's Bride, the Wife of the Lamb. In the post-millennial appearing, the New Jerusalem is said to be "like a bride."

Those who mature in Christ during the millennium will receive spiritual bodies and eternal life. So they also become "children of God." But I don't think they are considered to be the Bride of Christ. They never become Israel. We are the firstfruits of the harvest. But there probably will be a post-millennial celebration for the rest of the harvest. So they are "like a bride."

The description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation is very much like the Paradise of Eden. (Paradise means enclosed garden. It's the word that is used in the Greek Septuagint for the Garden of Eden.) In Jewish eschatology, when the

Messiah comes, the gates of Paradise will be opened up. The *Testament of Levi* 18.10 says, "one will open the gates of Paradise." In Latin IV *Eduras* 8.52, God says to Ezra, "because it is for you that Paradise is opened, that the tree of life is planted." A Jew reading Revelation would not assume this waits until after the Messianic age to come. It would happen when the Messiah appears.

Let us now take a look at some of the details about the pre-millennial appearing of the New Jerusalem. These are all things spoken of after verse 21:9. From a Jewish perspective, these are all things that would only make sense if it's during the millennium.

Revelation 21:24-27 The nations will walk in its light. The kings of the earth bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. (25) Its gates will in no way be shut by day (for there will be no night there), (26) and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it so that they may enter. (27) There will in no way enter into it anything profane, or one who causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The nations will walk by the light of the New Jerusalem. This means the nations will be taught righteousness by the Bride of Christ. And the Bride of Christ will be living in the New Jerusalem. The Greek word for "nations" is the same as the word for "Gentiles." The people of Israel do not refer to themselves as Gentiles. Israel is the holy nation. But a general reference to "the nations" does not include Israel. The Bride of Christ is not part of the nations.

If John is talking about a New Jerusalem that only appears after the new heavens and the new earth, then why does John make distinctions as to who can enter into the New Jerusalem? Those who are still living in sin will not be able to enter into the New Jerusalem. You must still be written in the book of life to enter. But if this is after the great white throne judgment, then everyone not written in the book of life would have already been thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 22:1-2 He showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, (2) in the middle of its street. On this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruits, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

This verse talks about the tree of life. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations. Again, the Greek word used here for 'nations' means Gentiles. Think about this from the Jewish perspective. They believed that when the Messiah

comes, Eden (Paradise) will be opened, and Israel will rule the nations. Righteousness will go out to all the nations. This Jewish belief is exactly what is being described here in Revelation. Righteousness and healing goes out to all the nations as a result of the Messiah's rule. Also, think about the fact that those with spiritual bodes will not need healing. Perhaps the water of life will give us eternal life. But we will never get sick. So we will never need healing. The Gentiles on earth, however, with their natural bodes will need healing.

Revelation 22:3 There will be no curse any more. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants serve him.

Romans 8:19-22 For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. (20) For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope (21) that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.

The curse is removed at the start of the millennium, when the children of God are revealed. Revelation 22:3 mentions this because it's talking about a pre-millennial appearing of the New Jerusalem. We don't have to wait for the new heavens and the new earth for the curse to be removed.

Revelation 22:4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known.

When the pre-millennial appearance of the New Jerusalem occurs, we will see Christ face to face. Also, his name will be on our foreheads. This can be seen in the letters to the seven churches.

Revelation 3:12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will go out from there no more. I will write on 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 own new name.

Each of the seven letters conclude with a reward that is given to those who overcome sin. Do we have to wait a thousand years after Christ returns before we

can receive our rewards? We will see Christ face to face when he returns. He will write his name on our foreheads when he returns. And the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven when Christ returns.

Revelation 22:5 There will be no night, and they need no lamp light; for the Lord God will illuminate them. They will reign forever and ever.

Over whom do we reign if not the nations during the millennium? The Jews believed that when the Messiah comes, Israel will reign over all the nations. This verse also connects back to one of the seven letters.

Revelation 2:26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.

All these things make better sense with a pre-millennial appearance of the New Jerusalem. But are similar things said before verse 21:9? At first glance, that would seem to be the case. But with a closer reading, the things said before verse 21:9 are only true after the millennium.

Revelation 21:4-5 He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away." (5) He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." He said, "Write, for these words of God are faithful and true."

This verse (above) says he will wipe every tear from our eyes. At first, one might think this could be talking about the millennial reign. But look at the context of the next sentence in the verse. "Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning or crying." Yet there will be death during the millennium. Paul speaks of the Messianic reign in this verse below.

1 Corinthians 15:24-26 Then the end comes, when he will deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when he will have abolished all rule and all authority and power. (25) For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. (26) The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

The last enemy is death. Some people will reject Christ's reign. In so doing, they reject Christ's salvation. They will reject the healing of the nations. Those who reject Christ's rule over their lives will die the second death. They will not be resurrected. And their souls will come alive again at the end of the millennium to

be thrown into the lake of fire. This is cause for tears. It's a cause for mourning and crying, especially when it will happen to someone we know. So the tears are wiped away only after the present earth is destroyed, and the new earth is created. That's why Jesus says, "Behold, I am making all things new."

The section in Revelation about the pre-millennial appearing of the New Jerusalem seems to go from verse 21:9 through 22:5. The next verse seems to have left the vision and returns to Jesus (or an angel) talking with John.

Revelation 22:6-9 He said to me, "These words are faithful and true. The Lord God of the spirits of the prophets sent his angel to show to his bondservants the things which must happen soon." (7) "Behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." (8) Now I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who had shown me these things. (9) He said to me, "See you don't do it! I am a fellow bondservant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

Here we are clearly in the context of waiting for Jesus to return. We are in the context of overcoming sin and doing the works of the Father so that we will be ready for Christ to return.

Revelation 22:12-15 "Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. (13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. (14) Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. (15) Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

When Christ returns he will bring a "reward." He say, "My reward is with me." Notice that "reward" is singular. In this context, Jesus is not talking about different rewards for different people. It's one single reward for us all. In this context, what is that reward? The reward is the New Jerusalem. It's the Paradise of Eden, opened up for us. Christ will bring this reward when he returns; not a thousand years later.

Christ said, "Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life." We don't get the tree of life a thousand years after

Christ returns. We will be able to "enter in by the gates into the city," when Christ returns, as a reward for doing his commandments.

Revelation is not the only book in the Bible that talks about the New Jerusalem. Paul speaks of the Jerusalem that is above. And in Hebrews, it's called the "heavenly Jerusalem."

Galatians 4:26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

Hebrews 11:16 But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 12:22-23 But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable multitudes of angels, (23) to the general assembly and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

This verse says those in the Bride are "enrolled in heaven." The elect are "enrolled" to be at the wedding banquet. However, those enrolled in the "heavenly Jerusalem" are only the "firstborn," according to this verse. If the Bride of Christ is only the "firstborn," then many others are to follow. Therefore, many in the nations will also become righteous and inherit eternal life.

Hebrews 13:14 For we don't have here an enduring city, but we seek that which is to come.

The author of Hebrews speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem as a city which is to come. Hebrews was written well before Revelation. If you didn't have the book of Revelation, how would this verse in Hebrews be interpreted? How would the original Jewish readers of Hebrews have interpreted this verse? The natural interpretation is for the heavenly Jerusalem to come when Christ returns. Our hope is in Christ. And that hope would seem to include the heavenly Jerusalem.

17.7) The Pre-Tribulation Appearing of the New Jerusalem

When the present age ends and the age to come begins, the covenants between God and man progress onto the next covenant after the New Covenant. (See section 9.2 titled, "The Seven Covenants.") God's covenant with the nations during the millennium is the seventh covenant. It's called the Covenant of Peace.

This does not mean the New Covenant becomes obsolete. But that covenant is only with Israel, which includes the Gentile Church. We are grafted into Israel. God's covenant with Israel is eternal. But what about the nations during the Messianic reign? The nations are not a part of Israel. So the covenants progress onto the Covenant of Peace.

At first, this may sound like dispensationalism. But it's not dispensationalism because there is no distinction between Israel and the Church. Scripture does teach about three dispensations, or ages. They are the past age, the present age, and the age to come. The past age is the Old Testament, which means the Old Covenant. The present age is the New Testament, which means the New Covenant. It's the dispensation of grace (Ephesians 3:2: KJV). The age to come is the Messianic reign of Christ. This is the dispensation this is to come (Ephesians 1:10 KJV).

The idea that the Day of the Lord begins at the start of the seven-year period is one of the few points where the New Wine System is in agreement with dispensationalism. But the argued reason for this position is very different. Dispensationalism separates Israel from the Church. Dispensationalists argue that God has two programs for two groups of people. They argue that God must shift from His program for the Church back to His program for Israel. This becomes the primary argument for a pre-tribulation rapture.

The New Wine System, on the other hand, simply argues that Christ and the New Jerusalem physically appear at the start of the seven-year period of Daniel 9:27. But only a very few will have overcome all their sinful habits and thus be ready for Christ's return. They will not be ready for the rapture. Christ must confirm a covenant with the many for one more seven so that they can also embrace Christian perfection and overcome sin. When Christ returns, the New Jerusalem will be in orbit around the earth, seen by everyone. But only the few who are ready will see Christ. They are the 144,000 firstfruits who will receive their spiritual bodies when Christ returns before the seven-year period. (See sections 24.1 through 24.3 for information about the 144,000.) They will see Christ standing on Mount Zion (Revelation 14:1-5).

A detailed article on "Daniel's Seventy Weeks" can be found in my book titled "Daniel and Revelation." But a summary of that chapter is given here to make the case that Christ returns at the start of the seven-year week of the covenant. The important point is that Christ returns with the New Jerusalem at the appointed time, when the seventy weeks are ended. But the majority of the Church is not ready for Christ to return.

How is all this derived from Daniel's seventy weeks? Daniel 9:27 has a controversial pronoun "he." "He" makes a covenant with many. "He" stops the sacrifice and offering. Is "he" the Messiah or the antichrist? Can the antichrist really make a covenant? If so, it would be the only place in Scripture where an evil person makes a covenant. Does the Messiah stop the sacrifice and offering?

Daniel 11:31 is part of fulfilled prophecy in which Antiochus IV Epiphanes stopped the sacrifice and offering in 168 BC. This event is easily understood to be a type for the second time this happens, Daniel 12:11 fulfilled in the future. So the antichrist stops the sacrifice and offering.

Preterists argue the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 was entirely fulfilled by Christ in his first coming. They attribute "he" as being Christ. Christ is said to have stopped the sacrifice and offering when he died on the cross. Dispensationalists and most pre-millennialists argue that the last week of the seventy is split out from all the others and is fulfilled in the future. They attribute "he" as being the antichrist. The antichrist makes the covenant with many for one seven.

The New Wine System, on the other hand, takes a very different approach. The first "he" is attributed to Christ and the second "he" is attributed to the antichrist. As we will see, this interpretation of Daniel 9 shows how Christ can return at the start of the millennium, but at the same time, this world system of government continues for seven more years. Thus, during this seven-year period the temple can be rebuilt and animal sacrifice can be started because Christ will have returned. In the midst of that seven-year period, the antichrist stops the sacrifice and offering and rules over all the nations for three and a half years.

The vision of Daniel 9 itself has a purpose statement. Each of the three systems of interpretation views this purpose statement quite differently.

Daniel 9:24 NIV Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

Israel was punished 70 years for sin. Now God is saying we have seventy weeks to stop sinning. Saying that Christ fulfilled this vision is to avoid the responsibility that we have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12.) Saying that Christ fulfilled this vision is to completely ignore Daniel's prayer of repentance for Israel, and God's response that Israel must repent and stop sinning. This is sanctification. God does the greatest work in us (Philippians 2:13.) But it's a task that we must undertake, with God doing the greater work.

Preterism says the seventy weeks of the vision is completely fulfilled. Therefore, the purpose of the vision must also be fulfilled. Even though the purpose statement says “your people” must do these things, preterists believe all these things were accomplished by Christ on the cross. In other words, sins were put to an end because of the cross. Transgression was finished because of the cross. It’s true that our sins paid because of the cross. But the cross did not bring about an end to transgression and sin. By saying the purpose was fulfilled at the cross, the requirement that all sin in God’s people be ended before Christ returns becomes entirely removed from what the vision says.

Dispensationalists would view “your people and your holy city” as being entirely Israel and not the Church. The time in-between the sixty-ninth week and the seventh week is considered to be a “parenthesis” between two dispensations for Israel. The Church is believed to be caught up in the rapture and in heaven before the seventh week begins. By saying the vision is for Israel, and not the Church, the requirement that all sin in God’s people must be ended before Christ returns becomes entirely removed from what the vision says.

The New Wine System views “your people and your holy city” as being Israel, which is the Church. The Old Testament purpose of Israel is to reign with the Messiah over the nations in order to bring righteousness to the world. But for this to happen, the world’s priests and kings must themselves be completely righteous. The seventy weeks is a time allotment during which Jerusalem is not trampled on by Gentiles. This is important, because after the week of the covenant, during the Messianic reign of Christ, Jerusalem will be the capitol of the world.

The New Wine System recognizes a parallelism between Christ and the antichrist. The parallelism can be best seen in this ESV translation. It's easy to assume that the prince in Daniel 9:25 is the anointed one. However, the prince in verse 26 is clearly an evil ruler. Try reading the vision with an eye for a parallelism between the "anointed one" and the "prince." In the following verses, both the "anointed one" and the "prince" are separately underlined. The "anointed one" is always first and the "prince" (or ruler) is always second. Then follow the same parallelism with the two pronouns translated "he" in verse 27.

Daniel 9:25 ESV Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. [SO] for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

Daniel 9:26a ESV And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.

Daniel 9:26b ESV Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

Daniel 9:27 ESV And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."

According to the parallelism, the anointed one makes a covenant with many and the prince stops the sacrifice and offering. Christ returns at the appointed time after seventy weeks. But only a few are ready for Christ to return. Only a few are really willing "to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, [and] to bring in everlasting righteousness."

Only a few will have found the narrow gate when Christ appears. So Christ makes a covenant with many for one more seven. Christ appears after the 70 weeks. So this week of the covenant is an additional week after the seventy weeks have expired. This additional covenant extends the new covenant for one more week. But at the same time, the Covenant of Peace begins and the temple can be rebuilt. The prince, who is the ruler of the nations, and who is the antichrist, stops the sacrifice and offering in the midst of that week.

Go back and take a closer look at verse 25. The anointed one and the prince both come at the same time. And it's at the end of seven weeks, which is the end of the seventy weeks. The coming of Christ and the antichrist, at the same time, at the appointed time, on the Day of the Lord, can also be seen in this verse:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 ESV Now, brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to him, we ask you (2) not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. (3) Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.

Let's go back to Daniel 9:25. The sixty-two weeks begin with the issuing of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem. During the time that Jerusalem is rebuilt is troubled times. So the sixty-two weeks must come first, followed by the seven weeks. However, there is nothing in the vision that requires the seven weeks to immediately follow the sixty-two weeks.

The vision could have unfolded in one of two ways. The seven weeks could have immediately followed the sixty-two weeks. But as it turned out, the seven weeks was postponed until a later time. After the sixty-two weeks Christ came at his birth. If Israel had been ready, the final seven weeks could have proceeded immediately following the sixty-two weeks. But Israel was not ready for the Messiah to come. At the time of Christ's birth, Israel had some independence from Rome. Herod the Great was the last king of Israel before Rome began to post Roman governors in Israel to rule over Jerusalem.

The first dispersion of Israel was because of sin. Daniel prayed for the dispersion of Israel to come to an end. In response to this prayer, seventy weeks were decreed for Israel to stop sinning before the Messiah would come. During that time, Jerusalem would not be trampled upon. The generation in Israel which grew up at the time of Christ was tested. Because of sin, that generation did not recognize the Messiah. So after that generation, Israel went back into dispersion. The trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles continued until the time of the Gentiles was completed. After the Six Day War of 1967, Jerusalem was no longer trampled on by the Gentiles. So the final seven weeks has been unfolding since that time.

When the final seven weeks is over, the entire seventy weeks will be completed. At that time, both Christ and the antichrist will come. Christ will return and the New Jerusalem will appear. But the high majority of the Church will again not be ready for the Messiah to come. This time, however, a Church will be in place that at least understands the basic teachings of Christ. So Christ will be able to make a covenant for one more seven, effectively extending the new covenant, in order for the many of the Church to get ready by "finishing transgression, putting an end to sin, atoning for wickedness, and bringing in everlasting righteousness."

This week of Daniel 9:27 is the seven-year period of Christ's return. For the elect, God's grace is extended seven more years. It's also seven more years of faith because the Church will be living during a time of great tribulation for the Church. Christ will be physically present, but he will delay setting up his earthly kingdom. So for the nations, the age of grace will be over. Thus, during these seven years, the temple will be physically built and animal sacrifice will be started.

17.8) Death During the Millennium

Isaiah 65:18-20 ESV But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. (19) I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. (20) No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

This is a description of life during the millennium. Notice that verse 20 speaks of infants. Children will continue to be born. Also, some of the translations speak of a sinner a hundred years old being accursed. Other translations don't speak of a sinner. I think it's possible that some people may die for various reasons and then be resurrected again. For example, what about accidental deaths? These people in the middle group would still have natural bodies, perhaps like Adam's body, that can live for hundreds of years. Adam lived 930 years.

Of course all we have on the subject would be this passage in Isaiah. Bottom line is that Isaiah 65 seems to speak of a middle-stage between the cursed-world we are in right now, and eternal life with spiritual bodies. So, for the nations, with natural bodies, I think the world will be like it was in the Garden of Eden before the fall. The curse will be removed. Those in the nations will still have natural bodies that can live a very long time.

Also, consider Revelation 20:5-6. The "first resurrection" would be the wise group - the Bride of Christ. Verse 6 associates the "first resurrection" with the priests (and kings) that will reign over the nations. I don't think this means everyone else waits until the 1000 years are over. There can be additional resurrections right after the "first resurrection." It's just that the wise group is first. The "first resurrection" does not mean that the second resurrection is at the end of the millennium. The foolish group could be raised during a series of resurrections that happen during the first couple of decades.

There could also be many other resurrections throughout the millennium as needed. It would be like the raising of Lazarus. Those types of miracles will be common in the Kingdom of Christ.

The term "second death" (Revelation 2:11, 20:6, 20:14, 21:8) seems to imply a final death. But I don't think the term "second death" would apply if the death is for reasons other than the rejection of Christ. The first death is because of sin,

even for the righteous. Christ's blood saves us all. The "second death" is for rejecting Christ's salvation.

Revelation 20:5 says the rest of the dead do not come to life until after the thousand years. This is taking about those who received the mark of the beast, and by extension, all those who have hardened their hearts against the voice of Christ. They "come to life" at the end of the 1000 years for judgment. But I do not consider this to be a "resurrection." A resurrection would be to get a body. To "come to life", I think, would simply be to be for the soul to be brought out of Hades, which is death. The soul would no longer be asleep.

With three types of people in the grave, all or most of the dead are asleep, awaiting the resurrection. While the dead can be awakened at times if God allows, the dead are generally at rest awaiting the resurrection. So the wicked, who are not to be resurrected, nevertheless "come to life" to be judged. When they "come to life," they are no longer at rest. But it's not a resurrection because they will not be given new bodies and new life after death. After the second death there is no rest (Revelation 14:11, 20:14). The wicked will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction (Matthew 25:46, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, and Jude 1:7).

17.9) The Day of the Lord is a Thousand Years

Many people believe the "Day of the Lord" is a single 24-hour day. Instead, it's the entire Messianic Age. With the Lord, a day is as a thousand years. It's the "age to come." To see this, look at 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 ESV Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, (2) not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. (3) Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.

The letter or rumor alleged that the day of the Lord had already come (verse 2). It concerned the coming of the Lord, and our being gathered unto him (verse 1). If the day of the Lord were understood by the Jews of that time as single 24-hour day, it would have come and gone long before a rumor or letter could get around. We must interpret Scripture the way ancient Jews would have understood. The day of the Lord must be the Messianic age to come.

Paul couldn't say, "Hey look, we have not yet been caught up in the rapture!" That's because the day of the Lord was not a 24-hour day. So, in order to dispel the rumor or letter, Paul had to give a sign that must occur before the day of the Lord. Since the "day of the Lord" is the Messianic age to come, we can use Revelation 20 to say it lasts a thousand years. The Day of Judgment is also the entire Messianic age to come.

2 Peter 3:8 But don't forget this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Psalms 90:4 For a thousand years in your sight are just like yesterday when it is past, like a watch in the night.

Hosea 6:1-3 "Come, and let us return to Yahweh; for he has torn us to pieces, and he will heal us; he has injured us, and he will bind up our wounds. (2) After two days he will revive us. On the third day he will raise us up, and we will live before him. (3) Let us acknowledge Yahweh. Let us press on to know Yahweh. As surely as the sun rises, Yahweh will appear. He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain that waters the earth."

Many argue that the thousand years in the above verse is simply a long period of time, like the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10). The argument is to say that God's time not like our time. But we must strive to interpret Scripture in the context of the beliefs and culture in which it was written. No doubt the cattle on a thousand hills, in that context, the number one thousand is to be taken as figurative. But in the Jewish culture, a thousand years was always interpreted literally. This is because the Jews at that time believed in a millennial week. Each day of the week was a thousand years.

The first source of Jewish ancient-text evidence for this is in the Book of Jubilees, chapter 4. Adam lived to be 930 years old. His age is being compared with a thousand years as a day. The fact that he did not live to be a thousand is given as the reason why he did not physically die on the day he ate the fruit. Genesis 2:17 states that on the day Adam would eat of it he would surely die. Most scholars today interpret this as a spiritual death. But the writer of the Book of Jubilees interpreted it as a physical death. He explains this verse by literally equating a day with a thousand years.

(Book of Jubilees, 4:29-31a) And at the close of the nineteenth jubilee, in the seventh week in the sixth year [930 A.M.] thereof,

Adam died, and all his sons buried him in the land of his creation, and he was the first to be buried in the earth. And he lacked seventy years of one thousand years; for one thousand years are as one day in the testimony of the heavens and therefore was it written concerning the tree of knowledge: 'On the day that ye eat thereof ye shall die.' For this reason he did not complete the years of this day; for he died during it.

The second Jewish ancient-text evidence for this is the Talmud Sanhedrin, Folio 97a. Here we find the millennial week itself. Here we see that the days of Psalm 90:4 are being interpreted as a literal thousand years. Also the days of Hosea 6:2 are being interpreted as a literal thousand years. Bottom line is that there was a strong association at that time with God's days being a literal thousand years.

The Talmud Sanhedrin, Folio 97a

It has been taught: R. Nehorai said: in the generation when Messiah comes, young men will insult the old, and old men will stand before the young [to give them honour]; daughters will rise up against their mothers, and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law. The people shall be dog-faced, and a son will not be abashed in his father's presence.

It has been taught, R. Nehemiah said: in the generation of Messiah's coming impudence will increase, esteem be perverted, the vine yield its fruit, yet shall wine be dear, and the Kingdom will be converted to heresy with none to rebuke them. This supports R. Isaac, who said: The son of David will not come until the whole world is converted to the belief of the heretics. Raba said: What verse [proves this]? it is all turned white: he is clean.

Our Rabbis taught: For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself of his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left: the son of David will not come until denunciators are in abundance. Another interpretation [of their power is gone]: until scholars are few. Another interpretation: until the [last] perutah has gone from the purse. Yet another interpretation: until the redemption is despaired of, for it is written, there is none shut up or left, as — were it possible [to say so] — Israel had neither Supporter nor Helper. Even as R. Zera, who, whenever he chanced upon scholars engaged thereon [i.e., in

calculating the time of the Messiah's coming], would say to them: I beg of you, do not postpone it, for it has been taught: Three come unawares: Messiah, a found article and a scorpion.

R. Kattina said: Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate, as it is written, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. Abaye said: it will be desolate two [thousand], as it is said, After two days will he revive us: in the third day, he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

It has been taught in accordance with R. Kattina: Just as the seventh year is one year of release in seven, so is the world: one thousand years out of seven shall be fallow, as it is written, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day,' and it is further said, A Psalm and song for the Sabbath day, meaning the day that is altogether Sabbath — and it is also said, For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past.

The Tanna debe Eliyyahu teaches: The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand there was desolation; two thousand years the Torah flourished; and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era.

Some will claim that I'm treating the Book of Jubilees and the Talmud Sanhedrin as Scripture. I'm not. But 2 Peter 3:8 is Scripture. We cannot put blinders on our eyes with regard to Jewish cultural background when we interpret Peter's words.

Peter was Jewish. John was Jewish. When Peter wrote that a day of the Lord is as a thousand years, he undoubtedly thought of these days as being literal thousand-year periods. If Peter's verse is interpreted literally, then we must also apply this interpretation to Revelation 20. It becomes the case of Scripture interpreting Scripture. If the thief in the night, and the destruction of the heavens and the earth in 2 Peter 3:10 covers a literal thousand years, then Revelation 20 must be interpreted literally, with the thousand years being a day of the Lord.

Many of the early church fathers also believed in a millennial week. The major difference between the Christian and the Jewish view is that in the Christians believe the seventh (Sabbath) millennium is the earthly reign of Christ. Thus, Christ is literally the "Lord of the Sabbath" millennium.

The early church fathers who wrote about the millennial week included Irenaeus (120-202), who was a disciple of Polycarp, who was the disciple of John himself. Irenaeus was a literalist. He read Revelation 20 in a literal way, and saw the thousand years as a time after the return of Christ. Today, we call this premillennialism. It's hard to believe that Irenaeus would have been mistaken about how to interpret Revelation 20 in that he was taught by Polycarp, who was taught by John. Other early church fathers who wrote about the millennial week includes Barnabas (100 AD) and Justin Martyr (110-165 AD).

In addition, Papias was a companion of Polycarp and also heard the teaching of John. We only have fragments of his writing. But we do know he also believed in the millennial week.

2 Peter 3:7-8 ESV But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. (8) But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

The ungodly men will be destroyed on the Day of Judgment. But with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years. So the Day of Judgment is the entire millennial reign of Christ, with the great white throne judgment at the end of it.

The ungodly men of this passage are not men who are ignorant of God. They are men who willfully reject Christ, like these who deliberately forget about the Creator. Many of their names will get blotted out of the Lamb's book of life.

During the ministry of Jesus, well before His final entry into Jerusalem, the Pharisees tried to frighten Jesus, saying that Herod wanted to kill Him.

Luke 13:31-32 On that same day, some Pharisees came, saying to him, "Get out of here, and go away, for Herod wants to kill you." (32) He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I complete my mission.

Jesus calls Herod a fox and then tells him something he cannot possibly understand! We have a hard time understanding it today! The context of the passage is the death of Jesus, but it is said well before his death. The two days of driving out demons and healing people can and does refer to the two days Jesus was dead. His death paid the price to drive out demons and to heal people. On the third day he "reached his goal" by being raised from the dead.

But, was this really the “goal” of Jesus? The “goal” of Jesus is the redemption of His Church! Also, why did Jesus say "today and tomorrow" when he clearly was not to be crucified at that time? And did Jesus really drive out demons and perform healings while he was in the grave?

The answer is easy if the days of which Jesus speaks are the thousand year 'days' of God's plan. For two thousand-year 'days,' demons have been driven out and people have been healed in the name of Jesus. On the third 'day,' his Church is resurrected! The Age of Grace is two days, or two thousand years. After Jesus speaks about "today, tomorrow, and the third day," Christ goes on to say:

Luke 13:33-35 Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day, for it can't be that a prophet perish outside of Jerusalem.' (34) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, like a hen gathers her own brood under her wings, and you refused! (35) Behold, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'" "

This verse is in the same context. It's part of his response to the statement that Herod wants to kill him. Is the focus of Jesus on his own resurrection, on the third day? Or is the focus of Jesus on the resurrection of Israel? There is a very similar verse in Matthew 23:37-38. Jesus is saying that Jerusalem will not see him again until they say these words. But here it's being addressed to the religious leaders, those who “sit on the seat of Moses” (Matthew 23:2). Matthew's account makes it clear that the people had already said these words when Jesus rode in on a donkey (Matthew 21:9). The words are from Psalm 118:26. For the Jews to say these words about Jesus would be to say that Jesus is the Messiah.

Like Jesus, Paul also agonizes over the fact that the Jewish people, his own people, rejected Jesus as the Messiah (Romans 9-11). In Romans 11:25, Paul predicts that the Jews would come back into the vine after the full number of Gentiles had come into the vine of Christ (or the vine of true Israel). I think it's clear from these verses that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (those who sit on the seat of Moses) will come back into the vine in the last days. The “goal” of Jesus is not his own resurrection. The “goal” of Jesus is the resurrection of true Israel, which is the Church, on the third day.

Consider the words of Hosea:

Hosea 6:1-3 "Come, and let us return to Yahweh; for he has torn us to pieces, and he will heal us; he has injured us, and he will bind up our wounds. (2) After two days he will revive us. On the third day he will raise us up, and we will live before him. (3) Let us acknowledge Yahweh. Let us press on to know Yahweh. As surely as the sun rises, Yahweh will appear. He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain that waters the earth."

This verse is certainly about the crucifixion. But interpreted literally, it's also about Israel, and not just about Christ himself. So, on the third day the Church (true Israel) is resurrected and we begin to "live in his presence." The resurrection of Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection of true Israel (1 Corinthians 15:20). Both are on the third day. The day of the Lord is a thousand years.

Chapter 18

The Church is Israel

The position taken by the New Wine System is that the Gentile Church is grafted into Israel. Thus, Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled literally in Israel. But the New Testament Church is a part of that same Israel.

This is different from the traditional covenantal system where the Church is a continuation of Old Testament Israel. The new covenant makes the old covenant obsolete. But it's also viewed as a continuation of the system of covenants in the Old Testament. And those Old Testament covenants are reinterpreted to be completely spiritual in nature. Or in some cases, a natural form of Christendom is considered to be the kingdom of heaven even before Christ returns. Thus, it can be stated that the Church replaces Old Testament Israel. The doctrine of the Church replacing Israel was the high majority view of both Catholics and Protestants for most of church history, up until dispensationalism began around 1830. The Church is viewed as a continuation of the system of covenants between God and man. Thus the Church is a continuation of Israel.

The traditional covenantal system also sees the Church as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy about Israel. Thus, covenantalism and preterism go hand in hand. The preterist sees prophecy as very allegorical. Almost everything is fulfilled in the first coming of Christ and in the Church. Everything is centered on going to heaven or hell when you die. So there is no need for a Messianic earthly reign of Christ. The Messianic age, a very central theme of Old Testament prophecy, is viewed allegorically as the Church age. When Christ returns, we immediately have the resurrection and then the new heavens and new earth. Since the dead are believed to already be in heaven or hell, the resurrection is seen as simply the start of eternity, perhaps with bodies instead of just being spirits.

The New Wine System, on the other hand, views Gentile believers as being very much a part of Old Testament Israel. We are grafted into Israel. There is no reinterpretation of the Old Testament. The purpose of Israel has not changed. There is no need to use allegorical methods to reinterpret Old Testament Israel in any way. Israel will literally reign over the nations here on earth when the Messiah comes. Gentile believers reign along with Jewish believers. There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. We will both reign with the Messiah over the nations.

18.1) The Vine Effectively Disproves Dispensationalism

The New Wine System places heavy emphasis on Gentile believers being grafted into Israel. This distinguishes the New Wine System from dispensationalism, and at the same time effectively disproves dispensationalism.

Probably the most fundamental core aspect of dispensationalism is that it distinguishes Israel from the Church. The Church is considered to be a "parenthesis" between two different dispensations of Israel. The pre-tribulation rapture is seen as necessary in order to remove the church so that God's purpose can be re-focused back towards Israel. Dispensationalists believe the church stays in heaven and Israel remains on earth during the millennial reign of Christ.

If we are grafted into Israel, then how can Israel and the Church be separate and distinct? Most dispensationalists tend to think of the vine as being Jesus Christ instead of Israel. The Gentile believers could be grafted into Jesus Christ. But were the Jews broken off the vine of Jesus Christ? Of course not. So Paul's olive tree (vine) of Romans 11 cannot simply be Jesus Christ. The vine must be Israel. The natural branches are Jews. And the wild branches are Gentiles.

To dispel any doubt, we must look at context. What is the vine in the context of the Old Testament? What is the vine in the context of the New Testament? And what is the vine in the context of Romans 9-11?

Romans 9 begins with Paul presenting a doctrinal problem. Then he provides the answer for his problem. How could Israel have rejected the Messiah? Did God's word fail?

Romans 9:4-7 ESV They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. (5) To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (6) But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, (7) and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."

God's word did not fail because not everyone who is descended from Israel (Jacob) belongs to Israel (the promise of a nation). Not all who are descended from Abraham are considered Abraham's children according to the promise. Does this mean that those who "belong to Israel" includes Gentile believers? I think the

answer is yes because later we find that we are grafted into Israel. Then, Paul explains election. Only the elect are heirs to the promise given to Abraham. And that promise is Israel, a promise of a royal people, a holy nation, which has not yet been completely fulfilled (1 Peter 2:9-10, Exodus 19:5-6).

In other words, Old Testament election and New Testament election are exactly the same. Paul continues his explanation of election to be in Israel from verse 9:7 down through verse 9:23. Paul states that Gentiles are also included in the election. Both Jews and Gentiles are elected to be in the holy nation of Israel.

Romans 9:24-26 us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles? (25) As he says also in Hosea, "I will call them 'my people,' which were not my people; and her 'beloved,' who was not beloved." (26) "It will be that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' There they will be called 'children of the living God.' "

Next, Paul addresses the issue of the remnant of Israel. Remember that at this point in time, there were relatively few Gentile believers. There were many more Jews, both believers and unbelievers, than there were Gentiles who were believers. So even with Gentile believers included, the elect was only a small remnant of all the descendants of Israel (Jacob) at this time. Also, note that the words "will be saved" here would mean to be given eternal life in the future.

Romans 9:27-29 Isaiah cries concerning Israel, "If the number of the children of Israel are as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant who will be saved; (28) for He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth." (29) As Isaiah has said before, "Unless the Lord of Armies had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and would have been made like Gomorrah."

Throughout chapter 10, Paul talks about what it takes to be part of the elect. What does it take to be a part of the righteous? We must have faith in the Messiah of Israel. The remnant of Israel are those who have faith in Jesus Christ. Then Paul makes the point that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.

Romans 10:11-13 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed." (12) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich to all who call on him. (13) For, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Thus, the elect of Israel is whoever calls on the name of the Lord to be saved. In verses 11:1-11, Paul returns to the issue of the remnant. What Israel (Jacob) did not obtain, the chosen ones (Gentiles) obtained. The rest of Israel was hardened (verse 11:7). Salvation has come to the Gentiles in order to make the rest of Israel jealous (verse 11:11). Then Paul speaks about his hope that his own people will accept Christ. What is the "root" in the following verses? Is it Israel or Christ? The "first fruit" is the resurrection of Christ. The "promise" of Israel is that resurrection. The promise is a holy nation that will inherit eternal life.

Romans 11:12-16 Now if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness? (13) For I speak to you who are Gentiles. Since then as I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry; (14) if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and may save some of them. (15) For if the rejection of them is the reconciling of the world, what would their acceptance be, but life from the dead? (16) If the first fruit is holy, so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches.

The majority of the Jews were not believers. They were broken off of the olive tree. Those Jews were never in Jesus Christ. But they were in Israel. This is why God's word did not fail. Paul is saying God's word did not fail because the true Israel are the ones who have faith in the Messiah of Israel. Thus, the olive tree (vine) must be Israel. The root, on the other hand, is the Messiah. The resurrection of Christ is the firstfruits of the harvest of Israel. Christ is the root because Christ is the King of Israel. Everything flows from Christ. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile. We all take our salvation (life) from Christ. Since we are grafted into Israel, we are a part of Israel. Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled literally (not allegorically or figuratively) in Israel, which includes Gentile believers.

Romans 11:17-18 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them, and became partaker with them of the root and of the richness of the olive tree; (18) don't boast over the branches. But if you boast, it is not you who support the root, but the root supports you.

Notice that we are grafted in among them. They were already in the vine of Israel. Now we are there together with the remnant of the Jews. Consider this when you read the following verse from Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:12 NIV Remember that at that time you were separate from [the Messiah], excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Back in Romans 11, Paul continues his olive tree metaphor. The Jews were broken off from Israel by election. Paul says the Jews were hardened. (Look back to verse 11:7.) Now Paul is saying that the hardening is not permanent. The Jews will be grafted back into Israel. When does this take place? It takes place when "the fullness" of Gentiles have come into the vine of Israel. After the Jews are unhardened, all of Israel (both Jewish and Gentile) will be saved. This word "saved" is future-tense. All of Israel will be resurrected into eternal life.

Romans 11:25-26a For I don't desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, so that you won't be wise in your own conceits, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, (26) and so all Israel will be saved.

At this point it should be clear that the Gentiles are not some kind of "parenthesis" between two dispensations of Israel. We are all grafted into the same Israel. We all share in the same purposes of God, which is to reign with the Messiah, and to bring righteousness to the nations, when the Messiah comes.

Are there other passages that speak of Israel as being the vine? In the Old Testament, the vine is Israel in Psalm 80:14, Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21, 6:9, and Hosea 10:1. In the New Testament, Jesus uses the vine in a parable about Israel (Matthew 21:33-41, Mark 12:1-9, and Luke 20:9-19).

Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches" (verse 5). Many dispensationalists will try to use this chapter to say that the vine of Romans 11 is Jesus and not Israel. This is done despite all the context of Romans 9-11 and despite the fact that the Jews are broken off of the vine. Were the Jews broken off of Jesus Christ? Remember that even in Romans 11, Jesus is the root while the tree is Israel. The Messiah is the King of Israel. You cannot separate Israel from the Messiah. When Jesus said he is the vine, he was also saying that he the Messiah.

The King is often thought of as being the same as the kingdom. The Messiah of Israel is Israel. Refer back to section 3.10 titled, "Out of Egypt I Called my Son." Israel is a promise of a holy nation. You can't have a holy nation without the King of that holy nation. So Israel is not completely fulfilled until Christ returns and reigns as King of Israel. Those who are in Christ are in Israel. And for those who are in Israel, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.

18.2) The Pre-Tribulation Rapture is Also Disproven

The central-core principle of dispensationalism is the separation of Israel and the Church. Dispensationalism and the pre-tribulation rapture go hand-in-hand. One does not survive without the other. There is no specific verse that states the rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 happens before the tribulation. On the contrary, a very similar event is described in Matthew 24:31. If not for the dispensational argument of the pre-tribulation rapture, it would be understood that Jesus and Paul were talking about the same gathering of the elect. And verse 29 of Matthew 24 explicitly states that this gathering happens after the tribulation.

However, dispensationalism argues that God must remove the Church in order to switch over from the Church back to Israel. The rapture is required in order to make this switch. The millennial reign of Christ is said to be the seventh dispensation. The major argument for two separate gatherings of the elect, one as described by Jesus and the other as described by Paul, is so that God can switch to another dispensation. That's why dispensationalists consider the separation of Israel and the Church to be imperative.

Dispensationalists will sometimes confuse disbelief in the pre-tribulation rapture with disbelief in the rapture at any time. One dispensationalist asked me what I do with 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. I only stated that the verse does not say whether that gathering happens before or after the tribulation. But one could turn the question around. What does the dispensationalist do with 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17? It's true that the verse does not set the timing of the rapture in relation to the tribulation. But it does set the timing of the rapture in relation to the resurrection. The rapture must happen after the resurrection. According to Revelation 20:4-6, the first resurrection occurs after the great tribulation. Therefore, the rapture must also occur after the great tribulation.

There is absolutely no evidence for two separate resurrections of the elect. Jesus several times speaks of the resurrection on the last day. This strongly suggests only one resurrection. But even if there were two resurrections, the resurrection after the tribulation is stated to be the first resurrection.

The pre-tribulation rapture hangs on dispensationalism. Dispensationalism hangs on the pre-tribulation rapture. Dispensationalism hangs on the separation of Israel and the Church. Once it's realized that we are grafted into Israel, and that the rapture must occur after the first resurrection, which is after the tribulation, then the whole dispensational house of cards collapses.

18.3) Scripture Verses for the Church being Israel

Here is a series of verses that demonstrate that the Church is Israel. Try to read these verses the way an ancient Jew would have read them.

Matthew 3:9-10 Don't think to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. (10) "Even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't bring forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire.

Matthew 8:10-13 When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to those who followed, "Most certainly I tell you, I haven't found so great a faith, not even in Israel. (11) I tell you that many will come from the east and the west, and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, (12) but the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (13) Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way. Let it be done for you as you have believed." His servant was healed in that hour.

Luke 13:16 Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound eighteen long years, be freed from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"

Luke 13:28-29 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and yourselves being thrown outside. (29) They will come from the east, west, north, and south, and will sit down in the Kingdom of God.

Luke 19:8-9 Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. If I have wrongfully exacted anything of anyone, I restore four times as much." (9) Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham.

John 8:39-41 They answered him, "Our father is Abraham." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. (40) But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God. Abraham didn't do this. (41) You do the works of your father." They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father, God."

John 8:44 You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and doesn't stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks on his own; for he is a liar, and its father.

John 8:52-53 Then the Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets; and you say, 'If a man keeps my word, he will never taste of death.' (53) Are you greater than our father, Abraham, who died? The prophets died. Who do you make yourself out to be?"

John 8:56-58 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. He saw it, and was glad." (57) The Jews therefore said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" (58) Jesus said to them, "Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM."

Romans 9:3-8 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brothers' sake, my relatives according to the flesh, (4) who are Israelites; whose is the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service, and the promises; (5) of whom are the fathers, and from whom is Christ as concerning the flesh, who is over all, God, blessed forever. Amen. (6) But it is not as though the word of God has come to nothing. For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel. (7) Neither, because they are Abraham's seed, are they all children. But, "In Isaac will your seed be called." (8) That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as a seed.

Romans 10:12-13 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich to all who call on him. (13) For, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Colossians 3:9-11 Don't lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his doings, (10) and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator, (11) where there can't be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondservant, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all.

Galatians 3:16-18 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He doesn't say, "To seeds," as of many, but as of one, "To your seed," which is Christ. (17) Now I say this. A covenant confirmed beforehand by God in Christ, the law, which came four hundred thirty years after, does not annul, so as to make the promise of no effect. (18) For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by promise.

Galatians 3:26-28 For you are all children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. (27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:29 - 4:1 NIV If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (4:1) What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate.

Acts 10:45-47 NIV The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. (46) For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, (47) "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

(Why were they astonished?)

Ephesians 2:11-13 Therefore remember that once you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "uncircumcision" by that which is called "circumcision," (in the flesh, made by hands); (12) that you were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (13) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off are made near in the blood of Christ.

Philippians 3:3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Ephesians 3:6 that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus through the Good News.

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you also were called in one hope of your calling; (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all.

Ephesians 4:25 NIV Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

James 1:1 NIV James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

Revelation 2:26-27 He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. (27) He will rule them with a rod of iron, shattering them like clay pots; as I also have received of my Father:

(This verse in Revelation is part of a letter to a Gentile church. According to this verse, who rules in the millennium? Who did the ancient Jews believe would rule in the Messianic age?)

Revelation 21:10-13 He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, (11) having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, as if it was a jasper stone, clear as crystal; (12) having a great and high wall; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. (13) On the east were three gates; and on the north three gates; and on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

(There are no gates into the New Jerusalem for Gentiles.)

18.4) Old Testament Prophecy Fulfilled In the Church

There are quite a few New Testament passages that quote Old Testament passages, in which the New Testament author is using an Old Testament prophecy to prove that those who believe in Christ have fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy. These Old Testament prophecies can always be argued to be about Israel. In other words, the New Testament references to these prophecies must be about the Church, yet the Old Testament are about Israel. Here are some of the Old Testament prophecies about Israel, which according to New Testament authors, are at least partially fulfilled in the Church.

Hebrews 8:8-13 quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34, which is explicitly stated to be about Israel, and applies it to the Church. This is the largest quote of the Old Testament in the New Testament.

Hebrews 8:8-13 For finding fault with them, he said, "Behold, the days come," says the Lord, "that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; (9) not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they didn't continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them," says the Lord. (10) "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days," says the Lord; "I will put my laws into their mind, I will also write them on their heart. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (11) They will not teach every man his fellow citizen, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'

for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. (12) For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness. I will remember their sins and lawless deeds no more." (13) In that he says, "A new covenant," he has made the first old. But that which is becoming old and grows aged is near to vanishing away.

(According to this verse, who is the new covenant made with? Are we included?)

Romans 9:23-26 applies Hosea 1:10 to the Church.

Romans 9:23-26 and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, (24) us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles? (25) As he says also in Hosea, "I will call them 'my people,' which were not my people; and her 'beloved,' who was not beloved." (26) "It will be that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' There they will be called 'children of the living God.' "

1 Peter 2:9-10 applies Exodus 19:6 to the Church.

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: (10) who in time past were no people, but now are God's people, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Acts 15:14-18 applies Amos 9:11 to the Church.

Acts 15:14-18 Simeon has reported how God first visited the nations, to take out of them a people for his name. (15) This agrees with the words of the prophets. As it is written, (16) 'After these things I will return. I will again build the tabernacle of David, which has fallen. I will again build its ruins. I will set it up, (17) That the rest of men may seek after the Lord; All the Gentiles who are called by my name, Says the Lord, who does all these things. (18) All his works are known to God from eternity.'

Acts 2:1,16-21 applies Joel 2:28-32 to the Church.

Acts 2:16-21 But this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel: (17) 'It will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out

my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. (18) Yes, and on my servants and on my handmaidens in those days, I will pour out my Spirit, and they will prophesy. (19) I will show wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and billows of smoke. (20) The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes. (21) It will be, that whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

The Church is referred to as the Bride of Christ (Matthew 9:15, 22:1-14, 25:1-13, Mark 2:19-20, Luke 5:34-35, John 3:29, Revelation 19:7, 21:2, 21:9, 22:17). The wedding banquet includes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matthew 8:10-13, Luke 13:28-29.) In the Old Testament, Israel is the Bride of Yahweh (Ezekiel 16). Some Dispensationalists have even argued there are two Brides. One Bride is for Christ and one Bride is for the Father. The Bride of Christ remains in heaven with the Father, and the Bride of the Father remains on earth with Christ, according to the theory. But with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remaining in heaven, they would not be a part of the Bride called Israel which is described in Ezekiel 16. Bottom line is that there is only one Bride, and it's the Bride of Christ. This includes the Bride of Ezekiel 16, making Israel be the Church.

Jeremiah 3:14 NIV "Return, faithless people," declares the LORD, "for I am your husband. I will choose you-- one from a town and two from a clan-- and bring you to Zion.

This list is not exhaustive. When New Testament authors spoke about the Church, they quoted Old Testament prophecies about Israel. When we observe this, there should be two conclusions. The first conclusion should be that the Gentile Church is grafted into Israel. The second conclusion should be that Old Testament promises will continue to be fulfilled in Israel, which is the Church.

Progressive Dispensationalism has come about in part as a result of this observation. But they need to recognize that it's only reasonable for the pattern of the Church fulfilling Old Testament prophecies to continue to be fulfilled in the Church, even in the millennium. Just as God's word did not fail when ethnic Israel rejected Christ, God's word will not fail when the rest of the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in the Church. This is because the Church is Israel, and sole heirs to the promises given to Israel. But remember that the Gentile part of the Church does not replace Israel. We are grafted into Israel.

18.5) The Historic Premillennialist's View of a Spiritual Israel

A number of theologians have had difficulties with dispensationalism and the pre-tribulation rapture. They desire to interpret Scripture as literally as is reasonable, and have difficulties with the allegorical approaches that are used by preterists and amillennialists. These theologians have often taken the historic premillennial position, which is strongly associated with the late George E. Ladd. He is well known for addressing issues about the kingdom of heaven. He argues that the kingdom of heaven and the Davidic covenant is partially fulfilled here and now in our hearts, but will be literally fulfilled in the millennium.

Nevertheless, Ladd is rightly criticized for not addressing the nature and purpose of the millennium itself. In other words, one could argue that the kingdom of heaven is partially fulfilled now in our hearts, but that it will be literally fulfilled in heaven. One can assume that our earthly existence in this age is solely for determining our eternal destiny of heaven or hell. If that were true, then where is the need for an earthly millennial reign of Christ? Yet those who interpret Scripture more literally cannot deny the Old Testament teaching of an earthly reign of the Messiah. So historic premillennialists such as Ladd simply must accept the earthly kingdom of heaven without reconciling its purpose.

One central question that must be addressed by historic premillennialists is the nature of Israel in relation to the Church. Historic premillennialists do not consider themselves to be dispensational. Thus, they do not completely separate Israel from the Church. Dispensationalists say that people in the Church remain in heaven during the millennium and that Israel remains on the earth. The purpose of the millennium, according to dispensationalism, is to fulfill God's promise to Israel. Historic premillennialists would say that we all remain here on the earth. So the distinction between Israel and the Church becomes far less defined than it is in dispensationalism. Historic premillennialists tend to refer to the Church as a "spiritual Israel." (Some dispensationalists also use this term.)

In his book, "The Last Things", in chapter II titled, "What About Israel," George E. Ladd writes (emphasis mine):

In the first chapter we established the principle of biblical hermeneutics: the Old Testament must be interpreted in the light of the new revelation given in Jesus Christ. What does the New Testament teach about Israel? If the Old Testament sees the future salvation of Israel, does the New Testament reinterpret these prophecies so radically that they are to be fulfilled spiritually in the

church? Is the church the new and true Israel? Or does God still have a future for his people Israel?

We are fortunate to have in the inspired Scripture a lengthy discussion of this theme in Romans 9-11. Paul first expresses his heart-felt concern and love for his kinsmen after the flesh. He says, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart" (Rom. 9:2) for Israel because they have rejected Jesus as their Messiah.

His first point is that "Israel," that is, the true spiritual Israel - the people of God - is not identical with the physical offspring of Abraham. "For not all who are descended from Israel [natural seed], belong to Israel [spiritual seed], and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants" (Rom. 9:6-7). Paul recalls Old Testament history to prove this. Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. However, even though the family of Ishmael and his descendants are the natural seed of Abraham, they are not included in the spiritual seed; but "through Isaac shall your descendants be named" (Rom. 7:7). "This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants" (Rom. 9:8). God chose Isaac but rejected Ishmael. Therefore the true descendants of Abraham - the true Israel - must be determined not by natural physical descent, but by the divine election and promise of God.

The implication is clear. Not all Jews of Paul's day can call themselves "Israel," the people of God, but only those who emulate Abraham's faith, and so prove themselves to be children of promise.

Ladd goes on to make a strong case that Paul is "spiritualizing" the Old Testament concept of Israel. This effectively reinterprets the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. Ladd's intent can clearly be seen in Ladd's original statement in the chapter. He says, "The Old Testament must be interpreted in the light of the new revelation given in Jesus Christ." The New Wine System, on the other hand, maintains that we must interpret the New Testament in the context of the Old Testament even if we must challenge many of the traditional views of the New Testament. Ladd recognizes the problems in spiritualizing the Old Testament. But he maintains that Israel must be spiritualized because Paul himself spiritualized

Israel. After his arguments that Paul spiritualizes Old Testament Israel, Ladd writes (emphasis his):

To Dispensationalists, a "spiritualizing" hermeneutic is the most dangerous way to interpret the Old Testament. Professor John Walvoord has written that this is the hermeneutic which characterizes modern Roman Catholic, modern liberal, and modern non-dispensational conservative writers (*The Millennial Kingdom*, Dunham, 1959, p. 71). The present writer feels that he must adopt a spiritualizing hermeneutic because *he finds the New Testament applying to the spiritual church promises which in the Old Testament refer to literal Israel*. He does not do this because of any preconceived covenant theology but because he is bound by the Word of God.

If the church is the true spiritual Israel, "has God rejected his people" - literal Israel (Rom. 11:1)? Paul goes on to answer this question at some length. He hints at their future salvation in Romans 11:15, "For if their rejection [of literal Israel] means reconciliation of the world [salvation of the Gentiles], what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?"

Ladd's arguments that Paul spiritualizes Israel are strong. But under the New Wine System, Ladd's arguments are based on a faulty assumption. The New Wine System holds that election is not just an election of salvation. God elects those who will inherit the kingdom and rule over the nations. But the nations can still be saved. Ladd's arguments are based on the assumption that Paul is talking about salvation election in Romans 9-11, with everyone else going to hell.

Paul is clearly talking about election to be a part of Israel. So if election to be a part of Israel is the same as election for salvation, then being a part of Israel is equivalent to salvation. Those who are not a part of Israel are assumed to not be saved. This really does make Israel become a spiritual expression of salvation. Under this traditional assumption, those in Christ really are a spiritual Israel.

The New Wine System, however, does not assume that election is strictly an election of salvation. We can interpret Paul as simply stating that those who will reign over the nations when Christ returns are elected. God's elect did not reject the Messiah because not everyone who is physically a descendent of Abraham are elected to reign over the nations. Therefore, Israel did not reject the Messiah. To better understand, we need a good definition for Israel.

To define Israel, we must go back to the promise given to Abraham. Abraham was promised land and descendants. And, this promise will be a blessing for all nations. Land and descendants adds up to a kingdom (or nation). It's a promised nation. And that promised (holy) nation will be a blessing to all nations. But you can't have a kingdom without a king. Early Israel did not have a king. Later, there were kings, but it was promised that David's Son would be the real Messiah (King) of Israel. Since Israel, as a nation, will bless all the nations of the world, the millennial reign is the final fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Paul said that if we are in the Messiah, then we are heirs to that promise. That's the promise of Abraham. This is the same as saying that if we are in Christ, that we are heirs to the promise of Israel.

Ladd is known for saying that the kingdom of God is here and now but not yet. The kingdom is partially fulfilled in our hearts, but completely fulfilled when the King returns. Israel is that kingdom. When you think of Israel, you must do so in terms of what is coming, not in terms of an Old Testament nation. Israel is partially fulfilled in our hearts. Israel will be completely and literally fulfilled when Christ returns. Israel has always been a promise, or shadow, of what is to come.

There is no real difference between a king and the kingdom. The word of the King is the Law, and the Law is the government of the Kingdom. So the King is the Kingdom. Christ (the King) is the Kingdom. Christ is Israel. Israel is the promised kingdom. Old Testament Israel was a shadow of the government that will come. But Old Testament Israel did not have the Messiah to reign over them. New Testament Israel is a shadow of the Law, written on our hearts. New Testament Israel has Christ in our hearts, but we do not have the earthly government. When Christ returns, we will have both, a complete fulfillment of the promise of Israel. Israel will be a blessing to all the nations.

This is a fundamental way of thinking which is important for the understanding of Scripture. For example, Matthew quotes Hosea saying, "Out of Egypt I called my Son" (Matthew 2:15, Hosea 11:1). Matthew uses this quote to say Jesus was the Messiah because he came out of Egypt. But when you go back to the quote in Hosea, it's clearly talking about Israel being called out of Egypt. Was this really a prophecy? Israel had already come out of Egypt. And why did Matthew use it as an unfulfilled prophecy of the Messiah?

If it's generally understood that Israel itself is a promise (prophecy) of a kingdom, and if it's understood that you can't have a kingdom without a king, then it all makes sense. Israel was called out of Egypt. But that must be only a partial

fulfillment because you can't have a kingdom without a king. For Israel to be called out of Egypt, both the people and the king must be called out of Egypt.

Under this system, there is no need to spiritualize Israel. The definition of Israel does not change from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The mystery of God, revealed in the New Testament, is that Gentiles can be elected to be included in the promise of Israel. Paul uses the metaphor of the vine to explain. Gentile believers are grafted into the vine of Israel. We are grafted into the promise given to Abraham, making us children of Abraham since we are heirs of the promise. Israel is in the future for both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Everything that has come before is a shadow of the coming Israel.

Those who are in the vine of Israel are those who will reign with the King when the Kingdom comes. So it matters not whether you are talking about Old Testament saints or New Testament saints. Israel is those who will reign during the millennium. And not all the Old Testament people are Israel. (Not all Israel is Israel.) Israel is that holy nation that will reign over all other nations. Israel is Christ. The Gentile Church is grafted into Israel. The Church is the assembly of God's people, both Jewish and Gentile, who are elected to reign with Christ.

18.6) God's Promises to Abraham, Literally Fulfilled in the Church

Amillennialists have long known that Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel have been fulfilled in the Church. New Testament authors have shown this fulfillment without the use of allegories. Fulfillment, however, can be considered to be a partial fulfillment just as the kingdom of heaven is here partially in our hearts.

In the "IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament", by Craig S. Keener, pg 136, the section about Mark 1:14-15, Keener writes:

The Jewish people recognized that God ruled the universe in one sense now, but they prayed daily for the day when his kingdom or rule would be established over all peoples of the earth. Then, they believed, everyone would submit to God. Because the Gospels affirm that Jesus must come twice, they recognized that the kingdom comes in two stages: God's future rule is established in the lives of those who obey him in the present, and over all the world when Jesus returns. John [the Baptist], however, was not yet in a position to make this distinction.

Preterists, on the other hand, tend to force all Old Testament prophecies to be already fulfilled, even if it requires difficult-to-understand allegories in order to show their fulfillment. These allegories are such that the Old Testament authors and audiences would never have interpreted Old Testament passages as such.

For example, in Zechariah 14:16, the survivors of the nations who will have attacked Jerusalem will be required to go up to Jerusalem, year after year, and worship at the Feast of Tabernacles. Amillennial preterists just can't see this happening, because they don't believe in the millennium. Consequently, they invent very creative allegories to make Zechariah 14 apply to Christ's first coming.

The New Testament authors, who have applied the Old Testament prophecies of Israel to the Church, did not have to resort to elaborate allegories. But they did allow for partial fulfillment. Complete fulfillment waits on the second coming of Christ. Therefore, we should allow this pattern of Scripture to continue, and should allow for Old Testament prophecies about Israel to be literally and completely fulfilled in the Church, when Christ returns.

As we have seen, the Old Testament promises are for those who are in Christ, and not for ethnic Israel. The promise is for the One Seed, which is Christ, and we are in Christ. Thus, the promises to Abraham, which were fulfilled partially in Old Testament Israel, will be fulfilled literally and completely in the Church when Christ returns.

Galatians 3:29 If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise.

God's promise to Abraham has three parts: (1) a holy nation, (2) a huge number of descendants, and (3) the land of Israel.

18.7) The First Part of the Promise: A Holy Nation

Genesis 12:1-3 Now Yahweh said to Abram, "Get out of your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. (2) I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. (3) I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. In you will all of the families of the earth be blessed."

Genesis 46:3 He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Don't be afraid to go down into Egypt, for there I will make of you a great nation.

Deuteronomy 2:25 This day will I begin to put the dread of you and the fear of you on the peoples who are under the whole sky, who shall hear the report of you, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of you.

Deuteronomy 4:6-7 Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. (7) For what great nation is there, that has a god so near to them, as Yahweh our God is whenever we call on him?

Exodus 19:5-6 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine; (6) and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

1 Peter 2:9-10 applies Exodus 19:6 to the Church.

1 Peter 2:9-10 NIV But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (10) Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Old Testament Israel was a great nation under David and Solomon for a short while. But God's promise to Abraham remains to be fulfilled in a much greater way through the One Seed, and therefore through those who abide in Christ. God's promise to Abraham was fulfilled literally in the Old Testament, so we can reasonably assume the promise will also be fulfilled literally through the One Seed. Therefore, those who abide in Christ, and thus overcome all sin, will rule over all the other nations of the world.

Revelation 1:5-6 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him

who loves us, and washed us from our sins by his blood; (6) and he made us to be a Kingdom, priests to his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 2:26-27 He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. (27) He will rule them with a rod of iron, shattering them like clay pots; as I also have received of my Father:

Revelation 5:9-10 They sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the book, and to open its seals: for you were killed, and bought us for God with your blood, out of every tribe, language, people, and nation, (10) and made us kings and priests to our God, and we will reign on earth."

That nation will be the real holy and great nation, a nation of kings and priests, which will rule the world. Thus, the greatest fulfillment of this promise to Abraham is through the One Seed Christ Jesus, and through Christ Jesus the promise will be literally fulfilled in the Church when Christ returns.

18.8) The Second Part: A Huge Number of Descendants

Genesis 13:16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then your seed may also be numbered.

Genesis 15:5-6 Yahweh brought him outside, and said, "Look now toward the sky, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." He said to Abram, "So shall your seed be." (6) He believed in Yahweh; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 22:17-18 that I will bless you greatly, and I will multiply your seed greatly like the stars of the heavens, and like the sand which is on the seashore. Your seed will possess the gate of his enemies. (18) In your seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Old Testament Israel was a fulfillment to God's promise of a huge number of descendants for Abraham.

Deuteronomy 1:10 Yahweh your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are this day as the stars of the sky for multitude.

2 Chronicles 1:9 Now, Yahweh God, let your promise to David my father be established; for you have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude.

Hebrews 11:12 Therefore as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as innumerable as the sand which is by the sea shore, were fathered by one man, and him as good as dead.

But God's promise to Abraham remains to be fulfilled in a much greater way through the One Seed, and therefore through those who abide in Christ. God's promise to Abraham was fulfilled literally in the Old Testament, so we can reasonably assume the promise will also be fulfilled literally through the One Seed. Therefore, those who abide in Christ, and thus overcome all sin, will inherit eternal life. They will be counted as the true descendants of Abraham.

Romans 9:7a Neither, because they are Abraham's seed, are they all children.

18.9) The Third Part of the Promise: The Land of Israel

Genesis 12:7 Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your seed." He built an altar there to Yahweh, who appeared to him.

Genesis 13:14-15 Yahweh said to Abram, after Lot was separated from him, "Now, lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, (15) for all the land which you see, I will give to you, and to your offspring forever.

Genesis 15:7 He said to him, "I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it."

Genesis 15:18 In that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.

Genesis 17:8 I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land where you are traveling, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession. I will be their God."

Old Testament fulfillment was literal, but partial. Therefore, the final literal and complete fulfillment must be through the One Seed. Those who abide in Christ,

and thus overcome all sin, will inherit all the land in the Middle East. Jerusalem will be the capital of the world, and we reign as kings and priests with Christ. Of course that does not mean we will all be dwelling in the land promised to Abraham. We will dwell in the New Jerusalem, which is Paradise, in orbit around the earth.

Revelation 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of my God.

Revelation 3:12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will go out from there no more. I will write on 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 own new name.

Chapter 19

Science and the Bible

Dispensationalists separate Israel from the Church. They see two distinct purposes of God in the two groups. The Church, they say, has a heavenly purpose, and Israel has an earthly purpose. However, this earthly purpose seems to be very anticlimactic. The earthly purpose, according to dispensationalists, is to fulfill Old Testament promises that God made to the Old Testament patriarchs, such as Abraham. It's to fulfill God's promises to the Jews. Yes, promises are important. But what was the purpose of the promises?

God's purpose all along has been the redemption of Man. In this purpose, God has a plan. And it's not a plan in which the first steps were somehow unneeded, and simply remain as promises that have to be fulfilled. Israel is not a carryover from old promises that do not directly bring about God's purpose of the redemption of Man. The redemption of Man happens only in Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and in our need to overcome sin as a response to God's love and sacrifice, with the help of the Holy Spirit. God's purpose is the union between God and all of God's children, but only those who will have Him.

Unlike the dispensational claim, the separation of people during the millennium is not between the Church and Israel. The separation is between those who will have overcome sin through Christ by the time of the resurrection, and those who haven't as yet matured in Christ. And of course the resurrected will include those who died having not yet heard about Christ.

Christ left the earth to prepare a place for us, rooms (or dwelling-places) in the Father's house. These dwelling-places are for His Bride, which is the Church (John 14:2-3). It's only reasonable to assume these dwelling-places will be ready for us when Christ returns. These rooms are in the Father's house. How can those living in the Father's house coexist with those living on the earth after the resurrection? The meek will inherit the earth. So heaven must come to the earth. The New Jerusalem will need to be in orbit around the earth during the millennium. However, to be in orbit around the earth is using the terminology of science, not the Bible! Is science the solution for solving a problem of Scripture?

When the New Jerusalem appears in orbit around the earth, two groups of people are going to be very surprised. The scientists will be very surprised to see aliens with very great science and technology aligning themselves with God, Jesus

Christ and the overcoming of sin. Theologians will be very surprised to see the New Jerusalem appear as a literal space ship instead of a vague description of eternity. They will also be surprised to see it come before the heavens and the earth are destroyed by fire and before the new heavens and the new earth.

Science and the Bible must come together because both are literally true. However, the Bible is not a book of science. The Bible was written by people who did not understand today's science. The Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit. What was written is without doctrinal error from the perspective of their understanding. The Holy Spirit gave these men understandings about God, and they wrote what they understood. Since they did not understand science, they did not write about science. Therefore, the Bible should not be used to argue science. It would be taking the statements out of context.

The one exception to the rule that the Bible must be understood by its authors is in the area of prophetic visions. For example, Daniel said he didn't understand the visions given to him (Daniel 7:28, 8:27, 12:8). Perhaps one reason for this is that an understanding of science is required before we can understand how God will carry out the latter part of his plans to redeem Man. Even the simple concept of the New Jerusalem being in orbit around the earth would have been difficult for Daniel, Paul, and John to understand.

To bring science and the Bible together, we must explore issues of heaven and the universe. Are they the same or different? Will the entire universe be destroyed when the heavens and the earth is destroyed? Why are the heavens plural? What was the seven days of the Creation? Did God create space and time? Is Christ the firstborn of the Universe?

19.1) Jerusalem, The Foundation of Peace

The word Jerusalem means "Foundation of Peace." When has Jerusalem ever lived up to its namesake? The reign of Jesus Christ is the only true means to lasting peace. But is that lasting peace realized through the Old Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem, or both? The writer of Hebrews seems to speak of both the city in the land promised to Abraham, and the city in heaven.

Hebrews 11:8-10 ESV By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. (10)

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:16 ESV But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Hebrews 12:22-23a ESV But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, (23) and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.

Hebrews 13:14 ESV For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

There are two cities called Jerusalem. One is in heaven; the other is here on earth. Both will be the “Foundation of Peace” through Jesus Christ.

19.2) Heaven is Up, Sheol (Hades) is Down

We speak of heaven as being up because that’s the way the Bible speaks of it (Genesis 6:17, 7:19, 15:5, 19:24, 22:11, 22:17, 26:4, 28:12, 49:25, Exodus 9:22-23, 10:21-22, 16:4, 20:4, 32:13, Deuteronomy 1:10, 1:28, 2:25, 4:19, 4:39, 5:8, 7:24, 9:1, 9:14, 10:22, 11:11, 17:3, 25:19, 28:24, 28:62, 29:20, 30:12, 32:40, 33:13). The sun, moon and stars are in heaven (Gen. 15:5, 22:17, 26:4, Exodus 32:13, Deuteronomy 1:10, 3:19, 10:22, 28:62). The Bible also speaks of Sheol (Hades) as being in the down direction (Genesis 37:35, 42:38, 44:29, 44:31, Numbers 16:30, 16:33, Deuteronomy 32:22).

Over time, men like Copernicus (1473-1543), Galileo (1564-1642), Kepler (1572-1630), Newton (1642-1727), Einstein (1879-1955), and Hubble (1889-1953), to name but a few, have profoundly changed our understanding of science and the universe. Today we know and understand the physics and mathematical formulas of how the moon, planets, stars, and galaxies move through the universe. And we routinely send men and women into orbit around the earth. Are these astronauts ascending into heaven? Based on the concept of heaven, as understood by the Bible writers, today’s astronauts do ascend into heaven. We have telescopes in heaven that study the vast reaches of the heavens.

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the word for ‘heaven’ and ‘sky’ is the same word. Ancient Bible writers did not distinguish heaven from what they saw when they looked up at the night-time sky, or up at the sun, moon, and

stars (Genesis 15:5, Deuteronomy 4:15, 17:3, Jeremiah 8:2). For example, the word 'heaven' in Genesis 1:1 is the same as the word 'sky' in Genesis 1:8. Many translations, including the ESV and the KJV, even use the word 'heaven' in verse 8.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:8 God called the expanse sky. There was evening and there was morning, a second day.

In the Hebrew, these two are the same word. The same is true in New Testament Greek. The word for 'heaven' and the word of 'sky' is the same word. For example, in Matthew 16:2-3, Jesus talks about the weather. This is in response to the Pharisees and Sadducees wanting Jesus to show them a sign from heaven.

Matthew 16:1-3 NIV The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. (2) He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' (3) and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

The Greek word for "heaven" in verse 1 is the same as the Greek word for "sky" in verses 2 and 3. Why did the NIV translators feel the need to use a different word? The ESV and the KJV translators also used "sky" in verses 2 and 3. Yet Matthew would probably not have made a distinction. Matthew, and the other writers of Scripture, believed heaven is what we see when we look at the sky.

Most theologians today, however, have redefined heaven. Heaven is considered to be a "spiritual realm" outside the visible universe. As astronomers have learned to understand the universe, our understanding of heaven has shifted to be outside the physical universe. But does Scripture support this shift in understanding? Or have theologians consciously or sub-consciously taken steps to avoid overlaps with science? Are the sun, moon, and stars really in heaven, as explicitly stated by Scripture? Or were the authors of the Bible simply too ignorant and mistakenly included the sun, moon, and stars as being in heaven?

Some would point out that the world is not flat, and the earth is not at the center of the universe. Likewise, there are Bible verses that were thought to say the earth does not move, thus it's at the center of the universe (Psalms 96:10, 104:5, 1 Chronicles 16:30, Ecclesiastics 1:5). And there are verses that were thought to

say the earth is flat (Isaiah 11:12, Ezekiel 7:2, Revelation 7:1, 20:8). Of course similar verses could be used to say that heaven is flat (Jeremiah 48:35, Daniel 7:2, 8:8, 11:4, Zechariah 2:6, 6:5, Matthew 24:31, Mark 13:27).

All of these verses can be interpreted in a way that does not make statements about science. Indeed, the Bible should not be used to assert statements about science. But by the same token, theologians should not let science change our understanding about theology. The existence of heaven is a statement of theology. God and the angels are in heaven. And if the Bible states that the stars are also in heaven, then that's what we should believe. There is no need to assume the existence of a spiritual realm, apart from the universe, of which neither the Bible nor science teaches. It's better to simply believe what the authors of the Bible believed and wrote about heaven.

Heaven is in the up direction. The earth is round. Therefore up, from everywhere on earth, covers the entire universe. Sheol (Hades) is in the down direction. The earth is round. Therefore down, from everywhere on earth, is the middle of the earth.

Can there literally be a "bottomless pit?" (Revelation 9:1-2, 9:11, 11:7, 17:8, 20:1) If a spirit were to fall, without being stopped by the ground, then he would fall to the center of the earth. At that point momentum would cause the spirit to keep going right on past the center until earth's gravitation reversed his fall. Then he would return back to the center again, repeating the process over and over. Perhaps some amount of friction might slow the fall down, to eventually stop in the middle. Or perhaps the spirit would continue to fall forever. In either case, there is no bottom. The spirit would just keep falling. This "pit" would not have a bottom to stop the fall. Is the molten lava that's in the center of the earth in reality the "lake of fire?" (Revelation 18:20, 20:10, 20:14-15, 21:8).

19.3) The Seven Heavens

Once we get past our preconception of heaven being a spiritual realm, outside the universe, then the idea of the New Jerusalem being in orbit around the earth begins to make sense. The New Jerusalem is a very large spaceship. Paul visited it (whether in body or in spirit) when he went to the third heaven.

2 Corinthians 12:2-7 ESV I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. (3) And I know that this man was caught up into paradise--whether in the body or

out of the body I do not know, God knows-- (4) and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. (5) On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. (6) Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. (7) So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

Paul was given a great understanding about heaven. He apparently visited the New Jerusalem while it was in the “third heaven.” Paul apparently knew a lot more about heaven than he was allowed to share.

We should interpret Paul’s reference to the third heaven in light of ancient Jewish literature. In Paula Gooder’s book titled, “Only the Third Heaven?: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 And Heavenly Ascent,” pages 184-186, Gooder writes:

There is no agreed number of heavens in the extra-biblical Jewish literature. 4 *Ezra* and 2 *Baruch* mention only one, the *Midrash on Psalm 114* and *Babylonian Hagigah* 12b seem to refer to two: ‘heaven and the heaven of heavens’. One version of the *Testament of Levi* 3.1 mentions three, as does the *Apocalypse of Moses* (known also as the *Life of Adam and Eve*). 3 *Baruch* refers to five heavens. Another, later version of the *Testament of Levi*, *Slavonic Enoch* 20, The *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the *Ascension of Isaiah* 6-9, *Babylonian Hagigah* 12a and *Sepher Hekhalot* speak of seven heavens, while *Slavonic Enoch* 21-2 presents 10 and *Sepher Hekhalot* 48.1 955. However, a detailed examination of these texts reveals that the situation is not quite as diverse as scholars such as Lincoln have assumed.

Skipping three paragraphs, Gooder continues (underline mine):

The *Apocalypse of Moses* also refers to ‘the third heaven’. The relationship between this text and the *Life of Adam and Eve* is odd. They recount essentially different stories but do so within the same framework of the life of Adam and Eve immediately after they had been evicted from paradise. Scholars believe that they are connected and are translations of the same Hebrew text which is no longer extant. The Greek *Apocalypse of Moses* is important here

for it mentions the third heaven in conjunction with paradise. There is no need to assume, however, that this is the highest heaven. God says 'Take him up into paradise, in the third heaven' (37.5), this does not necessarily imply that God is also there. Furthermore in 35.2, a reference is made to seven heavens: 'Look with your eyes and see the seven heavens opened.' This text, therefore, presents a cosmology closer to *Slavonic Enoch*, in which paradise is located in three out of seven heavens.

Skipping three paragraphs, Gooder summarizes (underline mine):

The re-examination of the cosmology of numerous texts containing heavens with multiple levels has produced interesting results. By far the most dominant belief appears to be in a seven-heaven cosmology. Systems containing 3, 5, 10 and 955 heavens are all problematic to some extent. The only text which refers with certainty to three heavens may have been condensed from a seven-heaven model. The text which has five heavens contain no throne vision, so there is no certainty that the fifth is the highest heaven. Accounts with ten heavens seem to be an expansion from an original seven-heaven model and 955 heavens appears to be gematria on the word heaven. The presence of seven levels in heaven appears most consistently in these texts. Given this and given that Paul refers to the third heaven alongside paradise, which in *Slavonic Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Moses* is the third out of seven heavens, it is at least possible that Paul here refers not to an ascent to the highest heaven but to the third out of seven heavens.

We should not raise the authority of extra-biblical text to the level of Scripture. However, we should also interpret Paul's statement in the context of ancient Jewish literature. Paul was a Pharisee. Words such as "third heaven" have meaning in a given culture and religious training. Therefore, we should interpret Paul's use of "third heaven" in the context of the Jewish beliefs of that time.

It would seem, therefore, that Paul believed in seven levels of heaven. And Paradise (the New Jerusalem) is at the third level. How does this reconcile with what we know of the universe today, thanks to astronomy and science?

We can assume that each level of heaven is further and further out, away from the earth. We can also assume that the seventh level is related to God's location or origin. Of course God, the Holy Spirit, is present everywhere. However, these

seven levels would seem to imply a special location for God in the seventh level. And all the Jewish literature about the seventh level would agree.

Astronomers also divide the universe based on the distance from the earth, and based on what is in orbit around larger and larger spaces. Working along the same lines as astronomers, the first level of heaven would be the orbit around the earth. The moon is in the first heaven. The second heaven is the solar system. It's everything that's in the orbit around the sun. All the planets are in the second heaven. The third heaven is the neighboring stars that are relatively close to our solar system. The fourth heaven is our entire galaxy. The fifth heaven is all the galaxies that are relatively close. And the sixth heaven is the entire universe.

Einstein's general theory of relativity predicted that the universe is either expanding or contracting. Hubble proved it is expanding. Einstein's equations say that originally the universe was a singularity. Space and time did not exist. The universe was "created" at the "Big Bang." You can't describe a time before the Big Bang, because time itself didn't exist. What caused the big-bang? Scientists do not know. But something (or someone) must have created the universe from outside the universe. God is outside space and time. Therefore, God's existence outside of space and time is the seventh heaven. It's beyond, or outside, the entire universe.

Therefore, one might argue the seventh heaven is really a spiritual realm, outside the four dimensions of space and time. However, it's probably not a place where humans or angels can go. We can't even imagine existence without space and time. And God is outside of space and time. Therefore, God knows the future and the past as one.

The Trinity has been said to be a doctrine that cannot be understood. How can there be three persons who are all God, and yet there is only one God? This science oriented view of the seven levels of heaven might provide some insight.

Think of God as originating outside of space and time; outside the universe. The Father loves us, but does not experience space and time as we do. The Holy Spirit "proceeds" (ESV) from the Father (John 15:26). He "goes out from the Father" (NIV). The Holy Spirit exists throughout the universe. The Holy Spirit can fill us. So the Holy Spirit experiences space and time. The Son has physical form. There is also Scriptural evidence that the Father has physical form inside the universe. We are created in the image of Christ. This makes God be three distinct persons. But at the same time, all three are one God, originating from outside the universe of space and time.

19.4) The New Jerusalem Comes Down From Heaven

Paul went to Paradise, which is the New Jerusalem, in the third heaven. This would be outside the solar system. It might or might not be near neighboring stars. I believe the New Jerusalem will (or has already) traveled back to the solar system and will appear in earth's orbit. This is the heavenly "city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). Jesus will return as that city returns. Those who are in Christ will be given rooms in that city. We will dwell in heaven, in that city, with Christ. And at the same time, we will reign with Christ over the nations here on the earth.

Also, with regard to the seven heavens, we should note that Scripture often refers to the heavens in the plural. "In the beginning, God created the heavens (plural) and the earth."

Revelation tells us the New Jerusalem will come down from heaven.

Revelation 3:12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will go out from there no more. I will write on 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 own new name.

Revelation 21:2 I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband.

If there is only one heaven, and if heaven is in a "spiritual realm" outside the universe, then one might think the New Jerusalem will come down and sit on the earth. Remember, however, the Jews believed Paradise is at the third heaven. With seven heavens, these verses can simply mean the New Jerusalem comes down from the third heaven to the first heaven.

Also, the New Jerusalem is far too big to practically sit on the earth. It is 1400 miles high. If it were sitting on the earth, it would extend well into space. It would be much more practical for it to stay in space.

Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable multitudes of angels,

Hebrews 13:14 For we don't have here an enduring city, but we seek that which is to come.

19.5) The Seven Days of Creation

Probably the biggest dispute between scientists and some conservative theologians involves the seven days of the Creation in Genesis. Proponents of literal Biblical creationism believe the earth and the rest of the entire universe were created in six 24-hour days, and that it all happened about six thousand years ago. The attempt is to force science into a very specific interpretation of Genesis.

Many conservative theologians, on the other hand, see alternate ways of interpreting Scripture and yet still believe in the inerrancy of Scripture and in literal interpretation for the given context. For example, many see a “gap” between the creation of the heavens and the earth and the first day.

Genesis 1:1-5 ESV In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (2) The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (3) And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (4) And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. (5) God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Does the first day begin with verse 1 or verse 3? For each of the six days, God gives a command and his Word becomes reality. God’s verbal command for the first day was, “Let there be light.” Before this, “darkness was over the surface of the deep.” This seven-day story of the creation seems to pick up long after the heavens and the earth had already been created.

This reasonable and literal interpretation of Genesis 1 better fits the “Big Bang” theory of science. The universe was “created” at the “Big Bang.” Scientists believe this was about 13.7 billion years ago. The creation of the solar system and the earth was much later.

Man has always tended to interpret Scripture along the lines of the universe being created solely for the purpose of Man. Perhaps this is part of our sinful and arrogant nature. The Bible tells us about angels. So we assume God created the angels for the sole purpose of servicing us. This was not helped by the visual illusion that the earth doesn’t move, and that the sun, planets, and stars appear to move around us.

The Bible was used to support this mistake with verses like, "The world is also established. It can't be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity" (Psalms 96:10,

104:5, 1 Chronicles 16:30, Ecclesiastes 1:5). It's not too hard to see how people have taken these verses out of context and applied them to science. The Bible is not a book of science, even though it's doctrinally inerrant. It was written and understood by authors who didn't understand even the basics of science.

The creation story of Genesis 1 was not written to give us the scientific details about the origin of the universe and the earth. It was written in a way that was understandable by men who looked up and saw the illusion of the planets and stars moving around us. The purpose of Genesis 1 was not to explain the scientific truth, but to show us the importance of understanding that God is the Creator. Therefore, as we learn more about science, it's reasonable to interpret the seven days of creation based on what we know of science. This is done without alternating the doctrinal truth of what's being said. We should not force old traditional understandings of Genesis which were based on Man's arrogant assumption that we are the center of God's Creation of the universe. But we are the center of God's creation of our own Solar System.

With a "gap" of billions of years between the creation of the universe and the first day of the seven, then it's obvious that Man was not the sole purpose of God's Creation of the heavens. There can be many other species of intelligent life in this vast universe that God created. The universe and the angels existed before the first day of the seven. Forcing the first day to begin with verse 1 is simply the last in a series of misinterpretations that arrogantly assumed Man is at the center of God's purpose in creating the universe.

The scientist tends to think from a mind's-eye perspective of outside the system looking in. Early men, however, looked up at the sky and wondered. They would have tended to think about how it all began from the perspective of earth and looking up into the heavens. What would happen if we were to interpret the six days of the creation from this perspective? Let's look at it from the perspective of the universe already being here at the time of the first day.

Prior to the first day, the solar system was still a lot of gases rotating around the center. In other words, the earth was still "without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep." The sun in the middle had not yet reached a high enough density for the hydrogen to begin atomic fusion. The earth had heavier materials down deep and lighter materials higher up. Water was everywhere. The Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.

1) God said, "Let there be light" (1:3). The density of the sun reached the point where the hydrogen began atomic fusion. The sun began to emit light. However, the earth still had thick clouds. There was light, but you could not see the sun. Remember that the seven days of the creation is not the creation of the universe. It's the creation of the solar system. It's from the perspective of what you would see from earth looking up at the heavens.

2) God said, "Let there be an expanse in the middle of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters" (1:6). The atmosphere began to be more separated from the solid earth below it. This atmosphere was up from the earth. So it would become known as heaven. God called the expanse above the earth heaven. Of course the universe had already existed for billions of years. Water is either a vapor, a liquid, or solid (ice). Mostly the water was vapor. Slowly the water vapor began to cool and became the liquid oceans on the surface of the earth. Liquid water covered the entire earth.

3a) God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together to one place, and let the dry land appear" (1:9). The volcanic activity of the earth was tremendous. Off-the-chart earthquakes were constant. Volcanic lava flowed into the oceans, building up in some areas beneath the seas. The plates shifted quickly because of the tremendous volcanic activity. Slowly, the land began to emerge from below the sea level. The plates continued to shift, forming the continents as they quickly separated. The volcanic activity was still intense. The sky was constantly filled with volcanic smoke. The sun could not be seen anywhere on the earth.

3b) God said, "Let the earth put forth grass, herbs yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with its seed in it, on the earth" (1:11). Finally, the volcanic activity subsided enough for plant life to grow. This is not evolution. The plants didn't evolve from sea life. The plants were simply planted on earth when the earth was ready for them. It is possible the original planting was done by the angels in Paradise (the New Jerusalem). Paradise means "enclosed garden."

4) God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of sky to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of sky to give light on the earth" (1:14-15). With the volcanic activity subsiding, the smoke in the atmosphere finally starts to clear. For the first time, the sun, moon, and stars can be seen from the earth. The sun was not created in the first day. God simply said, "Let there be light." Likewise, the stars were not created in the fourth day. God simply said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of sky."

5) God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of sky" (1:20 ESV). By this point, the seas have cooled down enough to support life. So the angels in Paradise start putting fish in the sea. The air has cleared up enough for birds to fly. So the angels start releasing birds on the earth.

6a) God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind, livestock, creeping things, and animals of the earth after their kind" (1:24). As the earth settles down, it can support more and more life. Also, the plants, fish, and birds were given a chance to multiply before other animals were released that would prey on eggs and fish. In other words, the order of plants and animals involves wise choices for building a world-wide balanced systems of nature.

6b) God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (1:26).

The plural use of "our image" and "our likeness" has been attributed to the Trinity. And this could be true. But it could also be interpreted as Christ giving instructions to the angels in Paradise. The plural nature of image and likeness could include the angels. Both Christ, called Yahweh, and two angels appeared to Abraham before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed (Genesis 18:1-2). All three were perceived as men. Therefore, both angels and men have the image of Jesus Christ, called Yahweh. The Father is also Yahweh.

In each of the six days of Creation, God said to let something be done, and it was done. Traditionally this is interpreted as the very words of God causing creation to occur. But it can also be interpreted as the angels being involved in carrying out the commands of God. If the angels in Paradise were involved, technology could have been used to help form the solar system, and to seed the earth with life.

Jesus Christ, as commander of this huge space ship, could have given the command to "let there be light." This is not creating matter out of nothing. The matter was created when God created the universe at the "Big Bang." The first day commandment was to speed up the process of gravity to form the sun.

19.6) Did Angels Seed the Earth?

The original Bible authors, and the ancient world as a whole, believed heaven is the sky. It's the universe that we see. In the 16th century Galileo and Copernicus started to convince us, by the use of science and technology, that the earth is not the center of the universe. The Church began to shift heaven to a spiritual realm in response. This effectively allow the earth to remain as heaven's center of focus. However, I consider this belief to be a non-Biblical 16th century tradition. If I'm right about this, then angels are aliens. And demons would be rebel aliens.

Today, the evidence for UFOs and aliens is so strong that many Christian groups have acknowledged that they exist, but will often associate them with the demonic. Because of the strong tradition that heaven is in a separate spiritual realm, these Christian groups tend to say that UFOs are not from other worlds, but come from another dimension or a parallel universe. But even science is very vague and speculative about the existence of parallel universes. I consider it much more likely that angels and demons are from this universe.

These same Christian groups will say that when the existence of aliens is fully disclosed to the public, that it will be the "great deception" of 2 Thessalonians 2. I partly agree. However, these Christian groups will claim that these aliens are demons from another dimension, and that it's a lie that they are aliens from another world. But what if the demons (fallen angels) really are from another world? In effect, the fallen angels claim to be "like" God. These fallen angels will claim that they made (seeded) us. This is definitely the same as the original lie from the Garden of Eden. Satan wants us to dismiss God and look to Satan for guidance. The Bible makes it clear that we are not to worship angels. So in principle, I would agree with these Christian groups. But where I would disagree, is that I think the demons really are aliens from another world. But these aliens will be in rebellion against the angels, which are also aliens from another world.

The Bible is not a book of science. It's all true, but it was written to an audience that has no understanding about science and modern-day astronomy. I'm a computer programmer. When I try to explain how software works to someone who has never programmed, I have to use allegories and metaphors. Even when talking to each other, computer programmers use allegories and metaphors. The same problem would exist in trying to explain the creation to people who had absolutely no knowledge of science and technology.

Since the Bible is not a book of science, there is not going to be a verse that explicitly states angels are aliens. No verse explicitly states the angels seeded the earth. But I do have a few verses below to consider.

I'm a big fan of Intelligent Design. This is a theory held by scientists who see the need for a designer based on science itself. Of course they are also Christians. But they are not trying to force science to fit old traditional interpretations of Scripture that were understood from before we understood science as we do today. Intelligent Design endorses the old-earth view. But it does not endorse evolution.

Another interesting point argued by Intelligent Design is that the earth itself might be very unique in the universe. We are just the right distance from the sun for H₂O to be liquid. Water is need for life. The earth has a magnetic field that filters out solar radiation, which would otherwise kill all life on the earth. And the earth is in a position in the galaxy that has a lot less cosmic rays, which would also be very deadly to life. Plus, the huge amount of water on the earth is probably very unusual. Without the vast amount of oceans, we would not have much rain. And rain is needed for life. Also, the atmosphere, with oxygen and carbon dioxide, is necessary for life.

For these reasons, I think the earth itself was designed. I think it was intentionally made by the angels (aliens). And the seven days of the creation is about the formation of the solar system and the earth using technology. The angels didn't create the matter in the solar system. They simply pushed the right gasses and rocks together to form the planets in a way that would support life.

Does that go against Scripture? God created the heavens and the earth. But how often does God do things through His servants? Also, who is the King of the angels? Since Christ is the King of the angels, and since Christ is God, then if it's true that the angels used technology to form the solar system, it would not be false to say that God did these things. When I get sick and go to the doctor, technology is used to help me get better. But I still give thanks and praise to God for healing me. We do not worship doctors. And we do not worship angels. But even if angels were responsible for the design and formation of our solar system, we give the credit and worship to God.

With our technology today, we could go to a primitive tribe and convince them we are gods – to get them to worship us. But that would be an evil thing to do. Angels direct all worship to Christ. But fallen angels would want to be worshiped because of their abilities. These abilities are at least in part based on technology.

Author C. Clarke's third law is: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

Could this same thinking also be applied to our bodies? Intelligent Design scientists say that DNA is strong evidence that our bodies were designed. As a computer programmer, I can easily imagine a programming language for DNA. The compiler would convert the programs into DNA code. If angels were involved in designing the DNA of our bodies, does that mean God had no part in it? What about our souls? The DNA difference between humans and chimps is only about three percent. And yet our minds make us far superior to the chimps. I don't think our ability to create comes from our DNA. I think our ability to create comes from our souls. So I have no problem with the idea that angel technology could have been used to design life, including our bodies.

Genesis 2:7 ESV Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

I think that when God breathed the breath of life into man, that God was putting a soul into the body. I think it's even possible that men existed prior to Adam, but that they lived like animals because they were animals. They may have even used a few tools. But animals have been shown to use a few tools. The huge difference between man and animal is the soul, breathed into us by God the Father. So it's possible that the angels were involved in seeding the earth with all kinds of life. But God breathed a soul into Adam.

Genesis 1:26 ESV Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Why is God speaking of himself in the plural? Some say it's because of the Trinity. I consider that to be a weak argument. Christ, the King of the angels, has an image. But the Holy Spirit and God the Father do not have images. They are Spirit. This verse makes much more sense if Christ is saying this to the angels. And we know the angels look like men. So we have the same image.

Keep in mind that the verse about God making man in "our image" comes from Genesis 1, and the verse about God breathing a soul into Adam is from Genesis 2-3. There is one noteworthy difference between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3. In Genesis 1, the name of God used is Elohim. In Genesis 2, the name most

often used is Jehovah God, which is Jehovah Elohim. Elohim is a plural name for God. The Whittaker's Revised BDB definition for Elohim is:

pl. in number. a. rulers, judges, either as divine representatives at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power. b. divine ones, superhuman beings including God and angels. c. angels;

Elohim is plural. However, singular verbs are used. This definition (above) is for when plural verbs are used. Is there one God, or are there many gods? Obviously there is one God. The singular verbs show us there is one God. However, God may use angels to perform some of his works (verb actions). I believe that's what is being shown when Elohim (plural) is connected to a singular verb. It's the singular act of God, carried out by multiple angels.

This is different from pagan gods. The angels are not to be considered as gods and worshiped. And Jesus Christ is their commander. It's like the actions of an army soldiers being attributed to the general, when all the general did was give the commands. The angels act on behalf of the One God. Therefore, it's appropriate to attribute their collective actions to the One God. Yet the soldiers are many. The angels, with the help of the advanced technology in Paradise, probably did the work involved in the six days of the Creation.

Thus Genesis 1 simply uses Elohim. Whereas, Genesis 2-3 mostly uses Jehovah Elohim. In Genesis 1, the things that were done could have been done with very advanced technology. But in Genesis 2-3, with the Garden of Eden, Adam was created and given a soul. The soul would only come directly from God. Also, the Genesis 2-3 story tells us about Adam's personal talks with Jehovah Elohim. This would not have been talks with angels. Adam walked and talked in the Garden with Christ himself.

The exception to the use of Jehovah Elohim in Genesis 2-3 is when the serpent tempted Eve. At this point, Elohim is used four times consecutively in verses 3:1-4. After the temptation, the text goes back to using Jehovah Elohim. Could this be Satan's deceptive reference to the angels? Satan didn't say Eve would be God. Satan said Eve would be like God. Satan, as an angel, probably tried to make Eve believe that Satan was speaking on God's behalf. Perhaps Eve was better tempted if Satan made her believe she could be like the angels and be a part of God's host of angels in that way. But it was not a temptation to serve God like the angels. It was a temptation to have the power of the angels for self-service. That's the knowledge of good and evil.

We must overcome self before we can be given the power of God in technology. I believe that God is allowing us to develop some technology today. But that's because this is the end-time generation. At the start of World War II, we developed the atomic bomb. This end-time generation is the generation that will see the coming of Christ, and the technology of this generation is just the beginning of the technology that will come in the millennium, during the next thousand years. But God cannot allow unlimited technology to remain in the hands of evil people. Technology is the power of the angels. But the angels must live without sin in order to use this technology in accordance to God's will.

There is one other verse to consider. But in preparation of looking at this verse, consider the pattern of the seven days of the creation. Four days are for creating the heavens and the earth. Two days are for creating abundant life. And one day is for rest. This pattern can also be seen in the seven trumpets and seven bowls in Revelation. But in Revelation it's about destruction instead of creation. I believe that Paradise is the Father's house. We are promised "rooms." In the Father's house are many "rooms." More precisely we are promised dwelling places. So Paradise is a place of rest. Also, in Hebrews it talks about God saying, "They will never enter my rest." And in this context, the seven days of creation is being discussed. So I think that being able to enter into the New Jerusalem is entering God's rest.

Consider the seven days of creation, and the fact that Paradise is like the Garden of Eden. Could the seven days suggest that there is more than one space vehicle? Was Paradise the only space vehicle that was involved in the formation of the solar system? Or could there have been seven space vehicles? Remember that when Paradise appears, it will make everyone on earth tremble. Here is a verse about four things which will appear and make everyone on earth tremble:

Zechariah 1:16-21 Therefore thus says Yahweh: "I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it," says Yahweh of Armies, "and a line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem." ' (17) "Proclaim further, saying, "Thus says Yahweh of Armies: "My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and Yahweh will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem." ' " (18) I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, four horns. (19) I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these?" He answered me, "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." (20) Yahweh showed me four craftsmen. (21) Then I asked, "What are these coming to do?" He said, "These are the horns which

scattered Judah, so that no man lifted up his head; but these have come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations, which lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it."

The four horns that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem are Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and Rome. The four craftsmen will terrify specifically these four nations as well as all the others. How do four "craftsmen" terrify the nations? The KJV translates it as "carpenters". They are builders. Could these four builders be very large space vehicles that have the technology to move gasses and rocks around in the solar system, to form the solar system and the planets? Four men who are carpenters would not make the nations tremble. But four space vehicles designed for building planets would make the nations tremble.

I tend to think there are seven space vehicles associated with the creation. Four are for forming the heavens and the earth (within a solar system.) Two are for growing and seeding life. It would be like two big zoos in space. And one would be for the dwelling places, the home, the resting place, which is Paradise.

19.7) Life Did Not Evolve

In science, theory becomes fact as reproducible tests are developed which convincingly support the theory. This has not been the case with macro evolution. There is no convincing evidence that species evolve from lower forms of life. And there is no reasonable theory as to how the first single-cell life could have spontaneously formed with the complexity that is necessary to reproduce.

Evolution is based upon small incremental improvements through "survival of the fittest." This requires reproduction. And there is no way for the complexity of the single cell that can reproduce to have come about without the reproduction of less-complex cells. The amount of complexity that is necessary for reproduction is huge. Therefore, it cannot evolve in small steps. In other words, evolution is not a valid science.

Some evolutionists have conceded that perhaps life didn't evolve on this planet. Earth was seeded by aliens. (With this I agree. Earth was seeded by the angels.) However, this allows evolutionists to again theorize that life evolved on other planets. Thus, evolution is pushed even further into un-provable grounds.

With evolution happening on other planets, evolution becomes a topic of pure conjecture, just like the existence of God as viewed by evolutionists. The Big Bang has strong scientific evidence. But evolution has no scientific evidence.

The universe was created. Whatever or whoever caused the Big Bang is God. And it's impossible for us to understand who or what God is, because we cannot understand anything outside the context of space and time. We cannot even ask the question of whether God had a beginning, because the question itself is a question about time. Space and time did not exist before the Big Bang.

Without evolution, intelligence is required in order to create life. Life is based on the software of DNA. It required intelligence to write DNA software. Where did the original intelligence come from? It came from God, of course. God came into the universe He had created.

Colossians 1:13-17 ESV He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. (17) And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Does this mean that high-tech computers and DNA software were used to create human beings? I believe technology can make our physical bodies, but not our minds. We have souls that give us creative abilities which cannot be reproduced in high-tech computers or in bodies of flesh. There is a huge difference between the mental abilities of man and that of primate animals. Yet the difference in DNA is less than three percent. This would indicate that our mental superiority does not come from DNA software. I believe that souls come from outside the universe, from God. The origins of souls cannot be understood any more than the origins of God. Our souls continue to exist even if our bodies are destroyed, because our souls come directly from the Father, from outside the universe.

Genesis 2:7 Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Notice that God does two things here. First, God formed man from the dust of the ground. Then, God breathed on him and the man became a living creature. This distinguishes the man from the living creature or creation. The picture of Yahweh God breathing directly on Adam tells us that God the Holy Spirit was much more directly involved in the creation of Adam than in the six days where God simply gives commands that were done.

19.8) The Two Stories of the Creation

In the sixth day, man was created male and female. It's possible that men were created without souls and lived for some time before Adam was created with a soul. They would have been as advanced as animals can be without souls. They may have even used tools in a primitive way. But they would not have had creative abilities and the advanced understanding that is needed for advanced natural language, or for knowing about God.

Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 have been criticized as being contradictory. In Genesis 2-3, Adam is created before the animals. Then Eve is created after the animals. In Genesis 1, man is created both male and female on the same day. Also, it's been said that the time between Adam's creation and Eve's creation, in Genesis 2-3, must be more than one day.

Literal Biblical creationists have strongly argued that each of the seven days are 24-hour days. They point out that other uses of the word 'day' in Scripture are talking about 24 hours. However, Genesis 2:4 uses the word 'day' in a way that clearly indicates an age or time.

Genesis 2:4 This is the history of the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens.

Did it take one 24-hour day to create the earth and the heavens? Most literal Biblical creationists say it took six 24-hour days. Is a "history of generations" talking about one 24-hour day? The only way to resolve this discrepancy is to allow for the word "day" to mean a time period. If the word 'day' in Genesis 2:4 means a time period, then the same word 'day' in Genesis 1 should also mean a time period. These time periods can be long. They do not have to be the same length. They are simply steps of the process.

It's entirely possible the seven days, including the seventh day of rest, occurred many years before the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2-3 is all about the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2 may have happened six thousand years ago, while the seven days may have occurred billions of years prior.

Genesis 1 is all about the long process that it took to form the earth and the solar system. The sixth day included man, male and female. But these men may not have had souls. They were animals with the same DNA as men. So they had the image of God. Critics have challenged who were the wives of Cane, Able, and Seth. Perhaps they were women from the sixth-day population of men and women.

19.9) Will God Destroy the Universe and the Earth?

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the end, God destroys the heavens and the earth by fire.

2 Peter 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (11) Therefore since all these things will be destroyed like this, what kind of people ought you to be in holy living and godliness, (12) looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, which will cause the burning heavens to be dissolved, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? (13) But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

What are the heavenly bodies that will melt? It's probably the moon and the planets. Does this verse mean that God will destroy the entire universe? This verse is obviously in the context of, and in reference to, the creation story of Genesis 1. 2 Peter 3:4 makes explicit reference to the "beginning of the creation," and that "heavens from of old, and an earth formed out of water and amid water, by the word of God" (3:5).

Will God destroy all the billions of stars in this galaxy because of Man's sins? Will God destroy all the billions of galaxies in the universe because of Man's sins? This kind of thinking again puts Man in the center of the universe.

As we have seen, the seven days of the creation was about the creation of the solar system. It was about the creation of the first two levels of heaven, which is the moon that orbits around the earth, and the planets that orbit around the sun. It would follow, therefore, that the destruction of the heavens and the earth by fire would be the destruction of the solar system by fire.

Science tells us that someday our sun will explode and will expand into a red giant star. It will engulf all the planets out to earth, destroying the earth and the planets by fire. The Bible seems to indicate this happens soon after the millennium. Scientists do not expect the sun to become a red giant nearly that soon. But perhaps angel technology could accelerate the process. A couple of billion years later, the sun will collapse to about the size of the earth, becoming a white dwarf.

19.10) The New Heavens and the New Earth

References to the new heavens (plural) and the new earth can be found in Isaiah 65:17, 66:22, and 2 Peter 3:13. A reference to the new heaven (singular) and the new earth is also found in Revelation 21:1. Is there significance to the fact that the word 'heavens' is plural in Isaiah and Peter, and it's singular in Revelation? I believe so.

Isaiah 65:17-20 ESV "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. (18) But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. (19) I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. (20) No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

This passage has confused premillennialists and has been used by amillennialists to argue against premillennialism. How can there be death, even at a hundred years old, in the eternal state? This passage in Isaiah seems to be clearly talking about the millennium. But it's when God creates the new heavens and the new earth, which is supposed to be the eternal state.

Amillennialists have used this passage to argue against the millennium. However, there has never been a time in redemptive history that even comes close to what is described here. With death involved, this cannot be the eternal state. Thus, if not for the puzzling reference to the new heavens and the new earth, this would be a clear argument in favor of the millennium. Amillennialists must resort to an interpretation of figurative speech to say this passage in Isaiah is about the eternal state. But why would even figurative speech include figurative death? This description of life and death seems to fall short of the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21:1-8. Verse 4 says, "Death shall be no more."

Isaiah 66:22 also has a reference to the new heavens and the new earth. A few verses prior, in verse 18, we have a gathering of all nations and tongues to come and see the glory of Christ. The gospel of Christ Jesus is spread throughout the nations. And right after the reference to the new heavens and new earth, in verse 24, we find a reference to all the dead bodies of the people who will rebel against

God at Armageddon. Thus, this new heavens and new earth is also a reference to the millennium, and not to the eternal state.

The problem is that theologians have tended to interpret Isaiah 65 and 66 in terms of Revelation 21. Revelation has more Old Testament allusions than any other New Testament book. The symbolism of Revelation should be interpreted according to what we find in earlier Scripture, not the other way around. We should be interpreting the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21 according to what was taught in Isaiah, instead of trying to make Isaiah fit Revelation.

Isaiah is a book of poetry. Isaiah 13:10 speaks of the sun and the moon being darkened or not giving light. Isaiah 24:23 applies emotions to the sun and the moon. Isaiah 30:26 speaks of the moon being as bright as the sun, and the sun's brightness being sevenfold. Isaiah 60:19-20 speaks of the sun and the moon no longer giving light, but that the LORD will instead be the light. This is very similar to Revelation 21:23, where the New Jerusalem does not need the sun or the moon, but the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Again, Isaiah is a book of poetry. In Isaiah, these signs in the heavens are figurative ways of saying times or seasons will change. Likewise, the new heavens (plural) and the new earth, in Isaiah speak of a new age. In 2 Peter 3:13, it's also a new age, like in Isaiah. Revelation picks up on much of Isaiah, and perhaps uses it in situations that are a bit more literal. The New Jerusalem will literally not need the light of the sun and the moon. But this does not change the fact that in Isaiah, these terms are poetic ways of expressing a new age or a new season.

The new heaven and the new earth in Revelation is not a literal new creation of matter out of nothing. The earth is literally destroyed by fire, as can be clearly seen in 2 Peter 3. It's destroyed when the sun explodes becoming a white dwarf. But the rest of the universe remains. The new heaven (singular) and new earth of Revelation 21 is simply a new age when the New Jerusalem (Paradise) goes to another star, with another planet that we will call the new earth. The word "heaven" in Revelation 21 is singular because it's a new place in the heavens.

Chapter 20

Ezekiel's Temple

Ezekiel chapters 40 to 46 describe in great detail a temple that has not yet been built. Then chapters 47 and 48 describe boundaries and divisions of all the land in Palestine surrounding this temple, divided between the tribes of Israel.

The details about the temple are elaborate. An artist can draw a very accurate rendering of the temple based on the huge amount of detail. There are also many details for the animal sacrifice procedures that should take place in this temple.

These details speak of a “prince” who makes sacrifices for both himself and the people. With the title “prince” instead of “priest,” apparently this person has some authority to rule as well as his priestly duties. If Ezekiel's temple is to exist during the millennium, then the question must be asked, “Is the prince Jesus Christ?” No, because the prince makes sacrifices for himself (45:22) and Jesus never sinned. Yet it's possible that the prince has direct physical encounters with Jesus Christ. Verse 44:3 says the prince may sit and eat bread before the LORD. In the context of a Messianic age, it could very well mean that the Messiah eats bread with this prince in the temple.

20.1) Ezekiel's Temple According to Amillennialists

The temple has never been built. If it's to be interpreted as a literal temple that will someday exist, then it would most likely exist during the millennium. Yet, the animal sacrifice makes it very controversial. Why is animal sacrifice needed after the crucifixion? Amillennialists would say Ezekiel's temple is symbolic or allegorical, and that it is simply a representation of eternity.

Amillennialists will generally equate Ezekiel's temple with the New Jerusalem. Both are believed to be a vague representation of eternity after the new heavens and new earth. Eternity is believed to be hard to describe and hard to understand for us until we are resurrected or changed when Christ returns. Therefore, both Ezekiel's temple and the New Jerusalem is believed to be vague representations of a future that none of us can today understand.

However, the same arguments that amillennialists use against a literal and millennial existence of Ezekiel's temple can also be used against the temple being representative of eternity. If Ezekiel's temple is a representation of eternity, then

who or what is the prince representative of? Why would any view of eternity include a view of ongoing animal sacrifice? And why is a prince portrayed as making animal sacrifices for himself if this is a view of eternity? Since this prince is portrayed as needing to make animal sacrifices for himself, this prince cannot be representative of Christ. And yet the prince seems to be taking on the role of the high priest. Christ must be the only high priest in eternity. But the prince cannot be representative of Christ.

Amillennialists also believe the New Jerusalem, in Revelation 21-22, is a symbolic view of eternity. However, Revelation 21:22 says there is no temple in the New Jerusalem. How can both be representative of eternity, even symbolically, if one doesn't have a temple and the Ezekiel's temple is explicitly a temple?

20.2) A Historic Premillennialist's Objection to Ezekiel's Temple

If the temple were to be rebuilt, would worship there be an abomination? Most amillennialists would say yes. Many premillennialists also have a big problem with the idea of animal sacrifice during the millennium.

The pastor of the First Baptist Church, in Durham NC, is Dr. Andrew Davis. Dr. Davis did his doctorate in Church History. His doctoral thesis was on the eschatology of Calvin. Dr. Davis has said that he believes in the thousand-year reign of Christ. Dr. Davis is an historic premillennialist. However, over the years he has seriously considered amillennialism.

Dr. Davis has recognized that a temple may be rebuilt, and thus the prophecy of the antichrist proclaiming himself to be God in the temple can be literally fulfilled. Dr. Davis believes such a temple could happen. However, it would be "cursed by God." Ezekiel's temple, on the other hand, is during the millennium. So how could it be real? Dr. Davis points out that the temple "has nothing but blood sacrifices – animal sacrifices all the way through it. It is a Levitical blood-sacrifice temple to offer up all those old covenant sacrifices, in the millennial reign no less. How in the world do you figure that out?"

The above and the following quotes of Dr. Davis were taken from his lecture, given during a Wednesday night teaching, July 23, 2008, on the millennium. The lecture is one in a series of Wednesday night teachings titled, "Gazing at the Future; A Study of the End Times." This series of audio lectures can be found on the First Baptist Church website at FBCDurham.org.

Dr. Davis says:

The book of Hebrews says very plainly that the animal sacrifice system is obsolete and aging, and will soon disappear. God will sovereignly make it disappear. He will never accept it again. Why? Because it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. He has put an end to it, once and for all time. He uses that kind of language again and again in the book of Hebrews. It's finished. So, the temple of Ezekiel 40-48 is a problem. It's a problem for everybody, friends. Even those who think it's going to be literally built during the millennial reign have a whole problem with the whole book of Hebrews. Those of us who say that can never happen then are left with what is it talking about? Because it certainly wasn't Zerubbabel's temple you know, the temple of Haggai, which was a little structure. It can't be Herod's temple. What is it? I don't know, I'm not teaching on Ezekiel tonight. So anyway. But it's not – I'm telling you – I say this with all the certainty I can when it comes to the millennium. It is not a millennial temple. So those are the different problems I have with that.

Dr. Davis is not the only premillennialist to recognize that they have a big problem with Scripture. (Dr. Davis is not a dispensationalist.) Dispensational premillennialists place emphasis on distinguishing the Church from Israel. In so doing, the millennium becomes simply a fulfillment of God's promises to the Jews. The millennium thus becomes very anti-climactic with regard to God's redemptive plan. But their huge distinction between Israel and the Church becomes at least a slightly arguable reason for having animal sacrifice during the millennium.

Historic premillennialists, on the other hand, see no real difference between Jew and Gentile. Both are Abraham's seed and inherit the promises of Abraham. Both are grafted into the same vine of Israel, which is Christ Jesus. Thus, historic premillennialists such as Dr. Davis have an even greater problem in explaining the possibility of animal sacrifice in a temple during the millennium.

Yet, if one turns to amillennialism, Dr. Davis believes, one has even bigger problems with Scripture. Here are Dr. Davis's reasons for sticking with premillennialism. These reasons are given in the notes handout distributed to attendants for this same lecture of July 23, 2008. The handout is also on the church website.

The reasons Dr. Davis gives for being a millennialist include:

1. The millennial reign of Christ seems to be taught plainly in Revelation 20:1-6. It is the burden of those who reject it to prove this passage to be figurative.
2. The (seemingly) chronological presentation of Revelation 19-22
3. The binding of Satan described in Revelation 20 goes far beyond the freedom Satan appears to have in the NT.
4. Key passages in the Old Testament
 - a. They speak of an order of life much higher than we presently experience
 - b. But they cannot be reconciled with the Eternal State
 - i. Example #1: Isaiah 11:6-9 Key Issue: the infants and young children mentioned here do not fit in the eternal state: Luke 20:34-36
 - ii. Example #2: Isaiah 65:20-25 Key issues: this passage also mentions infants born and children growing up; but it also mentions people dying. This does not fit at all with the eternal state: Revelation 21:4 There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.
5. It seems to fit God's progressive plan of revealing the sinfulness of man and God's grace as the only answer to that problem.

The reasons Dr. Davis gives for being an uneasy millennialist include:

1. There are many difficulties with understanding details about the millennial life
2. It is difficult to understand how the resurrection at the Second Coming taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:23 can fit into the following millennium, especially with the question about unregenerate children and people
3. The only passage that openly teaches the Millennium is in the Book of Revelation, a very difficult book to interpret with certainty because of its apocalyptic genre and its symbolic use of numbers
4. The amillennial system is cleaner and simpler, avoiding most of these pitfalls
5. One of the passages that seem to be teaching the Millennial life introduces the topic by mentioning the New Heavens and New Earth!! Clear example from above... Isaiah 65:17-20

In my opinion, the reasons for Dr. Davis's uneasiness stem from the fact that our entire traditional systematic theologies have been based on amillennialism. We have been trained to think in terms of death, the final judgment, or the time of Christ's return, as being the end of God's redemptive plan. So the true climax of God's redemptive plan has eluded us. Tradition has not taught the Jewish perspective, which is that when the Messiah comes the gospel will go to the nations as a result of Israel's reign.

Point 2 of Dr. Davis's list is explained by the fact that the New Jerusalem will come to the earth and be in orbit around the earth when Christ returns. This possibility is not generally considered by historic premillennialists. The rapture and resurrection, as described in these two verses, is traditionally understood to include everyone who will be saved. The idea that the Church is simply the firstfruits of the entire harvest is a foreign concept to traditional theologians.

Points 3 and 4 are strongly argued by amillennialists. But these points do not have nearly the weight when the Old Testament is taken as literally as the New Testament. And the New Testament has many clear references to the age to come and the kingdom of heaven. One only needs to interpret these in the context of the Old Testament to see that the New Testament is full of teachings about the Messianic Age.

With regard to point 5, the new heavens and the new earth in Isaiah is a poetic way of describing a new age. Likewise, the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21 is another new age. The heavens and the earth are literally destroyed by fire when the sun explodes and turns into a white dwarf. But the rest of the universe will remain. The new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21 is simply another new age when the New Jerusalem (Paradise) goes to another star, with another planet that we will call the new earth. For more information, refer to the sections 19.9 and 19.10.

In chapter 8 of this book, titled "Evidence from Hebrews," we saw how Hebrews supports the New Wine System. The Book of Hebrews strongly supports the existence of an unpardonable sin that can be committed even by true Christians who have had the Holy Spirit. With this perspective, Hebrews might be a bit misunderstood.

So later on in this chapter, we will revisit Hebrews. We will learn that Hebrews is not in fact at odds with a literal interpretation of Ezekiel's temple during the millennium. But first, we need to look at more evidence, in addition to Ezekiel's temple, that there will be animal sacrifice in the millennium.

20.3) Jews on the Seat of Moses Coming to Christ

Paul said the Jews have experienced a hardening until the full number of Gentiles have come into the vine of Israel. The idea that Jesus would be the Messiah is an insult to a Jew. That would mean they had rejected the Messiah. And Jews have been wrongly persecuted, with blame for the crucifixion of Christ as the excuse, throughout the centuries of their dispersion.

Jesus said to the teachers of the law, "You will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Mat 23:39). This was not said to Jews in general. Jesus was addressing the "scribes and the Pharisees [who] sit on Moses' seat" (verse 2). How can this prophecy be fulfilled? Today, which of the Jews sit on the seat of Moses? Today, it's true that there has been a gathering of Jews in Jerusalem. However, most of the Jews in Jerusalem are not orthodox. They are simply Jews as a heritage and culture. There are some orthodox Jews in Jerusalem, who are definitely religious. However, Jews around the world do not recognize them as being in a position of authority.

Today, there is no "seat of Moses." Today there is no one who can fulfill this prophecy by saying, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Remember that the Jewish people of Jerusalem had already said these exact words when Jesus rode in on a donkey (Mat. 21:9). Jesus is saying that those who "sit on the seat of Moses" must likewise recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

In order for this prophecy to be fulfilled, the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt. Then, the Jews who will be in charge of that temple and the worship there will be those who will again sit on the seat of Moses. They will come to Christ during the first half of the seven-year period of Christ's return. In the meantime, we hope for and pray for more Jews to come to Christ, as some have already done. Then they will reign with Christ during the millennium, along with the rest of Israel, which is the Church of Christ.

Why does God consider it necessary for those who sit on the seat of Moses to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah before Christ's earthly reign? It won't be the same individual people who sat on the seat during Christ's ministry. Therefore, it's the seat of Moses itself that is important. In other words, Christ cannot have an earthly reign without there being a seat of Moses. Christ cannot have an earthly reign without reestablishing the old system of temple worship and animal sacrifice. If the seat of Moses must be re-established before Christ can return, then it's only reasonable to assume the seat of Moses must remain throughout Christ's millennial reign.

In Revelation, we find worshipers at the temple. Are these true worshipers? Does John indicate this worship is an abomination? Thus, the building of the temple and the animal sacrifice does not seem to be an abomination by God from the perspective of this verse.

Revelation 11:1-2 NIV I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. (2) But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.

The aspect of this temple that is considered an abomination is in the outer court. The altar is not considered an abomination. In all probability, the abomination of desolation will sit in this outer court for 42 months. Yet the temple itself, with its altar and animal sacrifice, is not considered to be an abomination.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 ESV Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (4) who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

The antichrist will sit in the "temple of God." If the rebuilding of the temple would be an abomination, how can it be "of God?" Some have argued this is not a physical temple. The Holy Spirit dwells in us, therefore our bodies (collectively) are the temple of God. But how can a man enter our bodies? Of course they then extend this metaphor to mean our church organizations, and not just our physical bodies, and say the antichrist will sit in our church organizations. However, the temple had not been destroyed when Paul wrote these words. It's highly unlikely that Paul's audience would have interpreted Paul in this way. The temple must be rebuilt before the antichrist can profane it by sitting in it.

Back to the Old Testament, in addition to Ezekiel's temple, the following verse in Zechariah confirms that there will be a seat of Moses, which includes animal sacrifice, during the millennium.

Zechariah 14:16-21 ESV Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. (17) And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be

no rain on them. (18) And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain; there shall be the plague with which the LORD afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. (19) This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. (20) And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the LORD." And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar. (21) And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day.

20.4) Is The Law Abolished?

Most theologians argue that the law is obsolete, and therefore is abolished. If you try to keep any part of the law, you must become accountable to all of the law (James 2:10). Also, Paul makes lots of very convincing arguments that we are not to live under the law, but under grace. So what did Jesus mean in this verse?

Matthew 5:17-19 ESV "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (18) For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (19) Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

We are saved by faith, and through grace. We are not saved by the observance of the law. Even in Old Testament times, people were saved by faith and through grace (Hebrews 11). Once we received the permanent dwelling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the law was no longer needed the way it had been.

Different people interpret these words of Jesus in different ways, about not abolishing but fulfilling the law. Many, if not most, would argue that Christ's sacrifice fulfills the law, and therefore the law is fulfilled instead of abolished. But isn't that splitting hairs? If the law is obsolete, then is it not abolished and passed away? Jesus says the law will not pass away until "all is accomplished." So how can

it be abolished or fulfilled? Many argue that all was accomplished at the cross. But the statement that it will not pass away until the heavens and earth pass away strongly indicates that Jesus has not yet finished fulfilling the law.

The heavens and earth aspect of the verse is difficult for amillennialists and millennialists alike. Amillennialists believe the heavens and the earth pass away when Christ returns. So that would mean that the law does not pass away until then. Premillennialists believe the heavens and the earth pass away after the millennium. Again, that would mean that the law does not pass away until then.

What aspect of the law will pass away when the heavens and the earth pass away? The only aspect of the law that can disappear is the temple worship and animal sacrifice. And, according to the verse, it does not pass away until the heaven and the earth are destroyed by fire. Also, Jesus puts emphasis on all the details of the law, saying “not an iota, not a dot,” will pass from the law until that time. Jesus said these words to Jews. From the Jewish perspective, those details must include temple worship and animal sacrifice.

Those who sat on the seat of Moses rejected the Messiah. They had forty years to repent before Jerusalem was destroyed in the second dispersion. Back in the first dispersion, when the Jews were scattered to Babylon, did the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem mean that temple worship, animal sacrifice, and the details of the law had been abolished? Likewise, the destruction of the temple and the desolation of Jerusalem that occurred in 70 AD, because of disobedience, does not mean that the law has been abolished.

Christ came to fulfill the law by reigning literally as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Prophecy and Christ's purpose included this, even during the first coming. However, those who sat on the seat of Moses rejected Jesus as the Messiah. The people of Jerusalem wanted to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. But the hearts of their leaders were not ready. Since the hearts of their leaders were full of sin, the people were also full of sin. It was an “evil generation.” They were not ready for the Messiah to come. So prophecy was postponed. But it was not abolished. The law and the prophets were not fulfilled.

The temple was destroyed, and Jerusalem was made desolate. Jerusalem was trampled on by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles was fulfilled (Luke 21:24). But now that Gentiles are no longer trampling on Jerusalem, the temple can be rebuilt. It would not be an abomination, because “not an iota, not a dot” of the law has been abolished. And it won't be until the heavens and the earth are destroyed, after the Messianic reign of Christ.

20.5) Does Grace Continue Into the Millennial Reign?

Amillennialists are quick to say that Christ is the ultimate and final sacrifice, and that the restoration of animal sacrifice would be an abomination.

Hebrews 10:1-4 ESV For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. (2) Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? (3) But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. (4) For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

There are many Old Testament verses that clearly show animal sacrifice was an atonement for sin. But as the writer of Hebrews points out, this was only a temporary measure. One had to continually go back and sacrifice more animals because the sinful habits remained. That's why it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. The sinful habits continued.

But in this present age of grace, does the blood of Jesus "make perfect those who draw near?" Or do we also continue to sin, just like they did in Old Testament times? As we saw in Part Four of this book, those who profess faith in Christ, but continue to sin, are living under the law and not under grace. Living under grace is to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that you cannot sin. Those who draw near to Christ are made perfect in that they no longer sin.

When Jesus was here, the disciples did not sin because of the teaching of Jesus.

John 15:3 ESV Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

When Christ left the Holy Spirit came. It's the Holy Spirit's job to help us change us so that we no longer sin. In this age of grace, the Holy Spirit is a substitute for the physical presence of Christ. If Christ had not left, the Holy Spirit would not have come.

John 14:15-17 If you love me, keep my commandments. (16) I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever,- (17) the Spirit of truth, whom the world can't receive; for it doesn't see him, neither knows him. You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you.

John 14:25-26 I have said these things to you, while still living with you. (26) But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you.

John 15:26 "When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me.

John 16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I don't go away, the Counselor won't come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

When Christ returns, will the Holy Spirit continue to be a substitute for the presence of Christ? Or will this responsibility be turned over to the Bride of Christ, who at that time will have glorified bodies and will reign as priests and kings? The disciples were made clean by the words of Christ. When Christ returns, the nations will be made clean by the words of the Bride of Christ.

Thus, the age of grace will be past. The Holy Spirit will no longer act as the Counselor that substitutes for the presence of Christ. The new covenant is only with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Hebrews 8:8, Jeremiah 31:31). The full number of Gentiles and Jews will be in the vine of Israel at that time. The new covenant will no longer be in effect for those not yet reconciled to God. Instead, at that time, the covenant of peace will be implemented.

We are saved by faith and through grace. But what is faith? And what is grace? Faith, according to the author of Hebrews is as follows.

Hebrews 11:1-2 NIV Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (2) This is what the ancients were commended for.

We are saved by faith. We are saved by hoping for that which we do not see. We are saved by the hope for the kingdom of heaven. We do not see Christ. But we are saved by faith that Christ will return. Even the disciples, who saw Christ, were saved by believing the words of Christ when he said things like the meek will inherit the earth. But where is faith after all these things have been fulfilled? Where is faith after the earthly kingdom has been established?

What is grace? Grace is the filling of the Holy Spirit so that we cannot sin. Grace is doing the works of the Father, to further the kingdom, so that the Holy Spirit will dwell within us. But again, what happens when the kingdom is here?

What happens when the Holy Spirit is no longer a substitute for the physical presence of Christ? Can the nations be saved by faith and through grace after Christ returns? No, but with the physically present "counseling" of Christ and His Bride, they can be saved under the Law of Christ.

Grace means favor. Even in Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit filled people at times. The "favored" of God, such as David and Daniel, were filled with the Holy Spirit. But the people in general were not "favored" to receive the Holy Spirit. Today, we are in the age of grace because those God favors (elects) are the firstfruits of the harvest. We, the firstfruits, become believers and are filled with the Holy Spirit. But in the age to come, righteousness will be taught to everyone. There will not be a favoring (election) by God. So it will not be an age of grace (favoring). Thus, in the age to come, people will not be saved by grace and through faith. They will be saved through the Law of Christ.

Many will point out that the new covenant makes the old covenant obsolete.

Hebrews 8:13 ESV In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

The old covenant, with the Law of Moses, is obsolete. But the covenant of peace, with the Law of Christ, is not obsolete. The Law of Moses is a shadow of the things to come, as it says in Hebrews 10:1, quoted above. The Law of Moses was a theocracy. Likewise, the Law of Christ will be a theocracy. The problem with the Old Testament theocracy was that the priests and kings also had sinful habits that could not be overcome by the law. But when the priests and kings have themselves overcome all sinful habits, then a very similar system of law will be effective in helping the people to overcome all their sinful habits.

The entire book of Hebrews was written to address the issue of Jews who had believed in Jesus as the Messiah, and had tasted the heavenly gifts of the Holy Spirit. For them to turn back to Judaism and animal sacrifice, in this age, would have been equivalent to a rejection of Christ. But that will not be the case in the age to come. Therefore to blindly apply everything said in Hebrews to the age to come is to take it out of context.

The last chapter of this book is titled, "Christian Perfection in the Sabbath." Under the Law of Moses, the Sabbath was the law of the land. In the age to come, the Sabbath will again become the law of the land. Today, the filling of the Holy Spirit is God's primary way for us to overcome sin. In the age to come, the Sabbath will again become God's primary way for the nations to overcome sin.

20.6) Animal Sacrifice Will be Needed

The Law of Moses was not flawed. It was the priests and the kings who were flawed. Animal sacrifice is not flawed. It is a very good tool for showing that the wages of sin is death. But would a return to animal sacrifice detract from the glory of Christ, in that he alone paid the price for our sins? Consider the following verse, which is also in Hebrews.

Hebrews 6:4-6 For concerning those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, (5) and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify the Son of God for themselves again, and put him to open shame.

This verse shows us that at some point, a second crucifixion would be necessary to save a person. The blood of Christ paid the price for our resurrection from the dead. If we were to die because of sin again, which is the second death, then there would no longer be a sacrifice for another resurrection.

If this is true, then what about people who will have been resurrected by the blood of Christ, but continue to struggle with sinful habits? Old Testament saints will be resurrected, paid by the blood of Christ, which came later. But Old Testament Scripture clearly teaches that animal sacrifice was needed in their process of overcoming sin. The animals died because of their sins. Likewise, people in the age to come will have been resurrected, paid for by the blood of Christ. Only the blood of Christ can pay to bring us back from death. But animal sacrifice can be used, in the age to come, in the process of overcoming sin.

The theocracy in the age to come will not be the Law of Moses. It will be the Law of Christ. And the teacher of the Law of Christ will be his Bride.

Thus, the New Wine System solves even this difficult problem of Ezekiel's temple, which has plagued the traditions of both premillennialism and amillennialism. The New Wine System shows us the purpose of Christ's millennial reign. It's not simply to fulfill promises that were made to the Jews. The purpose of Christ's millennial reign is to apply temple worship, animal sacrifice, and the seat of Moses in a way that glorifies Jesus Christ, and to thus serve their original purpose of being a wise teacher, to help the nations overcome sin. And to understand the nature and purpose of Christ's sacrifice.

20.7) The Temple is Built During the Week of the Covenant

I have argued that the law has not been abolished, and that Christ will bring back animal sacrifice in Ezekiel's temple during the millennial reign. I have also alluded to the fact that the temple will be rebuilt and animal sacrifice will take place during the first half of the week of the covenant. This week is the seven-year period of Daniel 9:27. Animal sacrifice is approved of by God because the present age will be completed and the millennial reign of Christ will have begun.

The covenant between God and man shifts when the present age ends and the age to come begins. At first, this may sound like dispensationalism. The idea that the Day of the Lord begins at the start of the seven-year period is one of the few points where the New Wine System is in agreement with dispensationalism. For more information, refer back to section 17.7, titled "The Pre-Tribulation Appearing of the New Jerusalem."

The New Wine System argues that Christ physically returns and thus the temple can be built and animal sacrifice can begin. Christ returns at the start of the Day of the Lord, which is at the start of the week of the covenant given in Daniel 9:27. Those seven years are the first seven years of the millennium.

A detailed article on "Daniel's Seventy Weeks" can be found in my book titled, "Daniel and Revelation." The important point is that Christ returns with the New Jerusalem at the appointed time, when the seventy weeks are ended. But the majority of the Church is not ready for Christ to return. Christ must confirm a covenant with many for seven more years in order for the 'many' of the Church to overcome sin.

Thus, I refer to this week of Daniel 9:27 as the seven-year period of Christ's return. For the elect, God's grace is extended seven more years. It's also seven more years of faith because the Church will be living during a time of great tribulation for the Church. But for the nations, the age of grace will be over. Christ will be physically present, but he will delay setting up his earthly kingdom. Thus, during these seven years, the temple will be physically built and animal sacrifice will be started. But during the same seven years, the elect will be getting ready to reign with Christ by overcoming sin and embracing Christian perfection.

Part Six

The Book of Revelation

The New Wine System presented in this book is a study of God's redemptive plan for the ages. God's redemptive plan is accomplished at the cross, but climaxes when Christ returns. Thus, eschatology is the key to understanding God's redemptive plan. For this reason, we need to take a look at Revelation to see some of the details as to how the New Wine System is to be accomplished.

Chapter 21 explores why it's important to read Revelation and take it to heart. We also look at the overall theme of Revelation. It's the only book in the Bible that offers a blessing for reading it, and taking it to heart.

Then, Chapter 22 looks at the Signs of the Times. What evidence do we have that we are the generation that will see the appearance of Christ, the events in Revelation, and then the time when Christ sets up his earthly kingdom.

Chapter 23 explores the Mystery God. This thread of teaching in Scripture can help us understand why the New Wine System is only now being understood.

Chapter 24 is about the Greatest Revival of all time. People are fearful of reading Revelation because it's about the greatest tribulation of all time. So they miss the revival that is also in Revelation. This revival will happen during the first half of the seven-year period of Christ's return.

Chapter 21

The Lost Blessing of Reading Revelation

How many Christians today believe that reading Revelation gives them a special blessing? Many pastors won't touch Revelation. Pastors are fearful of it being taught in their churches. They fear "unnecessary divisiveness." Yet Revelation itself promises a special blessing for those who read it, or who hear it read and take to heart what is being read.

Revelation 1:3 NIV Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Did Jesus Christ give this special blessing simply as an incentive to read his book? Or is there a reason why the reading of Revelation, and taking it to heart, will give us a special blessing? How can reading about a third of man being killed, and the antichrist ruling over every nation, tribe, people, and language, give us a special blessing? Or perhaps you could argue that Revelation has praises of God and other virtues that would give us this blessing. No, Revelation 1:1 gives us the reason why the book was written. It was written to "show his servants what must soon take place." And the reason for the blessing is given as well. Verse 3 says we are given the blessing "because the time is near." Revelation teaches that Christ is coming soon – hopefully in our lifetimes. But Revelation also teaches that great tribulation comes first. And this teaching is the true blessing of reading Revelation.

But is this blessing really important? Is the study of Revelation and the end times of any importance? Is the study of Revelation as important as say, Paul's teachings about grace in Romans? Most pastors would say no. Many pastors are fearful of Revelation being taught in their churches. We teach, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are those who mourn." But we don't teach, "Blessed is the one who takes to heart that which is written in Revelation." Pastors say it's just not an issue of salvation. Or is it?

There are four schools of thought about the great tribulation in Revelation. (1) One is to use allegorical techniques to bring the great tribulation into the past. This is called the Preterist view of Revelation. (2) Another is to use allegorical techniques to say the great tribulation of Revelation will never literally happen. This is called the Spiritualist view of Revelation. (3) Another is to use allegorical techniques to say the great tribulation of Revelation has been happening

throughout Church history. This is called the Historic view of Revelation. (4) The fourth is to skip right over it with the pre-tribulation rapture. This is called the Dispensational Futurist view of Revelation. These are comfortable beliefs about Revelation. But they take away the blessing of its reading, because they don't allow for a near-future time (Revelation 1:1-3) reading such that we could personally experience great tribulation and death. Neither of these views takes "to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."

Look at it this way. At the Last Supper, Peter promised the Lord that he was willing to die for the Christ. But when the test came, Peter denied Christ three times. Peter saw great tribulation when Jesus was put on trial. Peter was not spiritually prepared to really face death for Christ.

If you grow up believing in a pre-tribulation rapture, you don't expect to face this trial. Likewise, if you take the preterist view of Revelation and the preterist view of the Olivetti Discourse, you don't expect to face this trial. When this trial comes, will you really be ready? Or will you be like Peter and fail the test?

Many will fail the test because they have been told a distorted gospel. When you understand, believe, and accept the truth, and seriously overcome sin, you become spiritually prepared for this test. Many of those who fail this test will wind up taking the mark of the beast and will be condemned. Those who fail this test may understand all forms of eschatology quite well. But they could be blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life for taking the mark of the beast.

Matthew 24:11-13 NKJV Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. (12) And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. (13) But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

I have seen how people can stretch Scripture into saying anything in order to allow this one delusion to continue. The delusion is that the church will somehow be able to avoid the great tribulation before Christ returns. There are different forms of this delusion. There are different ways to tell the same lie of Satan. It takes a great love of Scripture to actually believe what it says, even if it means understanding that we as Christians are called upon to be ready for great persecution and tribulation and even death for the sake of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

21.1) The False Doctrine of Imminence

Suppose you believe in the pre-tribulation rapture, but then you realize the abomination of desolation has already occurred. If your deep-set reason for believing the pre-tribulation rapture is that you don't want to face this test, then you will certainly fail the test. Those who don't have the true love of God's Word, and are faced with death, will fool themselves into twisting Scripture again. Satan will be right there helping them figure out some way to do it. And they probably won't even realize they are lying to themselves yet again.

2 Thessalonians 2:11-13 ESV Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, (12) in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (13) But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

How can believing a lie cause one to be condemned? Does God condemn anyone for believing a false doctrine? Or does the false doctrine cause one to think they will be saved, when in fact they will not be saved? In the New Wine System, the only way to be condemned is to harden one's heart against the voice of Christ. During the great tribulation, taking the mark of the beast is to reject Christ's salvation. The strong delusion, therefore, must be a lie that causes people, even Christians, to take the mark of the beast.

Yet, the mark of the beast cannot be something subtle, like a computer chip implant. It must involve the deliberate rejection of Jesus Christ. If a Christian must choose between denying Christ and hunger or death, how many will really choose hunger or death? Peter thought he would follow Christ to death. But he denied Christ. During the great tribulation, those who deny Christ will not get another chance. But those who have a false doctrine will simply tell themselves that their names cannot be blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life, and therefore Christ will forgive them if they were to deny Christ. If one allows one deception of denying the expectation of great tribulation, then these other deceptions easily take hold.

Look at the verse again. Those who are not fooled by the strong delusion are those who do so, "through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." In other words, we must mature in Christ by the Spirit in order resist temptations during the great tribulation. And we must have a love for the truth of Scripture that is greater than our love for our own lives.

What problem was Paul dealing with when he wrote 2 Thessalonians 2? There had been some letters or reports, supposedly written by Paul, saying that the day of the Lord had already come. And this false teaching was concerning the return of Christ, and our being gathered to him. I don't think anyone believed they had already been gathered into the clouds. And likewise, I don't think anyone believed Christ had already come. They were simply saying that the day of the Lord had already come. Thus they were giving the impression that Christ would return at any moment now in order to gather the elect. They were teaching Imminence.

Therefore, in 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul was arguing against Imminence. He was giving all these things that must happen first, before the day of the Lord would come. And he was using prior Scripture for his arguments. Back then, the delusion was not so strong. It was based on supposed reports from Paul. So all Paul had to do was write the letter, and this weaker delusion was silenced.

But Paul tells about a strong delusion that comes in the end-times. By context, it would also be about Imminence. There will most likely be other lies told by the world during the great tribulation. However, based on context, the strong end-time delusion Paul seems to be referring to is most likely similar in nature to the delusion he was correcting at that time.

Paul said that they would believe the lie (of Imminence) and thus be condemned. But can believing in the pre-tribulation rapture cause you to lose your salvation? Well, can believing any lie cause you to lose your salvation? No, the only way one could lose their salvation would be to harden one's heart against Christ. During the great tribulation, those who take the mark of the beast will lose their salvation. It matters not whether one considers themselves to be a Christian. If they take the mark of the beast, they will be condemned. Their names will be blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life.

The issue of Imminence would be irrelevant to those who don't consider themselves to be Christians. So these are people who believe they are Christians. They believe they are in the Book of Life, and cannot be blotted out. (This is also a part of the strong delusion.) However, they have not yet matured in Christ. They are still slaves to sin. Those who are no longer slaves to sin are those who truly understand the meaning of taking up our cross and following Christ. Our very physical lives are nothing. We would be willing to die for Christ. But many Christians down deep have not turned their entire lives over to Christ. For them, the idea of going through the great tribulation is fearful. Hence, the strong delusion

of the pre-tribulation rapture draws them. The strong delusion of imminence by way of preterism also draws them.

When persecution comes, those who are immature in Christ could easily wind up hardening their hearts against Christ in order to avoid the persecution. That's exactly what the book of Hebrews warned against. Jewish Christians were considering turning back to Judaism because of persecution.

What does church history show us about tribulation for God's people? Tribulation purifies the Church. Christians, who are not willing to give their lives for Jesus, fall away during times of tribulation. God often tells martyrs, such as Polycarp, that He wants them to be martyred because it can strengthen the Church. Tribulation can make the Church pure and holy. During times when life is easy, the yeast tends to work its way through the dough (Matthew 16:11-12, 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Galatians 5:9). So when do you think Christ will return? Will Christ return when the Church is full of yeast, or when the Church is pure? (Ephesians 5:27, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Revelation 19:7)

Jesus himself said not to follow those who teach, "The time is at hand" (meaning Imminence) (Luke 21:8). But these very teachers are saying it's not an issue of salvation. The pre-tribulation rapture doctrine makes it more difficult for Christians to forsake their own lives to the point of death. It teaches that they won't go through tribulation. And those who don't forsake their own lives to the point of death are in grave danger of taking the mark of the beast. Any false doctrine that makes it more difficult to understand the true cost of salvation needs to be elevated to the state of a salvation issue. People can easily get upset at my suggestion that the pre-tribulation rapture is a salvation issue. But this doctrine must be challenged if people will be being condemned who could have been saved.

21.2) Understanding All the Symbolism

Is the complete understanding of Revelation necessary for all Christians? Do all Christians need to understand all the symbolism in Revelation in order to receive the blessing for reading Revelation? While Revelation has a lot of difficult-to-understand symbolism, the basic theme of Revelation comes through without understanding the symbolism. The seven letters to the seven churches are easy to understand. The message that the saints will be turned over to the beast (antichrist) for 42 months is easy to understand (Revelation 13:5-10). And it's easy to understand that many Christians will become martyrs (Revelation 6:9-11, 14:13).

You don't have to understand all the details of Revelation in order to understand the theme. And if you miss it in Revelation, you can find it in Matthew 24. It's the theme that brings holiness. It's the theme that forces us to consider whether we are willing to be a martyr for Christ. But if we have been told that Revelation is not about us personally, then the blessing is stolen from us. All Christians can understand Revelation well enough for its message to have this blessed impact on our lives.

Think back to other Scriptures about the time of Christ's return. Daniel 7, Daniel 9, Daniel 12, Zechariah 14, Matthew 24, 1 Thessalonians 5, 2 Thessalonians 2, and the book of Revelation all have one thing in common. They all speak about the coming of the Messiah, immediately preceded by great tribulation for God's people.

21.3) The Theme of Revelation

Many people treat the seven letters to the seven churches, in Revelation, almost like a separate book from the rest of Revelation. The seven letters is viewed as holiness messages to churches. The rest of the book is viewed as things that will happen during the great tribulation. Sermons have been preached on the seven letters, stopping when chapter four is reached. Additionally, there are Futurist and Preterist studies of the eschatology of Revelation, without paying much attention to the seven letters. However, if one does not consider these two as one topic, the reader can miss the overall theme of Revelation.

Each of the seven letters to the seven churches has one common message. To those who overcome (or to those who conquer) Jesus will give a gift. The gift is different for each of the seven letters. Here is a list of the seven gifts. All are various aspects of inheriting the kingdom.

1. The right to eat of the tree of life, which is in Paradise. This is a clear allusion back to the Garden of Eden. The Septuagint uses the word Paradise for the Garden of Eden. Those who overcome sin will inherit eternal life.
2. Will not be hurt by the second death. For there to be a second death, one must have died the first death as well. Therefore, for those who die a second death, there must have been a resurrection. Those who overcome sin in this age receive spiritual bodies and are promised they will not die a second death. The wicked, however, will eventually come to life and die a second death.

3. Hidden manna, and a white stone. On the stone is a new name that no one knows except he who receives it (Rev. 2:17). Jesus is the bread of life, which is the hidden manna (John 6:31-59). It is hidden because many do not understand (verses 60-66). The new name would seem to be an allusion to Isaiah 62:2. “The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.” The new name is also found in the letter to the sixth church (Rev. 3:21). After we mature in Christ with the Bread of Life, we will be given a new name. The new name seems to be associated with a new purpose, which is to be exalted over the kings of the nations.
4. Authority over the nations. Also, the morning star. John quotes Psalm 2:8-9, where God is promising his “Son” that he would make the nations his inheritance. Jesus says those who conquer sin will rule with Him. Peter says that we have “the prophetic word ... as a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts” (2 Peter 19:4) Therefore, the morning star refers to the age to come. We will rule in the age to come. Revelation 22:16 also refers to the son of David as being the “bright morning star.” Again, this is in reference to the Messianic Kingdom, when Christ will reign on earth.
5. Clothed in white robes. Name will not be blotted from the Book of Life. Jesus will confess our name before the Father and the angels. White robes are symbolic of holiness. Those who are holy, who overcome sin, will not be blotted from the Book of Life. This implies that others will be blotted from the Book of Life.
6. Made a pillar in the temple of God. Write on him the name of God, and the name of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down from God out of heaven and my own new name. The temple of God is the New Jerusalem. It will be in orbit around the earth. To be a pillar is not literal. It means those who overcome sin will have a new purpose (new name) in the New Jerusalem.
7. Sit with Christ on His Throne. This is compared with Christ who conquered, and was thus given the right to sit on the Father’s throne. To sit on the throne simply means to be given authority. Christ didn’t have to conquer personal sin. But Christ did conquer the wages of sin for the entire world.

In summary, those who conquer sin in this age will inherit eternal life, no death, a new name, authority over the nations, honored as holy, new purpose in the New Jerusalem, and will reign with Christ on His throne.

The problem is that the Church is not ready for Christ to return. The Church, as a whole, has not overcome sin. The remainder of Revelation is all about how God gets the Church ready for Christ to set up his kingdom. One could view Revelation as an allegory about the fight between good and evil in every generation. But this should not deny the explicit literal teachings about literal events that will occur in the literal years just prior to when Christ sets up his earthly reign. The Church must get ready. The theme of Revelation is that the Church must overcome sin before we can be given authority to rule the nations.

This theme can also be found at the end of Revelation. Those who conquer will inherit (the spring of the water of life). The context of this verse is after the Great White Throne Judgment, after the millennium.

Revelation 21:7-8 ESV The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. (8) But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

The saints must conquer sin prior to Christ's earthly reign. However, this is not all the conquering that is happening during this time. The beast makes war on the two witnesses, conquers them, and kills them (Revelation 11:7). The saints are turned over to the beast, who is allowed to make war on the saints, and to conquer them (Revelation 13:7). The beast and the false prophet will also make war on the Lamb. But the Lamb will conquer them (Revelation 17:14).

Of course there is a difference between the conquering victory of the saints, and the conquering victory of the beast and later of Christ. Our battle is with sin. These other battles are literal wars. Nevertheless, Revelation shows us the relationship between these two types of battles. We will live victorious with Christ only when even our own literal deaths are of no consequence, as compared with our need to conquer sin. The soldier must be willing to lose his life in order to win the war.

Matthew 10:38-39 He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me. (39) He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. (25) For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it.

Also see Mark 8:34-38 and Luke 9:23-25 which are almost identical.

John 12:24-25 Most certainly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. (25) He who loves his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life.

This is the theme of Revelation.

Revelation 12:10-11 I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now is come the salvation, the power, and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ; for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. (11) They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life, even to death.

21.4) Watch and Be Ready, For the Time is Near

There is no question that the early Church believed the time is near (Matthew 10:23, 16:28, 24:34, 1st John 2:18). Paul was including himself when he said, "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). And there is no question they believed tribulation would come first. 70 AD had not yet come, so there was no way to say that Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24 had already taken place.

People had to ask the hard question of whether or not they were willing to be martyred for Christ. And in that generation, many were martyred for Christ. When the Church believes that great tribulation is near, it brings purity into the Church. And when there is purity in the Church, it grows quickly (Acts 2:42-47).

The bottom line is that Scripture teaches Christians of all generations to expect great tribulation just prior to Christ's return. Christians of all generations are to believe that the time is near. This belief produces purity, holiness, and great growth in the Church. So, when we read Revelation, and take it to heart, we are blessed with purity. We take seriously the hard question of whether or not we are ready to be martyred. Thus, we are blessed when we take Revelation to heart.

Today, the Bride of Christ is not ready for the rapture. The Bride of Christ is still full of yeast. Christ's return has been near for all generations. But no generation has been ready. Many individuals have been ready. However, it will take the events of Revelation for the entire Church of one generation to become ready.

The theme of Revelation is God's plan to allow great tribulation so that the Bride will make herself ready (Revelation 19:7). All the popular views avoiding the tribulation distort this theme, and remove its blessing. The Church will not skip over the great tribulation. And the great tribulation is not an allegory, nor is it symbolic of events in the past.

Chapter 22

Signs of the Times

Should we expect the return of Christ in our (baby-boom) generation? Scripture gives us signs for which we are to watch. There are a number of signs that could be attributed, in various degrees, to almost any generation of the past. These signs include false prophets, a falling away, and the love of the people growing cold. This present generation certainly has all of these signs. But there are four signs which I believe can only be attributed to this generation.

Every generation has been taught to expect Christ to return in their lifetimes. Some generations have had very specific reasons why Christ might have come in their generation. Some of these generations had specific date calculations based on a day being a year. For example, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah Witnesses grew out of two such date calculations. Other generations have had "apocalyptic fever" because of their interpretation of Revelation, and how the events of that day were being seen in Revelation. For example, the generation of Martin Luther had lots of apocalyptic speculation based on the historic view of Revelation. And people from that time did a few day-as-a-year calculations as well.

Our generation, however, is the first generation since Christ's that can point to very specific verses, whose natural interpretations point exclusively to our generation today. There are four very specific verses that can be applied only to our generation. They will be discussed below.

In addition to the four very specific verses, there are quite a few other sign-of-the-time verses, of a more general nature, that can arguably be applied to other generations as well as ours. These include wars, plagues, earthquakes, false christs, and a falling away from God (Matthew 24:6-7, 24, Revelation 6:8, Romans 1:26-27, 2 Timothy 3:1-9). All of these verses seem to be happening with great intensity in this generation. But since they can be argued to apply to other generations as well, our focus will be on the four verses that are specific only to our generation.

First, we will do a survey of these very specific verses, and then we will take a look at some prophecies in Revelation and Daniel that are easily interpreted as pointing to this generation. Here is the first verse that is unique to our generation:

Matthew 24:14 NKJV And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

This generation is the first generation since Christ's generation that can see the possibly of this being fulfilled in our lifetimes. Depending on how you measure it, you could say that this has already been fulfilled in today's generation. You could even argue that Mel Gibson's film has preached the gospel to every nation. But even with a strict requirement of a church planted in every people-group of the world, we are very close to preaching the gospel to every nation. Here is the second verse:

Luke 21:24 They will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

This is the first generation that has seen a reversal of what happened in 70 AD. Full preterists argue that everything in Scripture was fulfilled by 70 AD. But the fulfillment of this verse must take place after 70 AD, because it was in 70 AD that they were taken as prisoners to all the nations. The time of the Gentiles must be fulfilled after 70 AD.

Some have argued that today's events in Jerusalem do not apply to this verse because the Jews today in Jerusalem are not Christian. However, they were not Christian in 70 AD either. The word Gentile has nothing to do with one's status as being chosen of God. Gentiles were grafted into the vine of Israel. The word Gentile simply means non-Jewish. Likewise, this verse says nothing about the salvation status of the people in Jerusalem. It simply states that non-Jewish people (Gentiles) will control (trample on) Jerusalem until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

This baby-boom generation, born after World War II, is the first generation to see Jerusalem no longer being trampled on by Gentiles. When that generation became adult, in the 1967 Six Day War, we saw Old Jerusalem come under the control of Non-Gentiles for the first time since 70 AD. Here is the third verse that is unique to our baby-boom generation:

Daniel 12:4 ESV But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

This baby-boom generation, since World War II, is the first generation in history that can be marked by such a huge explosion in knowledge and travel. Daniel is told to seal up the words of the scroll until the "time of the end" when there would be such a huge explosion of knowledge and travel. Daniel is also told in verse 13 that the time of the end would be when he would rise to receive his inheritance.

22.1) The Sign of Full Preterism

Full preterism is a relatively new movement which has gained noticeable strength during this generation. Preterism means past fulfillment. Full preterism states that every single prophecy in the Bible has already been fulfilled. This includes the return of Christ, the new heavens and the new earth, and the final great white throne judgment. Full preterists take the extreme position of believing that all these prophecies have already been fulfilled.

Futurist interpretations of these “signs of the times” verses make preterists a bit angry. In the past, dispensationalists such as Hal Lindsey have interpreted Bible prophecy in light of current events, which have turned out to be false. Some people over the years have gotten very frustrated with the ongoing spread of these interpretations. It has caused many people to shift from dispensationalism all the way to amillennialism. The hermeneutic shift that is necessary to make this change, however, is extreme. There has to be a lot of motivation to shift from one extreme to the other. In other words, many have been motivated by their distaste for people relating Bible prophecy to current events.

The middle ground between these two extremes would be along the lines of premillennialism with the post-tribulation rapture (historic premillennialism). But the middle ground requires the Church to go through a future great tribulation. And those who have hated the signs of the times have tended to hate a future interpretation of Revelation even more. They just don’t want to hear about the possibility of themselves going through great tribulation before Christ returns. It is distaste for watching the signs for Christ to return, such as the abomination of desolation, as is taught in Matthew 24.

Various aspects of traditional preterist views have been around for most of church history. Full-preterism, on the other hand, is really something that’s grown into more than just a few followers during in this generation. Full-preterism says that everything in the Bible was fulfilled by 70 AD. That includes the return of Christ, the great white throne of judgment, the literal new heavens and new earth, and the conquering of the last enemy, which is death, here on the earth. In other words, full preterists believe that this world of sin is the eternal state.

When God destroyed the world by water, he spared Noah, even though he knew that sin would continue and would eventually get as bad as it was before the flood. But God set forth a plan to rid his creation of sin. Full preterists basically want us to believe that God’s plan is finished, even though sin today is probably worse than it was before the great flood.

Full preterists do this by changing the definitions of a few terms and by taking historical preterism to its logical conclusion. The fact that the logical conclusion of historical preterism winds up being such an extreme is a strong indicator that the basic premises of historical preterism are incorrect. Full preterists are mostly true Christians. But any true Christian knows down deep that God's plan, instigated at the great flood, was not to allow sin to remain in the world. God's plan is not finished until the eternal state of a new heaven and a new earth, where sin and death have been completely overcome.

Full-preterism mostly originates with James Stuart Russell and his anonymous publication of 'The Parousia' in 1878. In 1887 he published a second edition under his own name. But it has not had a strong following until this generation. Because of this new demand, the 1887 edition was reprinted in 1983. No other generation in history has had a significant number of Christians who held anything like the full-preterist view, which denied the literal and visible second coming of Christ. With this in mind, here is a fourth verse. Here is the one last sign of the time that no other generation has had. This is the fourth verse that is unique to our baby-boom generation:

2 Peter 3:1-7 ESV This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, (2) that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, (3) knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. (4) They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." (5) For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, (6) and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. (7) But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Full preterists are the scoffers of the end time generation. They not only say, "Where is the promise of his coming." They deny that the coming will ever happen. To a small degree, there have been scoffers that are not in the Church. But they have been few. Most people outside the church pay little attention to the Hal

Lindsey and others like him. The real scoffers are the full preterists within the Church of this generation.

Would people outside the church “deliberately overlook” doctrine? Or must it be believers who “deliberately overlook” doctrine?

As Peter prophesied, the full preterists of this generation “deliberately overlook” that the heavens and the earth is a term that’s defined in Genesis 1:1, and that the meaning of that term should remain consistent. They say the old heavens and earth are the old covenant, and that the new heavens and new earth are the new covenant.

They “deliberately overlook the fact” that when God gave the word for the destruction of his creation by water in Noah’s day, that this exact “same word” will destroy the creation “by fire.” The destruction by water was literal. But they say the literal creation of Genesis will never be literally destroyed by fire, even though it’s the exact same word.

The full preterists want everything to go on as it has since the beginning of creation. In other words, they say the Bible is completely fulfilled, so that nothing the Bible says will happen in the future. They deny the end of sin. They deny God’s plan at the flood. And they deny that the last enemy, which is death, will ever be conquered here on the created earth.

The full preterists are the scoffers of this baby-boom generation. The full preterists have become their own worst nightmare. They themselves have become a “sign of the times.”

22.2) The Seals of the Scroll are Broken

Many people believe the scroll of Revelation 6 is about judgments, like the trumpets and the bowls. But would the souls under the altar, asking how long, be considered a judgment? This seal is much more like a sign of the time than a judgment. And the sixth seal is about signs in the heavens. So, the seals are not judgments. Instead, the seals are signs related to the opening of the scroll of Daniel 12. That scroll is all about the sealing of words written on the scroll until the time of the end. The scroll of both Daniel 12 and Revelation 6 is all about the signs of the end-time generation. The writing on the scroll show signs of the generation that will see the coming of Christ. To show this, consider the parallelism between the seals and the early signs of Matthew 24.

<p>First seal - Revelation 6:2 And behold, a white horse, and the rider who sat on it had a bow. A crown was given to him, and he came forth conquering, and to conquer.</p>	<p>Matthew 24:6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you aren't troubled, for all this must happen, but the end is not yet.</p>
<p>Second seal - Revelation 6:4 The rider was given power to take peace from the earth. He was given a great sword.</p>	<p>Matthew 24:7a For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom</p>
<p>Third seal - Revelation 6:5 The rider had a balance in his hand.</p>	<p>(No corresponding verse in Matthew 24)</p>
<p>Fourth seal - Revelation 6:8 The rider's name was Death. Hades followed with him. Authority was given to him over one fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword, with famine, with death, and by the wild animals of the earth was given to him.</p>	<p>Matthew 24:7b And there will be famines, plagues, and earthquakes in various places.</p>
<p>Fifth seal – Revelation 6:9-11 Persecution of the Church. The souls of the martyrs under the altar.</p>	<p>Matthew 24:8-9 But all these things are the beginning of birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to oppression, and will kill you. You will be hated by all of the nations for my name's sake.</p>
<p>Sixth seal – Revelation 6:12-14 There was a great earthquake. The sun became black as sackcloth ... the whole moon became as blood. The stars of the sky fell to the earth, like a fig tree dropping its unripe figs when it is shaken by a great wind. The sky was removed like a scroll when it is rolled up.</p>	<p>Matthew 24:29 NKJV Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.</p>

Therefore, the seals are not judgments. They are similar to Matthew 24. They are signs of the beginning of the birth pains. They are signs of the “generation [that] will by no means pass away till all these things take place” (Matthew 24:34 NKJV). The seals are about the signs of end-time generation that will witness the rapid increase in travel and knowledge (Daniel 12:4) and the gospel preached to every nation (Matthew 24:14).

The next section begins my interpretation of the six seals. Many people have other interpretations. But one should consider how much an interpretation relies on Old Testament symbols. Does the interpretation find that symbol in the Old Testament, and then bring its meaning from the Old Testament to show the meaning? Or does the interpretation only look at the symbol itself? Also, many people get uneasy in relating Bible prophecy to recent history. But consider the fact that doing so is only in agreement with the four very clear verses of Scripture, which say this is the end-time generation. This is the generation that will not pass away before “all these things” take place.

22.3) The Four Horses – Superpowers of the End Times

In Scripture, four is the number of the heavens and the earth. The heavens and the earth were created in the first four days. There are four corners of the earth (Revelation 7:1, 20:8). There are four quarters of the earth (Isaiah 11:12). There are four quarters of the heavens (Jeremiah 49:36). The four winds are about all the heavens and the earth (Jeremiah 49:36, Ezekiel 37:9, Daniel 7:2, 8:8, 11:4, Zechariah 2:6, Matthew 24:31, Mark 13:27, Revelation 7:1). So, the four horses should also be about the whole world.

The four horses of white, red, black, and pale (Revelation 6:1-8) can be found in Zechariah 1:8-11, 6:1-8. In Revelation they are single horses with a rider. In Zechariah they are chariots of horses. The chariots of horses go out in the four directions: west, east, north, and south (Zechariah 6:1-8). All go out all at the same time, to see the state of the world. In other words, what are the signs of the world that are observed by these four horses?

The white horse goes west. The red horse goes east. The black horse goes north. And the pale horse goes south. Directions are given relative to Jerusalem.

Zech. 6:6	Zech. 6:6, Rev. 6:1-7	Rev. 6:1-7	Signs of the generation after World War II	Superpowers of the world after World War II
West	White	Conqueror bent on conquest	Atomic Bomb	United States (The West)
East	Red	Power to take peace from the earth	Atomic Bomb	Peoples Republic of China (The East)
North	Black	Holding a pair of scales in his hands	Bad Economy in the USSR, and later the world	USSR
South	Pale	Death and Hades. Kills by sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts	Wars, famine, AIDS, wild beasts	Africa / The United Nations

Right after World War II, the world changed. The United Nations was formed. Israel became a nation in 1948. The United States (West) became a world superpower. The People's Republic of China (East) came into power in October of 1949, right after World War II. The USSR also became a world superpower right after World War II. Russia is directly north of Jerusalem.

At the end of World War II, these three nations developed the atomic bomb. This is the “conqueror bent on conquest” (Revelation 6:2 – white horse) in the West, and the “power to take peace from the earth” (Revelation 6:4 – red horse) in the East. For the first time in history, our knowledge has reached the point where we can destroy the entire world.

To the North was the USSR. The Soviet Union is known for failing because of its poor communist economy. Poor economy is described in association with the black horse (Revelation 6:5-6). The pair of scales, associated with the third horse, indicates trade (economy). A quart of wheat for a day's wages and three quarts of barley for a day's wages is extremely poor economy. Oil and wine were the cash crops in Biblical times. I expect this bad economy to become world-wide as the world turns to a one-world government.

The direction of the fourth horse is south. To the south of Jerusalem is Egypt. This rider is on a pale horse. South in the Bible is Egypt, which is symbolic of the world, and Pharaoh is symbolic of the antichrist. This does not mean the antichrist will come from Egypt.

The fourth horse is the kingdom of the antichrist. "Death; and Hades [are] following with him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth" (Revelation 6:8). What better description is there of Africa? There are constant wars in Africa. Africa has been known for people dying in famine during this generation. AIDS originated in Africa and is now epidemic in Africa. And Africa is known for wild beasts. These four plagues, especially including AIDS, could easily wind up taking a fourth of the world's population.

This United Nations government rules all the nations of the world, but does not have its own geographical boundaries. The UN is a government, but it has not yet had the military power needed to enforce its "resolutions." More and more, however, that is changing. The militaries of the world are shifting to the UN. The UN was formed right after World War II. We have been under a one-world government for the entire baby-boom generation. But its power has been only slowly increasing, like the slow boiling of water with a frog in the pot.

Thus, the four horses are symbolic of the three superpowers, and the UN, which rule the world during the end-time generation. They show a view of the entire world, as the four chariots of horses go out in four different directions. They show a time when knowledge reaches the point of mankind being able to destroy the world. So, the knowledge and fear of weapons of mass destruction are forcing us into a one-world government under the rule of the antichrist. The knowledge increases since World War II have been unbelievable. And it is at time when the global economy has brought the world together, and vastly increased travel.

22.4) The Four Beasts – Four Kingdoms that Control Israel

The four beasts of Daniel 7 are covered here because of how they relate to the four horses. Both tell us about kingdoms of this end-time generation. Also, the symbolism of the four beasts continues in Revelation 13:2. It's important to understand these four beasts to help us understand the beast of Revelation.

Traditionally, the four beasts are identified as Babylon, Medes-Persia, Alexander the Great, and Rome. The fourth beast is seen as Rome, so many argue that Revelation must be about the old Roman Empire. But Daniel 7:17 says, "The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth." At the time of this vision, Babylon was only a couple of years away from being conquered by the Medes and the Persians. Babylon and the Medes-Persians had long since risen from the earth. Also, Daniel 7:11-12 tells us that when the fourth beast is destroyed, the other three will be stripped of their authority but will be allowed to live for a period of time. This verse rules out ancient kingdoms, which will have been long dead, when the fourth beast is destroyed.

So, these four beasts cannot be the traditional four ancient empires. And Daniel 7:18, the very next verse, puts the context of the whole vision in the end times. Daniel 7:2-3 speaks of the four winds. As shown in the previous section, four is the number of the heavens and the earth. The four winds are about the entire world. So, the four beasts are like the four horses. Like the four horses, they represent kingdoms that exist in the end times.

However, the four beasts do not represent exactly the same kingdoms as do the four horses. The beasts are kingdoms that directly control Israel, and the trampling of Jerusalem, during the end-time generation. On the other hand, the horses are the superpowers of the end time generation. The fourth beast and the fourth horse is the same. It's the one-world government that comes out of the three. So the four beasts and the four horses are similar, but do not represent the exact same set of kingdoms.

The Lion (Daniel 7:4) is England and the United States. The Lion has wings of an eagle. The wings are torn off. It stands up on two feet like a man. It is given the heart of a man. The symbol of England is the Lion, standing up like a man. The eagle wings represent the United States, torn off from England at the US Revolutionary War.

Lion	Lion with wings of an eagle. The wings are torn off. It stood on two feet like a man. Heart of a man.	England and the United States
Bear	Three ribs in its mouth. It's told to eat its fill of flesh.	Russia
Leopard	Four wings like bird on its back. Four heads.	European Union
Fourth Beast	Terrifying and frightening and very powerful. Large iron teeth. Crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. Different from the other beasts. It has ten horns.	United Nations

The Bear (Daniel 7:5) is Russia. The Bear has three ribs in its mouth. The three ribs are the Baltic States which were absorbed into the USSR. (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia) These states were absorbed into the USSR unlike any of the other states of the old Soviet Union. The Bear is told to eat its fill of flesh. Joseph Stalin executed 1 million political offenders, 14.5 million needlessly starved to death. 9.5 million people were deported, exiled, or imprisoned in work camps. An estimated 5 million were sent to 'Gulag Archipelago' never to return alive.

The Leopard (Daniel 7:6) is the European Union. It has four wings like a bird on its back. It has four heads and is given authority to rule. The EU was originally a series of economic treaties that over time are turning into a federation of states similar to the United States. The EU began with the Treaty of Rome in 1957. These were the four states of France, West Germany, Italy, and Benelux. (Benelux is Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxemburg.) The four wings, and possibly the four heads, are these four original states. The spots of the leopard probably represent the many different languages and cultures in the EU.

The fourth beast (Daniel 7:7) is the United Nations. The fourth beast is like no other beast. It's different from the former three. The fourth beast is terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It has large iron teeth. It will crush and devour its victims and trample underfoot whatever is left. The fourth beast is different from the other beasts. This beast has the ten horns. This beast is the kingdom of the antichrist.

The UN is a government, but it has not had the military power needed to enforce its "resolutions." In other words, it does not yet have its teeth. However, the fourth beast will have large iron teeth that will crush and devour its victims.

The first three horses are the superpowers of the end time generation. The first three beasts, on the other hand, represent nations which directly influence and control Israel. And the fourth beast is the same as the fourth horse. It's the United Nations.

Today, these four beasts which influence and control Israel, can be seen in the organization of nations called the Middle East Quartet. This organization was established in 2002 by Spanish Prime Minister Aznar. The Middle East Quartet consists of the same four powers: The United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations. On June 27, 2007, Tony Blair was appointed as special envoy to the Quartet. This was the same day that he resigned as Prime Minister of England.

UN — Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry
 European Union — High Representative Baroness Ashton of Upholland
 Russian Federation — Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov
 United States of America — Secretary of State John F. Kerry
 Special Envoy — Tony Blair

The total purpose of the Quartet is to solve the Middle East problems of Israel and the Palestinians. The Quartet is the author of the Road Map for Peace. Also, the peace treaty process should be watched that began in Annapolis, MD in November of 2007. This could turn into a seven-year treaty similar to the Oslo Accords which was signed in September of 1993. The Oslo Accords treaty deliberately left out critical issues such as the refugees, Jewish settlements, borders, and most importantly, the issue of Jerusalem.

This next treaty is expected to cover all the issues, and will probably be more of a unilateral agreement that is enforced by the Middle East Quartet. In other words, Israel is being pressured by the four beasts into signing this peace treaty. As we will see, the four beasts of Daniel 7 are very much related to the seventy weeks of Daniel 9. Both the seventy weeks and the Middle East Quartet are about the Gentile control of Old Jerusalem.

22.5) Two Generations, Separated by the Desolation of Jerusalem

In 70 AD, Jerusalem was destroyed. The Jews lost any remaining control of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was made desolate.

Luke 21:20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is at hand.

Note Christ's careful choice of words here. Jerusalem was made desolate. As we will see, this connects the event directly to the seventy weeks of Daniel 9.

A few verses down, we read about Jerusalem being trampled upon by the Gentiles. Remember our four verses, showing signs of the end times, which are uniquely fulfilled in this baby-boom generation? The second of these four is Luke 21:24. This verse begins the desolation of Jerusalem.

Luke 21:24 They will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

The adult generation, to which Jesus spoke, saw the desolation of Jerusalem. Luke 21 is about that generation. Jesus said, "This generation will not pass away until all has taken place" (ESV Luke 21:32).

Likewise, the adult baby-boom generation that saw the birth of Israel also saw the fulfillment of the time of the Gentiles. After the Six Day War of 1967, when the baby-boom generation had become adult, Jerusalem was no longer being trampled upon by the Gentiles. This marked the fulfillment of this verse.

Matthew 24 is all about the end-time generation that will see the abomination of desolation and the resurrection 1290 days later (Daniel 12:11). Matthew 24:34 (ESV) also says, "This generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Thus, Jesus was talking about two different generations that would not pass away before all these things take place. One generation sees the desolation of Jerusalem. The other generation sees the restoration of Jerusalem, and later the abomination of desolation, followed by the resurrection 1290 days later.

The time between the two generations is called the time of the Gentiles. It's all about the control of Jerusalem. The time of the Gentiles probably also extends back to soon after the death of Herod the Great. Jerusalem was not desolate between Herod's death and 70 AD. However, Jerusalem was being trampled upon by Rome. Gentile control (or desolation) vs. Jewish control (or restoration) of Jerusalem is the subject of the seventy-week timeline given in Daniel 9.

22.6) The Fifth Seal – Martyrs Bring the Gospel to Every Nation

We have covered the first four seals. Then we took a little detour to the four beasts and the seventy weeks. Now, it's time to return back to the seals. Remember that the seals are signs being revealed during the baby-boom end-time generation, which began right after World War II.

The fifth seal is all about martyrs and modern-day missions. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). Can the great commission be achieved during our baby-boom generation? People who study the various people-groups believe that it can be done. Mission activity and its success during this baby-boom generation have been like no other generation in history.

I believe that the success of missions work will climax during the time of the trumpets. Has the gospel already been preached in every nation? By some measures it has already happened. But during the time of the trumpets we will see people from every "nation, tribe, people, and language" (Revelation 7:9) completely overcoming sin so that they will be ready for Christ's return. The wise, who will be the Bride of Christ, must be completely sanctified by the time of the resurrection and the rapture.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) He who calls you is faithful, who will also do it.

In Revelation 7:9-17, John sees a "a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes, peoples, and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, dressed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands." These are wise, who will have completely overcome sin before the resurrection and the rapture. These are represented by the five wise virgins who will have enough oil in their lamps and will be able to enter the wedding banquet.

In other words, the good news (gospel) about the salvation of Jesus Christ has been preached to every nation. But this "gospel of the kingdom" has not yet been preached. This "gospel of the kingdom" is about inheriting the kingdom. The good news is that we can be a part of the Bride of Christ to reign with Christ during the millennium. God will be faithful to bring about complete sanctification for those he calls.

Chapter 23

The Mystery of God

For the New Wine System to work, there must be two types of resurrections. Some are resurrected into natural bodies. Others into spiritual bodies. Does Scripture make it clear that there are two types of resurrections? Yes, but Scripture was easily misunderstood by the early Greek mind. But the distinction is necessary for the New Wine System to work. Was this a "mystery of God?"

The rich man asked Jesus, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-32). Jesus tells him to obey all of the Ten Commandments. When he said he had done so all his life, Jesus tells him to sell all his possessions and to follow him.

When the man went away sad, Jesus told the disciples that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to "enter" the kingdom of heaven. The disciples were astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Obviously the disciples interpreted "entering" the kingdom as being completely equivalent to salvation. If this was wrong, Jesus did not correct them.

The disciples were very astonished at this, and started bringing up the fact that they had given up everything. Were they concerned about their own salvation? Jesus told them that at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, they would sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). (It's my belief that Paul, not Matthias, will replace Judas.) Will all the people, over which they will rule, also have sold all their possessions and given them to the poor? After the rich man left Jesus, the disciples walked behind Jesus astonished, and everyone else walked behind Jesus afraid (Mark 10:32). This was a very hard teaching.

Suppose a rich man today were to knock on the door of Billy Graham, or of some other famous evangelist. Suppose this rich man asked the evangelist what he must do to be saved. Would they tell him to repent of his sins and ask Jesus to come into his life? Or would they tell him he must first sell all his possessions and give everything to the poor? The evangelists would probably open their Bibles to the words of Paul in places like Romans 10, to put together the plan of salvation, but would not be likely to use the words of Jesus from these two passages about the rich man.

Did Jesus let the rich man go, knowing he would wind up in hell? Or did Jesus understand that the man could still be saved in the age to come? Obviously the disciples understood that the rich man would not be saved. Even so, Jesus gave them some hope, telling them that all things are possible with God. Is this a hint that the rich man would be saved, but would not “get eternal life” at first?

Mark 10:26-27 They were exceedingly astonished, saying to him, "Then who can be saved?" (27) Jesus, looking at them, said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God."

What does Jesus mean here? Of course no man can save anyone. Only God can save. Why then does Jesus say, “With men it is impossible?” Was Jesus making a statement that was besides-the-point and obvious, which the disciples would have assumed anyway? Of course the disciples would know that no man can save anyone. The disciples were expressing confusion about who could be saved. Basically, Jesus was saying that it’s not something that man understands (as yet). The fact is that with God, all things are possible. In this context, means they did not as yet understand how God will accomplish these things.

As we have already seen, the disciples at this point were afraid (Mark 10:32). They were afraid for their own salvation. Peter said, “See, we have left everything for you” (verse 28). How does Jesus respond? Does Jesus relate leaving everything to salvation? Yes and no.

Mark 10:29-31 Jesus said, "Most certainly I tell you, there is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or land, for my sake, and for the sake of the Good News, (30) but he will receive one hundred times more now in this time, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and land, with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. (31) But many who are first will be last; and the last first."

Jesus does not directly equate salvation with the sacrifices made by the disciples and their obedience. He says they will be highly rewarded for their sacrifice. Yet we know that it’s because of the disciples’ obedience to Christ that they are saved.

The important point to look at here is how Jesus finishes. “The first will be last, and the last will be first.” The rich man, at that time, was among the first in their society. He will be saved, but he will be last. The disciples were last in their society. They will be first in the kingdom of heaven. They will sit on twelve thrones, judging (ruling over) the twelve tribes (Matthew 19:18).

I contend that the focus of almost all of Christ's teaching was not about salvation. It was about what it ultimately takes to receive eternal life. That's what the rich man asked about. The rich man had asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" Christ's answer was to stop sinning. The only way to stop sinning, however, is to follow Christ. Therefore, Christ's answer was correct for the question. But, the disciples didn't exactly understand the question.

The disciples didn't understand the cross, which was to come. It was still part of the "Mystery of God." The cross brought salvation to everyone. Therefore, what's important is not salvation itself. Everyone who does not reject this salvation will be resurrected when Christ returns. And that also has been an aspect of the "Mystery of God." What's important is what it takes to get eternal life.

Christ's teachings, I believe, are all about the holiness that it takes to get eternal life before or after the resurrection. Christ taught about what it takes to be a part of the true Israel, and about what it will take to usher in the kingdom of heaven. If you miss out on that, however, Christ's teachings are still about what it takes to get eternal life after the resurrection, during the millennium.

Paul, I believe, addressed both issues separately. He talked about salvation, and about eternal life. Between the two topics, however, Paul drew no explicit distinctions. The evangelists of today tend to use Paul's teaching about being saved, and not Paul's teaching about what it takes to inherit the kingdom. When explaining the plan of salvation, evangelists tend to avoid the words of Jesus, except for John chapter 3, which is the chapter on being born again.

If the New Wine System is true, then it's not something that the disciples would have understood, at least during the ministry of Christ. But did Paul understand the distinction? Did Paul believe that there is such a distinction, and yet follow Christ's example of not teaching about this distinction?

Jesus spoke of "seeing" the kingdom only the one time in John chapter 3, which is the one chapter that evangelists use. It's the chapter in which Jesus said that if you believe on Him, then you will be saved (John 3:16). Elsewhere, Jesus spoke only of "entering" the kingdom. Jesus never spoke of "inheriting" the kingdom.

Paul, however, never mentions "entering" the kingdom. Paul seems to have changed "entering" the kingdom to "inheriting" the kingdom. The word "inherit" much more relates to Israel "inheriting" the promise of Abraham. In other words, "inheriting" the kingdom is much more suggestive of the exclusive relationship that Israel believed they have with God. The word seems to make more of a distinction

between Israel and the nations. Perhaps that's because Paul's audience was mostly Gentile, and he wanted them to believe they are a part of true Israel. Jesus was addressing Jewish people who believed that anyway. In any case, Paul never speaks of "entering" the kingdom.

If there is a distinction between inheriting the kingdom and simply being resurrected to live in the nations, Paul does not teach the distinction. It seems that both Paul and Jesus understood the distinction, but were not permitted by the Holy Spirit to teach it. Paul indicated that he had been caught up to Paradise and "heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell" (1 Corinthians 12:4). Paul understood more than he was permitted to teach.

Perhaps the New Wine System is true, yet it has been part of the "Mystery of God," that has been withheld until the end-time generation. If this New Wine System is true, then knowledge of it may have caused harm to previous generations that were not seeing all the signs of the coming great tribulation. If it were not for the danger of the mark of the beast, even this generation could see this system as an excuse to allow sin to remain in our lives.

Even so, many people today adopt what is known as "cheap grace." In other words, the knowledge of salvation becomes an allowance for some sin to remain in people's lives. Without the danger of the mark of the beast, many people would combine "cheap grace" with this New Wine System to allow for even more sin.

23.1) Some of the Mystery Revealed to Daniel

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a statue (Daniel 2). This dream is referred to as a Mystery of God, eight times in Daniel 2.

Daniel 2:17-19 ESV Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, (18) and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. (19) Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Daniel 2:47 ESV The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."

The mystery of the statue, of course, foretold the eternal kingdom of God.

23.2) Paul's Use of "The Mystery of God"

To one degree or another, the "Mystery of God" is about God's redemptive plan. The Jews did not understand that God's redemptive plan was for the Messiah to be sacrificed and die for their sins. The Jews did not understand that God's redemptive plan included Gentiles as part of Israel. The Jews did not understand that they would be hardened until the full number of Gentiles come in. All these aspects of God's Mystery were revealed to Paul. All these aspects of God's Mystery can be found in the Old Testament. Understanding was hidden from the Jews.

Romans 11:25 ESV Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

Romans 16:25-27 ESV Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages (26) but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-- (27) to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Two points should be observed that Paul is making here. (1) This mystery was intentionally "kept secret" by God, even though it had been in "the prophetic writings" all along. (2) The mystery is only revealed to the wise.

This brings us back to Daniel 12, where understanding of the words of the scroll would only be revealed to the wise at the time of the end. As we will see, understanding of the question in Daniel is very much a part of the Mystery of God. And the Mystery of God was partially revealed to the wise, through Paul, at the time of Christ. However, much of that Mystery is still "kept secret." For example, the specific answer to the question of "How long will it be until" the resurrection has not yet been fully revealed.

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

The Mystery of God is all about how God's redemptive plan is to unfold. When we receive our spiritual bodies, God's redemptive plan is complete for the elect. Of course that's not the end of the plan. We are the "firstfruits" of the harvest.

Ephesians 1:7-10 ESV In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, (8) which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight (9) making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ (10) as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 3:1-10 For this cause I, Paul, am the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, (2) if it is so that you have heard of the administration of that grace of God which was given me toward you; (3) how that by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I wrote before in few words, (4) by which, when you read, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; (5) which in other generations was not made known to the children of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; (6) that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus through the Good News, (7) of which I was made a servant, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power. (8) To me, the very least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, (9) and to make all men see what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ; (10) to the intent that now through the assembly the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places.

Colossians 2:2-3 ESV to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, (3) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The Mystery of God concerns the details of God's redemptive plan. The fact that Gentiles are included in Israel has now been revealed. The fact has been revealed that God's Mystery centers on the sacrifice of Christ. The fact that the Jews would be hardened until the full number of Gentiles has come in has been revealed.

However, the exact timeline of God's redemptive plan has not been revealed. And the full extent of God's redemptive plan, during Christ's Messianic reign, has not been revealed. In other words, our understanding of how the rich ruler can be saved is only now being revealed. It can be seen in the New Wine System. As Jesus said conserving the ruler's salvation, "All things are possible with God." These details are all in Scripture. But the wise are only now beginning to understand. The time of the end is coming very soon.

23.3) The Mystery of God's Timeline

As a summary of the Mystery of God's Timeline, consider the following dialog that happens in Scripture. The dialog begins with Daniel and two angels in his last vision. The dialog continues with Jesus and the disciples. And the dialog ends in Revelation with John and an angel.

First Angel: He was above the water. He asks, "How long will it be before the resurrection is fulfilled?" (Daniel 12:6, 2, 13)

Second Angel: He was also above the water. He holds up his right hand. He holds his left hand up towards heaven. He swore by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times, and half a time." (Daniel 12:7)

Daniel: I don't understand. (Daniel 12:8)

Second Angel: You are not supposed to understand. It's a mystery. Seal the words until the time of the end. At that time, only the wise will understand. The wicked will not understand. It will be a time when there will be great increase in knowledge and travel. (Daniel 12:9, 10, 4)

Second Angel: But here is a sign. From the abomination of desolation it's 1290 days to the resurrection. (Daniel 12:11) Once you see the abomination, there is no more mystery. You will then be able to compute the day of the resurrection. But only the wise will understand to do so.

The Disciples: "When will all this happen?" (Matthew 24:3)

Jesus: No one hath known. It's still a mystery. But here are some signs. (Matthew 24:36, Acts 1:7)

Paul: The Mystery of God is about the resurrection. Jesus was raised from the dead; and so shall we. We will get spiritual bodies just like Jesus. Also, part of the Mystery of God is that Gentiles are included, and that the Jews were hardened until the full number comes in. (1 Cor. 15:51, Eph. 1:9-10, 3:1-13, Rom. 11:25)

Angel: He was standing on the sea (water) and the land. He shouts. (Rev. 10:3)

Seven Thunders: They speak, but John is told to seal the words. No doubt they have something to do with a “time, times, and half a time.” The timing of the resurrection was still sealed when John wrote Revelation. (Rev. 10:4)

Angel: He holds up his right hand toward heaven. He swore by him who lives forever, saying, “There is no more delay. The Mystery of God is accomplished in the days of the seventh trumpet.” (Rev. 10:6, 7)

Related to the seven thunders of Revelation 10, we find an angel who stands on the land and the sea, who swore by him who lives forever (Revelation 10:5). We also find this in Daniel 12:7. The angel in Daniel lifts his right hand and his left hand towards heaven. The angel in Revelation lifts his right hand toward heaven. This is not exactly the same. But it's close enough to rule out coincidence. Both the angel in Revelation and the angel in Daniel “swear by him who lives forever.”

In Daniel, the angel says, “It will be for a time, times and half a time.” This is in response to the question, “How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?” Looking back to verse 2, and forward to verse 13, we see that “these astonishing things” includes the resurrection. The question is, “How long will it be before [the resurrection]?” The answer is, “A time, times, and half a time.” Daniel, of course, does not understand. The angel tells him that the words are sealed until the time of the end. In other words, Daniel is not supposed to understand. It's a mystery to Daniel. Only the wise at the time of the end will understand.

Compare this with what happens in Revelation. When the angel shouts, the seven thunders speak. But John is told, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.” This is almost exactly what Daniel is told. Daniel is told the words are sealed. John is told to seal the words. So, that which the seven thunders say is probably related to the answer given to Daniel, which is “A time, times, and half a time.” It's an indication of how long it will be until the resurrection.

Until the time of the end, the day of the resurrection is unknown. It's the Mystery of God. But Daniel is given a sign. From the abomination of desolation, there are 1290 days to the resurrection (Dan. 12:11). Once we see the abomination, the wise will be able to compute the days and thus know the date of the resurrection. When we see the abomination, the Mystery of God will be over. It will no longer be a mystery for the entire Church. But the wicked will continue to be wicked, and will not understand. This is what Daniel is told in Daniel 12:9-10.

23.4) A Time, Times, and Half a Time

In response to the question, Daniel is actually told two different aspects to the Mystery that he, of course, didn't understand. The understandings of both points were sealed until the time of the end.

Daniel 12:7-8 NIV The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." (8) I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?"

The first point is in direct answer to the question, "How long will it be until the end of these wonders?" The angel swears it will be for a "time, times, and half a time." This term can also be found in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14. In both of these other passages, the term most likely refers to 3 ½ years.

Many people have also assumed that the unit is a year in this passage of Daniel 12:8. It should be noted that the word used for "time" in Daniel 12:8 is different from the word used for "time" in Daniel 7:25. The word used in Daniel 12:8 means "appointed time", and can better be used to describe an age or a season. Whereas the word used in Daniel 7:25 simply means "time," like "hour" in the New Testament. Therefore, the "time, times, and half a time" of Daniel 12:8 may be referring to a much longer amount of time. However, it should also be noted that these two passages in Daniel are written in two different languages. So this word comparison can be argued as invalid.

Therefore, we must go back to context. The question is not, "How long will it take?" Most people have assumed such because "time, times, and half a time" is usually interpreted as 3 ½ years, just like Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14. The real question is the one that Daniel would have much more naturally have wanted

to ask. The question the angel asked is, “How long shall it be [from that time], till the end of all these wonders?” The answer to this question cannot be 3 ½ years.

If we interpret this answer along the lines of the beliefs of the early church fathers, before Augustine, then it makes sense. They believed in the millennial week, with the earthly reign of Christ being the Sabbath. Christ, therefore, is “Lord of the Sabbath” millennium. Assuming that Christ is indeed returning in our generation, the question that was asked by the angel was asked in Daniel’s time. It was asked around the middle of the seven millennia. Therefore, the half a time would be from Daniel to Christ. The times would be the two millennia of the Church Age. And the single time would be Christ’s millennial reign.

The second aspect of this mysterious answer involves the power of the holy people. The Hebrew word for “power” in this verse is ‘Yad.’ The word means ‘hand, strength, or power.’ It’s first used in the Bible in Genesis 3:22, speaking of Adam being able to reach out his hand and take from the tree of life, after he had eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In other words, the “power of the holy people” is not a good power. It’s our power that we take upon ourselves to decide what is good and what is evil. We must allow God to declare what is good and what is evil. When that power is finally broken in God’s holy people, then we will be ready to receive eternal life.

Chapter 24

The Greatest Revival of All Time

The very first sign that Jesus performed was the changing of water to wine. Jesus did this at the request of his mother Mary. At first, Jesus objects to doing the miracle. He said, “My time has not yet come” (John 2:4). Of course his time was at least very soon to come because he had already begun to get the twelve disciples to follow him.

What did Jesus mean when he said his time had not yet come? The ministry of Jesus was during a 3 ½ year period, leading up to the crucifixion. Obviously this was the time to which Jesus refers.

Jesus did so many miracles that the disciples could not write them all down (John 21:25). The miracles of Jesus, over time, grew more and more spectacular. At first, the miracles were in healing the diseases of the poor. The rich do not pay much attention to the poor. Then it progressed to the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:16-21), and the feeding of the four thousand (Matthew 15:32-28). The word of Christ’s miracles got around, because they were so many. However, it was when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, that the rich rulers actually took action to have Jesus killed (John 11:46-53, 12:9-19).

Lazarus was buried in a rich man’s tomb. How do we know this? The poor were not buried. They were cremated. Also Mary, the sister of Lazarus, poured a bottle of expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus (Luke 7:38, John 11:2, John 12:3). This family was not poor. The raising of Lazarus could not be hidden. This event resulted in the people of Jerusalem honoring Jesus as the Messiah as he rode in on a donkey. There was no longer any doubt that Jesus was the Messiah.

Jesus did many great things. But he promised that the Holy Spirit will do even greater miracles for the Church.

John 14:11-14 NIV Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. (12) I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. (13) And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. (14) You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

There have been many miracles done for the Church over the centuries. But they have been mainly for the poor. They have not been recognized by the world. They have never escalated to the public level of awareness as the raising of Lazarus. Yet Jesus promised we will be doing even greater things than he.

What is the problem? What will it take for the world as a whole to recognize that Jesus is the Messiah? What will it take for the Jews in Jerusalem to recognize that Jesus is the Messiah?

If there have been people raised from the dead, then why has the world been able to ignore it? Could it be that our time has not yet come? Jesus did the miracle of changing water to wine. But his time had not yet come. Miracles have been done for the Church. But our time has not yet come. Today, even if someone were to be raised from the dead, right out of the casket at the grave-side funeral, the news media would probably not believe it, and would probably not report it. It would not change the world, as did the raising of Lazarus.

I believe the time of the elect will be during the first half of the seven-year period of Christ's return. I believe it will start with the appearing of the New Jerusalem in orbit around the earth. The news media will not be able to ignore it. That will be the time of the elect. That time will be so strong that it will bring about the greatest tribulation of all time. And then Christ will appear in the clouds.

Many people know about the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21), a time of great suffering for Christ's people, which is to come prior to Christ's return. However, what many do not realize is that this is also a time of great revival. This is a time when all people will be forced to completely trust and obey Christ, or to reject Christ altogether. There will be no middle ground.

The first half of the seven-year period of Christ's return will be more characterized as a great revival. The second half will be more characterized as a great tribulation. There will, however, be some aspects of both in either half. In this chapter, we will look at some of the Scriptural evidence of the great revival.

24.1) The Sealing of the 144,000

Many people, including myself, look at the daily news and see signs of the end times. Some observe that things are getting worse, and try to use these signs as a way to measure or speculate how long it will be until the start of the seven-year period of Christ's return. But what if God's timeline waits for just the opposite? What if the time comes when God's people are ready for a world-wide revival?

In chapter 18 of this book, we discussed the fact that Church is Israel. How does this apply to the 144,000 of Revelation 7? Dispensationalists, who believe Israel is a distinct body of believers separate from the Church, generally say the 144,000 are all Jews. The Jews who returned from Babylon, however, were predominately from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. Also, there were some who were of Levi. The northern kingdom of the ten tribes had already been dispersed to Assyria many years prior. The northern kingdom was never re-gathered.

Since the Church is Israel, I believe all the 144,000 are members of the true Church, which is the true Israel. They are both Jews and Gentiles. The New Jerusalem has twelve gates. Each has a name of one of the twelve tribes. There is no gate for Christian Gentiles. I believe that each of us who are elect, who are given the right to enter the New Jerusalem, are members of one of the twelve tribes.

Revelation 7:3 tells us the harm to the land, sea, and trees will not happen until the 144,000 are sealed. Harm to the land, sea, and trees is described in the first two trumpet-plagues (Revelation 8:7-8). In other words, the sealing of the 144,000 happens very early on in the seven-year period, or perhaps just before it begins.

To be sealed is to receive the promise of spiritual bodies and eternal life by receiving the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13, 4:30). However, far more than 144,000 believers have already received the Holy Spirit. The sealing of the 144,000 is much more likely to be the actual and literal receiving of spiritual bodies and eternal life; not simply the promise of it.

Revelation 14:1-5, tells us more about the 144,000. Verse 4 says they are firstfruits to God and the Lamb. What does it mean to be firstfruits? The Resurrection of Christ was on the feast of firstfruits. In 1 Corinthians 15:20,23, Paul says Christ's resurrection was firstfruits. This means that the major part of the harvest is to come. The resurrection of Christ was the firstfruits to God. Thus, the sealing of the 144,000 is the firstfruits to God and to Christ (the Lamb). The 144,000 will get their spiritual bodies before the first two trumpet-plagues. Later, there is more to come with the harvest of the rest of the elect on the last day.

This strongly suggests that the 144,000 will have their spiritual bodies at the start of the seven-year period. Paul said that Gentiles had been given salvation in order to make the Jews envious (Romans 10:19, 11:11, 11:14). Could the same thing be happening with the 144,000? Most believers are not ready for Christ to return. Most believers are still enslaved to sin. The 144,000 receive their spiritual bodies for the purpose of being a wake-up call to the rest of the Church. The purpose of the sealing of the 144,000 is to bring the greatest revival of all time.

24.2) Paradise, the New Jerusalem

In Part One of this book, we discussed the New Jerusalem. It is also called Paradise. We discussed the idea that the New Jerusalem could appear in orbit around earth on or before the start of the millennium. Refer back to section 2.16, titled “What is Paradise Anyway?” Also, refer back to section 3.13, titled “What Does It Mean To Literally Enter the Kingdom?”

Only people with spiritual bodies can enter the New Jerusalem. If the 144,000 are given spiritual bodies at the start of the seven-year period, then it would also be logical that the New Jerusalem would appear at or before the start of the seven-year period. This would also serve the purpose of making the rest of the Church envious. The 144,000 could report on what it’s like inside the New Jerusalem. Perhaps they could even take pictures.

The spiritual bodies of the 144,000 will give credibility to the New Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem will give credibility to the 144,000. Only those who do not believe the Bible to be true, or who have very selfish motives for promoting their own interpretation of the Bible, will deny these two works of God.

24.3) The Two Witnesses

Revelation tells us very little about the 144,000. Will they make public appearances? It’s my guess that the 144,000 will appear in churches quite often, but will not appear publicly very often. On the other hand, Revelation 11 tells us about the two witnesses. They are probably part of the 144,000. However, they seem to be described as being more public.

The two witnesses prophecy for 1260 days. At the end of the 1260 days, they are killed and lie dead in Jerusalem for 3 ½ days. Then they are resurrected. During these 3 ½ days, the world celebrates their death by exchanging gifts. In other words, the world hates the two witnesses, but they can’t be ignored. Anyone who just appears in churches, even if they have spiritual bodies, can be ignored by the world. The world would simply say they don’t believe it, or it’s a trick.

However, the same is not true about the two witnesses. During these 1260 days, the trumpet-plagues are poured out. Revelation 11:6 says they have the power to turn water into blood, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. No doubt the two witnesses will be blamed for the trumpet-plagues. The world will truly hate them and will greatly want them dead.

Now, combine the preaching of the two witnesses and the trumpet-plagues, with the 144,000 and the New Jerusalem in orbit around the earth. If you are not in love with Christ, and if you do not consider the return of Christ to be real, and of great benefit, then these items on the daily news would make one very fearful. Christians have been saying for 2000 years that Christ will return and rule the world. As long as comments like these are considered to be religious in nature, nobody gets upset. But when comments like these start being perceived as being literally about to happen, worldly people will do anything to stop Christ from returning.

At the battle of Armageddon, all the nations of the world will send their armies to surround Jerusalem. This seems to be a strange reaction. To think the armies of the world are any match for Christ is crazy. But people with this level of reality thrown in their faces will do crazy things. It's much better to simply give your life to Christ, and to anoint Him as King of Kings. Many, however, will not do so. Their names will be marked out of the Lamb's Book of Life. That's because rejecting Christ in the face of this level of proof about Christ is the unpardonable hardening of one's heart against Christ.

24.4) Building the Temple of God

Theologians from the amillennial side, and perhaps some theologians from the premillennial side, believe that to build the temple again would be an abomination against Christ. The Church, collectively, is the real temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:21.) (All of our bodies collectively form a single temple, according to these verses.) Also, the old stone-structure temple was a place for animal sacrifice. Theologians believe that to begin animal sacrifice again would be an abomination against Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Yet there are several passages of Scripture which indicate the temple will be rebuilt before Christ returns.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 says the man of lawlessness will set himself up in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. This was written before the old temple was destroyed. Therefore, the author and his audience would naturally assume this temple to be the physical temple made of stone, standing on the Temple Mount. This is given as a sign, by Paul, to take place just prior to the coming of the day of the Lord, and our being gathered unto Him (verse 1).

Amillennial theologians try to interpret this verse as being in reference to the spiritual temple, which is our collective temple-body. This is done regardless of the fact that audiences of that day would never have interpreted it as such. The Holy

Spirit resides inside our collective temple-body. That's the only reason we are God's temple. Only a spirit can reside inside a body. Likewise, only the Holy Spirit can reside inside the collective temple-body. A man of lawlessness cannot reside inside our temple-body as the Holy Spirit does. Therefore, amillennial theologians must re-interpret the spiritual temple, at least for this verse, as being an earthly church organization.

Another verse that indicates a literal rebuilding of the temple, just prior to Christ's return, is Revelation 11:1-2. John is given a measuring rod, and is told to measure the temple. A measuring rod, and the task of measuring the temple, gives it a very physical interpretation.

Closely associated with this physical temple is the 1260-day prophecy of the two witnesses. It's during this time of prophecy that the real spiritual temple will be built. People from every nation, tribe, people, and language will commit themselves to Christ, to overcoming sin, and to getting ready for Christ to return. In verse 19, we see something about the spiritual temple. John sees God's temple in heaven open, and the Ark of the Covenant is seen within his temple. I'm not sure whether this is literal or just symbolic. In either case, the meaning is clear. The Ark of the Covenant represents God's law. For the Ark of the Covenant to be seen in the temple means that God's law is finally written on the hearts of all who are in the Church.

I believe the physical temple will be rebuilt during these 1260 days. This will literally happen. However, the literal temple is only symbolic of the spiritual temple. At the same time that the literal temple will be rebuilt, the spiritual temple will be built. The Bride will make herself ready (Revelation 19:7).

Part Seven

Christian Perfection by Grace and Works (Booklet)

Part Seven of this book is also published separately in a smaller booklet. The first six parts of New Wine for the End Times have endeavored to look at every aspect of Scripture that has a bearing on the New Wine System. Once we understand what Christ really meant by the wise, the foolish, and the wicked, we learn that we must overcome all our sinful habits if we are really to know Christ and be his disciple.

In light of the New Wine System presented in this book, much of what Christ said about the Kingdom of Heaven takes on new meaning. If there are three intermediate states in the grave, then we can no longer water down the holiness verses, saying that holiness is not required for eternal life. If we want to inherit the kingdom, we must take holiness very seriously.

1 John 2:3-6 NIV We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. (4) The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (5) But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: (6) Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

We overcome sin by grace because it's impossible to completely overcome sin without the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We overcome sin by works because as we do the works that Christ commands us to do, the Holy Spirit fills us, enabling us to do the will of the Father. When God has filled us, we cannot sin because God is in us and God cannot sin. But we can still yield to temptations because all sins are habitual. The Holy Spirit backs off when we yield to temptations. But we can repent and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us again. So we must again focus on the works the Father has commanded us to do and again be filled with the Holy Spirit. As we get immersed in the works of God, sin no longer has control over us, and we can become completely sanctified, overcoming all our sinful habits.

Introduction

During the last couple of decades, there has been an ongoing debate known as Lordship salvation vs. free grace salvation. Advocates of Lordship salvation say there must be a noticeable change in the life of a believer if he is really to be saved. Thus, these advocates believe there could be millions of church-goers who think they are saved but are not. Lordship salvation advocates put emphasis on the words of Jesus which seem to be completely intolerant of any sin with regards to inheriting the kingdom.

On the other hand, free grace advocates place emphasis on the words of Paul and say that salvation is a free gift. There would be some "fruit of the Spirit" in the life of any believer. But the amount of fruit could be completely unnoticeable.

It's been assumed that all who are saved will inherit the kingdom. But a study of verses about inheriting the kingdom alongside verses involving salvation seem to indicate that salvation is about faith whereas inheriting the kingdom is always about holiness. Carnal Christians will be saved but will not inherit the kingdom.

The New Wine System takes this approach. Not all believers will inherit the kingdom. Those who overcome all their sinful habits before Christ returns will inherit the kingdom and reign with Christ during the millennium. Everyone else, including the carnal Christians, will live in the nations here on the earth. Jesus tells his disciples to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. So you can be saved and yet not inherit the kingdom.

The separation of simple salvation from inheriting the kingdom makes it clear that holiness is eternally important. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:15). Carnal Christians will be surprised at being excluded from the wedding banquet. The five foolish virgins will be saved, but they will be surprised that they must still overcome sin in order to inherit eternal life.

We must become completely sanctified in order to inherit the kingdom. That means we must overcome all our sinful habits. But failure to do so before death or before Christ returns does not mean we go to hell or purgatory. This elevates Christian perfection to be more than something which Christians think they should do, but they don't think is really all that necessary. Christian perfection is the practical application of the New Wine System.

The letter of 1 John focuses heavily the need to completely stop sinning. Seven times John refers to his audience as "little children" (1 John 2:1, 2:12, 2:28, 3:7,

3:18, 4:4, and the last verse of the letter, 5:21). How much sin do we need to overcome in order to be considered mature and wise? How much does it take to be a saint? Is anybody perfect? What does it mean to be completely sanctified (1 Thessalonians 5:23) and inherit the kingdom and eternal life?

1 John 3:2-9 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is. (3) Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure. (4) Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. (5) You know that he was revealed to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. (6) Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him. (7) Little children, let no one lead you astray. He who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. (8) He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. To this end the Son of God was revealed, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (9) Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, because his seed remains in him; and he can't sin, because he is born of God.

The Reformed view of theology says that nobody can completely stop sinning. This would be the view of Luther and Calvin. Thus, even John would have been still sinning just a little when he wrote these words. And yet John says, "Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him." Thus, if you believe that John was still sinning when he wrote these words, you have to go to great lengths to explain what John means.

At the same time, if you take John's words at face value, it would seem that only those who become mature and completely stop sinning can be saved. After all, if you are continuing to sin, according to John, you don't know Christ. And if you don't know Christ, you are not saved. This would mean that very few people are saved. We are saved by grace, and through faith, that no man can boast (Romans 4:2-3, Ephesians 2:8-10). So how can John say, "Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him?"

The New Wine System is all about forgetting the traditional interpretations of the New Testament. Instead, we must put ourselves into the shoes of the ancient Jews whose Bible was the Old Testament. We must interpret the New Testament in the context of the Old Testament. When this is done, we begin to understand that both the Old Testament and the New Testament teaches there are three types

of people in the grave. The wise are those who have completely overcome all their sinful habits through a personal discipleship (Lordship) relationship with Jesus Christ. The foolish are those who still have some faith in God, even God the Creator, but they still have sinful habits. And the wicked are those who deliberately and knowingly reject Jesus Christ.

Thus, the foolish (carnal) can still be saved through faith. Salvation is a gift so that nobody can boast. At the same time, only those who stop sinning know Christ. Only those who have a discipleship relationship with Christ are mature and wise. That's why John addresses his audience as "little children." John was speaking as one who had completely overcome all his old sinful habits. This is why John can say, "Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him." John has experienced the truth that when you live in the light of Christ, you don't sin. When in darkness, you are not living with Christ. From darkness, you have neither seen Him nor known Him. Foolish Christians go back and forth between the light and darkness.

To be ready for Christ to return involves the overcoming of all sinful habits. It involves living in the light all the time. These habits are reoccurring sins that are still happening. I don't think that means you have repented of each and every past sin. When we first confess our faith in Christ and become a believer, our sins are forgiven, by the blood of Christ. All of them. Period.

However, we must overcome all our sinful habits. If the Holy Spirit brings some past sins to mind, then perhaps you still have a tendency to sin in that area. If you have wronged someone in the past, it's best to ask them to forgive you. Otherwise, you will still carry the harm that the sin caused you to receive. When temptation comes, it will be harder to resist if you have not asked for forgiveness when you should. And asking forgiveness can only help heal the relationship. Asking forgiveness brings release from the sin. It will release you from the guilt of sin. And it helps you be sure that you won't do the sin anymore.

That's because sin must be brought into the light. You can't just say "I won't do it anymore." We were slaves to sin. The bondage of sin is too strong for us to overcome it in secret, which is darkness. If you just tell yourself and God that you won't do it anymore, then when temptation comes, you will tend to say, "Well I can just ask God to forgive me again." And so you fall to the temptation again. But when you truly seek the forgiveness of others, the change goes very deep. When temptation comes, you will know that you have put yourself on the line with the person from which you have asked forgiveness.

Let's compare it with being drunk. Perhaps someone is an alcoholic. And in being an alcoholic, the alcohol-addicted person causes hurt in other people around them. Part of the process of overcoming alcoholism is to ask forgiveness of the people that were hurt. The purpose here is to stop drinking. (Or stop sinning.) But there could have been many people that were hurt by the alcoholic that do not even come to mind as the alcoholic begins his or her recovery. So one would not have to figure out every possible person and ask forgiveness of them all. But the Holy Spirit and circumstances will bring to mind the ones that count, whose relationships need to be healed.

It's very much the same as confessing your sins one-to-another. It forces you to be accountable to someone else regarding your sinful habits. That's why Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) can work. Very few alcoholics can overcome their addiction by simply asking God to forgive them. The drunk believes he or she can stop at any time. But they can't. However, when they become accountable to others in the group, and to the people they have harmed because of the alcoholism, then it becomes possible for them to completely stop drinking.

So how do you know when you are ready for Christ to return? It's when the Holy Spirit gives you peace. It's entering God's rest (Psalm 95:11, Hebrews 3:11, 4:3, 4:5.) Your sins are all forgiven. That was Christ's work on the cross. But it's the Holy Spirit's work in you to help you overcome the sinful habits. Ask God to not give you rest until all your sinful habits have been overcome. And always be open to the possibility that the Holy Spirit may show you something later on that was hidden to you in the past.

The first thing we must all do, every day, is to pray for holiness. Ask God to give you a day of holiness. Ask God to not lead you into temptation. Holiness comes one day at a time. Every day must be a new day for which you depend upon the Holy Spirit to keep you from falling back into darkness that day. That's why the alcoholic counts days. We live one day at a time with God. Stay in the light. Don't fall off the bandwagon. Start each day in prayer.

The alcoholic never says that he is no longer an alcoholic. The alcoholic knows that he or she can still be tempted, and could very easily fall off the bandwagon. Likewise, I never say that no sinful habits will crop up again. But I can and do have a peace that as far as I know, I'm ready for Christ to return. As long as you have peace from the Holy Spirit, that all your sinful habits have been overcome, you can be confident that you are ready for Christ to return. And you can be confident that

the Holy Spirit will complete this work in your life as long as you truly seek God's rest through Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6 ESV And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

What about examples in the Scripture? Paul believed he had finished the race, before he died:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIV Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. (25) Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (26) Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. (27) No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

And then later in his life, he wrote:

2 Timothy 4:7-8 NIV I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (8) Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Also, Jesus told his disciples, after about three years of discipleship, that they were all clean; (all but Judas.)

John 13:10-11 Jesus said to him, "Someone who has bathed only needs to have his feet washed, but is completely clean. You are clean, but not all of you." (11) For he knew him who would betray him, therefore he said, "You are not all clean."

John 15:1-4 ESV "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. (2) Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. (3) Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. (4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

Our cups must be clean on the inside as well as the outside. When you are clean (without sin) on the inside, you will be clean (without sin) on the outside. The inside of the cup is one's thought life. Once we overcome all our habits of sinful thoughts, we won't be sinning on the outside. You won't commit adultery if you are not lusting. You won't commit murder or lash out in a rage of anger if you are not angry against someone on the inside. But how do you overcome sins of the mind? Recognize the things that trigger your thoughts. Avoid the triggers. And most importantly, pray for God's help and focus on the cross.

You become clean by being Christ's disciple, and by seeking his righteousness. Being Christ's disciple is more than just learning. It's all about doing what Christ is doing in you. That's what Paul meant when he said that he no longer lives, but Christ lives in him (Galatians 2:20). You can't do it by just fighting sin. You do it by finding Christ's purpose for your life. As you do the Father's work, your purpose in Christ becomes more important in your life than anything else. That purpose winds up taking the place of the sinful habits.

In other words, all sin is about self. We find Christ's purpose for us that is never about self. As we work in Christ's purpose, sin disappears, because self becomes less and less important. That's what it means to take up your cross and follow Christ (Matthew 10:38, 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23). Even your very life is of no importance as compared with the purpose of following Christ, which is to do the things that Christ would do if he were in your shoes.

1 John 2:3-6 NIV We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. (4) The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (5) But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: (6) Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

The point here is that Jesus obeyed the Father's commands and walked without sin. We overcome sin by grace because it's impossible to completely overcome sin without the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We overcome sin by works because as we do the works that Christ commands us to do, the Holy Spirit fills us, enabling us to do the will of the Father. When God has filled us, we cannot sin because God is in us and God cannot sin. When God has filled us, we remain in the light. But we still can respond to temptations because all sins are habitual. We can still fall into darkness.

The Holy Spirit backs off if we fall into temptations. But we can repent and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us again. The Holy Spirit can bring us back into the light. So we must again focus on the works the Father has commanded us to do and again be filled with the Holy Spirit. As we get immersed in the works of God, sin no longer has control over us, and we can become completely sanctified, overcoming all our sinful habits. Let's read 1 John 3:2-9 again:

1 John 3:2-9 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is. (3) Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure. (4) Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. (5) You know that he was revealed to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. (6) Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him. (7) Little children, let no one lead you astray. He who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. (8) He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. To this end the Son of God was revealed, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (9) Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, because his seed remains in him; and he can't sin, because he is born of God.

People read, "Whoever remains in him doesn't sin," and "whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him," and then immediately become confused. Every Christian believes that they know him. And every Christian struggles with sin. So the passage is dismissed in some way. Often the reader simply assumes the passage is talking about really bad sins. There is always some class of sins that are perceived as being worse than the ones we struggle with. But John treats sin as being either in darkness or light. There is no middle ground. There is no gray area. John is comparing the absence of sin that is expected of us with the absence of sin in Jesus Christ.

Some take the following verse out of context in order to argue that you can't completely overcome sin.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But let's look at the verse in context. John makes an obvious point that God is in the light, and in him there is no darkness. Then he says we must walk in the light just as God is in the light. There is no gray between the light and the darkness. You are either in darkness or you are in the light. And if you are in the light, it's

just like God being in the light. Therefore, verse 8 cannot be saying that everyone continues to sin. Verse 8 must be saying the same thing as verse 10, which is that all have sinned in the past, and therefore all of us need the blood of Christ to forgive us of our sins. Verse 8 cannot be used to say we cannot completely overcome all our sinful habits.

1 John 1:5-10 This is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (6) If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and don't tell the truth. (7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we haven't sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Most Reformed theologians will concede that verse 10 is talking about past sins. But they insist that verse 8 is talking about present sins. In the Greek, verse 1:10 uses a verb for "sinned". And of course that verb is in the past tense (indicative, perfect, active). But in verse 1:8, a noun is used for "sin" instead of a verb. In this translation, as well as the ESV/KJV translations, the word "no" modifies the noun "sin." But the Greek word for "no" is an adverb. Therefore, it should modify the verb and not the noun.

1 John 1:8 ESV/KJV/NKJV/WEB If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

The verb means "to have", or "to hold." So literally speaking, it could be translated as: "If we say we do not hold sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." If we don't translate it like this, we have an adverb modifying a noun. Having sin, or holding sin, can easily be talking about having or holding the guilt of sins that were committed in the past. So what do Reformed theologians say to this? Obviously they are not going to change their opinion. Here an email response to me from one person who is working on his doctorate in theology.

I appreciate that you're looking at the Greek text to gain some clarity on these interpretive matters. You are right to point out that the phrasing in 1:10 and 1:8 are slightly different, but the general trend of each is preserved in most English translations. 1:10 is the

perfect tense ("have not sinned"), and 1:8 is a simple present ("have no sin"). They look similar in English, but are quite different in the Greek (as you noticed).

The word for "have" can reasonably be translated as "hold," and is in other contexts. And while your interpretation may be a plausible one, it's a bit of a strain on the actual usage and not one that is offered as a natural reading of the verse. That doesn't mean it's necessarily wrong, but it's significant that no one in church history has it read like this. A good rule of thumb is to give deference to those who knew the language and context of Scripture if we come up with a unique interpretation.

He agrees that technically I'm correct. But he falls back on tradition. Most theologians don't generally consider this verse to be translated in this way. So it's assumed not be true. But look at the amount of explaining that is done in order to make 1 John say something besides the fact that we must completely stop sinning. Generally, they say things like there is more than one type of sin. There are really bad sins that we can stop. And then there are not-so bad sins that we can't stop doing. And they rely heavily on this one verse to make that case. I just don't see John as saying that you can't stop sinning. In overcall context, he is writing these things to teach us that in Christ we can stop sinning. You are either in light, as Jesus is in the light, or you are in darkness, according to John.

To really understand what John is saying, these verses should be examined in context. And we will do so in chapter 2, titled "The Christian Perfection of John." For now, just understand that when the Holy Spirit is in us we are in the light. When we are in the light we cannot sin because God is in us and God does not sin. When we fall to temptations, we move into the darkness and the Holy Spirit leaves. We must repent and the Holy Spirit fills us again. As we do the works of the Father, we are filled with the Holy Spirit more and more often. As we become consumed with doing the Father's commands (works), we are no longer sinning on a more continual basis. Thus, we can remain in the light.

When arguing against Christian perfection, another verse that is often taken out of context is the verse in James that has been used to argue "sins of omission." Actually, many Christians who bring up "sins of omission" don't know exactly where it's taught in Scripture. But that phrase "sins of omission" has been used so often that everyone assumes that it's taught by Scripture.

The assumption is that everyone is always sinning because there is always something else that could be done for the Father. Perhaps I could have had the opportunity to go over and talk with a stranger about getting saved. The thought occurred to me, but I was nervous about doing so, and so didn't do it. Thus, it's believed, I've sinned. It matters not if one has overcome all their sinful habits. They are still sinning because of the ever-present "sins of omission." There is always something else that could have been done. So all Christians become continuous sinners for not doing enough. The verse that is taken out of context is the last verse in James chapter 4.

James 4:17 NIV Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

But in context, it's not talking about moment-to-moment missed opportunities. James is talking about the general direction one takes in life. We must seek the calling God has for us and don't neglect that calling. Here is the verse in context.

James 4:13-17 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow let's go into this city, and spend a year there, trade, and make a profit." (14) Whereas you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. For what is your life? For you are a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. (15) For you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will both live, and do this or that." (16) But now you glory in your boasting. All such boasting is evil. (17) To him therefore who knows to do good, and doesn't do it, to him it is sin.

Does James really teach against Christian perfection? Chapter 2 of this booklet is titled "The Christian Perfection of James." As we will see, the first three chapters of James argue very much in favor of Christian perfection.

For those who argue against Christian perfection with "sins of omission," consider these words of Jesus:

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus also taught us to completely overcome sin. The theme of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is to be "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Jesus compares this perfection that is expected of us with the perfection of the Father. This is done in order to prevent his meaning from being understated.

Compare this perfection with John's teaching about being in the light or the darkness, with no gray in between. In this sermon, Jesus teaches us to be perfect by storing our treasures in heaven. The narrow gate that few find is only found by those who do the works of the Father (Matthew 7:13-23). We will examine the Sermon on the Mount in more detail in chapter 1 of this booklet. The chapter is titled, "Christian Perfection According to Jesus."

The gospel of Jesus is often seen as being quite different from the gospel of Paul. Some even claim that the gospel of Jesus was for an old dispensation and that it changed at the cross. One dispensational pastor, who is a friend of mine, says he interprets the words of Jesus "through the lenses of Paul." In other words, he reinterprets the words of Jesus using his interpretation of the words of Paul. A better approach is to interpret Paul in the context of the words of Jesus.

It's true that Paul spoke a lot about his own struggle with sin. For this reason, Paul's words are often used to argue that you can't overcome sin. In chapter 3 of this booklet, we will examine Paul's struggle in overcoming sin.

Some people have used Paul's struggle with sin as an argument that you can't completely overcome sin.

Romans 7:18-20 For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For desire is present with me, but I don't find it doing that which is good. (19) For the good which I desire, I don't do; but the evil which I don't desire, that I practice. (20) But if what I don't desire, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me.

But when we read the overall context, we can see that through Christ Jesus, we can have victory over sin. That means we can completely stop sinning. Paul was talking about his struggles with sin. He was not saying that sin cannot be overcome.

In chapter 3 of this booklet, we will see that Paul expected us to be completely sanctified before Christ returns. Paul struggled with sin. But Paul did in fact overcome sin before he died. We will see this in chapter 3 of this booklet. The title of the chapter is, "The Christian Perfection of Paul."

Many people respond to the teaching of overcoming sin by saying things like, "I've never known anyone who has done it." Or if they meet someone who believes they have overcome sin, they just roll their eyes in mockery and disbelief. There are two problems involved. The first is that if we are taught that you can't overcome sin, then there is no strong motivation to overcome sin. The second problem is that mistakes and shortcomings are mistakenly thought to be sins. Sin is moving into the darkness and disobeying what you know to be the Father's commands. When you are in the light, in obedience, you are not sinning.

You are in the light if you have nothing to hide, even if people could read your mind. In other words, if people could read your every thought, would you have things to be embarrassed about? Would you be embarrassed about an honest mistake? When we receive our spiritual bodies, will we be able to read each other's thoughts? If so, then we must overcome all our sinful thought habits before we can inherit eternal life. We have to learn to stay in the light all the time. Suppose you said something to someone that hurt their feelings. But you had no intension of hurting their feelings. You say you are sorry, that you didn't understand. Did you sin? Or did you just make a mistake?

Can you define the difference between art that contains nudity and pornography? It's not something that you can precisely define. But you know pornography when you see it. Pornography degrades the woman, and it degrades God's beautiful gift of sex between a married man and woman. It's the same with sin and mistakes. With the Holy Spirit within you, you know the difference. With sin you want to hide it. You are in the darkness. With mistakes, you just apologize and grin with embarrassment. But you don't feel like you need to hide it. You are still in the light. Of course those who have not been taught righteousness by Holy Spirit will often sin in the open and be proud of it. That's the open rejection of God. They are in a very dark place.

All sins are habit-forming. Habits can be overcome. Honest mistakes will happen. Yes, you learn from your mistakes. But with mistakes, you are not disobeying what you know God desires and commands. It's all about obedience. If we are to be truly obedient to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we must learn to remain in the light, just as Christ Jesus is in the light. We have been justified without our own works. Only the work of Christ on the cross has saved us. But in our journey of salvation, we must learn Christian perfection, through both grace and works, if we expect to inherit the Kingdom when Christ returns.

Chapter 1

Christian Perfection According to Jesus

John the Baptist preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). This can be thought of as, “Overcome sin, for the kingdom of Jesus Christ is coming soon.” It was also the first message preached by Jesus (Matthew 4:17).

From the time of John the Baptist, until the events of Matthew 12, the kingdom of heaven was forcefully advancing.

Matthew 11:11-13 NIV I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (12) From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. (13) For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

John preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus began his preaching with the same message (Matthew 4:17). Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, which is all about holiness. The kingdom of heaven must have holy men to rule in it. The kingdom cannot come until enough of those who will reign with Christ have repented and have overcome all their sinful habits.

A pastor and good friend of mine once told me that the message of Jesus, preached in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the parables, changed at the cross. He believed that Christ’s message was for the older dispensation, or the old covenant, and that everything changed at the cross. That’s because he understood that the gospel of Jesus requires personal holiness but the gospel of Paul does not. Books have been written about the apparent discrepancy between the gospel of Jesus and the gospel of Paul. But Christ’s sermons and his parables are not about salvation. They are about holiness and about the forceful advancement of the kingdom of heaven. The cross, on the other hand, is about salvation. Christ’s gospel has not changed.

Jesus performed many miracles so that the people would listen to his gospel of the kingdom. The miracles also testified that Jesus was the Son of God, but Jesus downplayed this. He didn’t want this to get in the way of his message of holiness. Jesus needs disciples who are committed to holiness, disciples who will reign with Christ, before the kingdom can literally come here on the earth.

As people repented, the kingdom was forcefully advancing. It was not that they were “getting saved.” They were repenting of their sins. They were becoming holy, but many people simply wanted to see more miracles and were not responding to the message of the kingdom.

Jesus said that from John's preaching until “now,” the kingdom has been forcefully advancing. But “then, Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent” (Matthew 11:20). He said the cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom would rise up to condemn the cities that had seen the miracles, but did not repent. In other words, these people of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom will be raised up in the millennium. Christ has died for them so they can be resurrected.

At first, Jesus did not speak in parables about the kingdom. It was a message of holiness, in preparation for the kingdom of heaven to come. The Sermon on the Mount is a good example. It is clear-cut language. It begins with the beatitudes.

1.1) The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-16)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Literally, in the Greek, it says “blessed are the spiritual beggars.” Those who beg for spiritual holiness will receive the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). By context, this verse is talking about those who mourn over their own sins. When we repent of our sins, God comforts us.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5 ESV). Does this verse say the meek inherit heaven or the earth? Those who are spiritual beggars, and who mourn over their own sins, are the meek. Pride stands in the way of holiness. Those who are meek will inherit the earth. They will be kings and priests in the earthly kingdom that's coming. Those who are prideful, even prideful Christians who believe in Christ Jesus as Savior, will not inherit the earth.

Look at this from the Jewish perspective. Remember that Jesus was preaching to the Jews of that day. They believed the when the Messiah comes, Israel will rule the world. It's not ruling in heaven. It's ruling in a natural way, here on earth. It's a real kingdom. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, the Jews would have understood this to be the Messianic reign when Israel will rule the world, as is prophesied in the Old Testament. Jesus is saying the meek will rule the nations of the earth. The first will be last, and the last will be first.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). The meek, who beg for spiritual holiness, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, will find righteousness. They will overcome sin. True spiritual beggars do all they can do to overcome sin. But they still need God’s help. Those who are prideful, however, see themselves as already being right with God. They don’t beg. And they don’t overcome their sinful nature. They have this religion that says their sins have been atoned for, and so the overcoming of sins is not important for them. For them, sin blinds them so they don’t even know they are “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17 ESV). Those who do not hunger and thirst for righteousness will not inherit the kingdom. They will be saved by the blood of Christ. But they won’t inherit the kingdom. Those who will inherit the earth are the truly meek and thus overcome their sinful habits through a discipleship (Lordship) relationship with Jesus Christ.

After you overcome the sin of pride, and begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness, you begin to look at God and at your neighbors with love. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy” (verse 7). Those who love their neighbors, and show them mercy, will be given righteousness by God. One of the best ways to overcome sin is to be active in a ministry that helps your neighbor. As we build God’s house, and as we build the kingdom of heaven, He will build our spiritual house. (This is not the prosperity doctrine. He builds up our soul, not our possessions.)

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (verse 8). Hebrews 12:14 NIV says, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” Those who are pure in heart are holy. When we are literally born again into spiritual bodies we will be able to see God. However, those resurrected into natural bodies will not at that time be able to see the Lord.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Those who are peacemakers today certainly have a godly quality. It's when we get our spiritual bodies, however, that we will literally be sons of God. When we are literally born again, into spiritual bodies, those bodies will be from the Holy Spirit. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). When we are literally born again, with spiritual bodies, we will literally be sons of God. The sons of God, during the millennium, are the peacemakers. Christ will rule as the prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6). We will then rule with Christ. It will be an age of peace, in the kingdom of heaven, under the rule of the sons of God, who will have overcome sin (Revelation 2:26-27).

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10). During this present age, those who obtain righteousness will be persecuted. It will be turned upside down in the age to come. Those who are persecuted in this age will inherit the kingdom, and will rule over the persecutors. God loves even those who persecute us. The purpose of that rule will be for us to bring righteousness to the persecutors in God's love.

"Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matthew 5:11). Our reward is in heaven. We will be kings and priests in the kingdom of heaven. The beatitudes commence with being a spiritual beggar, and have now progressed up to making comparisons with Old Testament prophets, in verses 11 and 12. It's all about holiness.

Verses 13-16 are all about being the light of the world. Just as the life of Jesus is our example for holiness, our lives of holiness are examples for the world. This is especially true when considering the age to come. In this age, people persecute the holy ones. In the age to come, those same people will remember our examples. Of course, we also hope that people in this age will see our examples of holiness and will strive to become holy themselves before they reach the grave. They too will then inherit the earth.

1.2) The Purpose of Christ's Reign on Earth (Matthew 5:17-18)

In verses 17-18, Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them. The heavens and the earth eventually disappear, but nothing from the law will disappear until everything is accomplished. Many view the cross as the time where everything is accomplished. The cross, however, only provided reconciliation for everyone. It did not immediately bring everyone into justification that is credited with righteousness. It did not bring everyone into holiness through sanctification. This will not be accomplished until the heavens and the earth disappears, after the messianic reign of Christ.

From this verse we can see that the millennium is vital and included in all that will be accomplished. The high majority of all who will accept Christ's reign over their lives will do so in the millennium. But many will remain lost. At the end of the millennium, a countless number will march against Jerusalem when Satan is released again to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:7-9). Surprisingly, even then, many will reject Christ even after living under Christ's reign.

1.3) What We Think is Who We Are (Matthew 5: 19-37)

Verse 19 affirms the commandments. Anyone who breaks the least of the commandments, or teaches others do so, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and keeps the commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. By the context of verses 21-22, and 27-28, we can see that Jesus was primarily talking about the Ten Commandments. Jesus is bringing them to a deeper level. Anger is like murder. Lust is like adultery.

It's all about holiness. We must be clean on the inside as well as the outside. In verse 20, Jesus says that if our holiness does not surpass the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Does this mean that salvation is determined by holiness? No, salvation is only by God's grace and through faith. The work of salvation was completed on the cross. Nothing that we do can earn our salvation. But to enter the kingdom of heaven requires holiness. And that requires obeying God's commandments. It requires works.

Many people read this verse and dismiss it by saying we have Christ and the Pharisees did not. Therefore, Christ's holiness is imputed upon us by the cross. They think even if we still hide a lot of sin on the inside, we are forgiven because of the cross, and thus we will enter (or inherit) the kingdom. Satan always has tricks for dismissing Christ's words. Jesus said unless your holiness surpasses the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will not enter the kingdom.

The trick that Satan uses is to equate salvation with inheriting the kingdom. Unless you reject Christ's salvation, you will be resurrected when Christ returns. But you won't inherit the kingdom. And you won't have eternal life. You won't reign with him over the nations. Only the truly meek will inherit the earth. Only the true spiritual beggars will inherit the earth. Only Christ's true disciples, who take Christ's words to heart and act upon them, will inherit the kingdom.

"Do not murder" (verse 21). Jesus brings this to a deeper level. "Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (verse 22 NIV). Of course anger could lead to murder. Anger is on the inside of the cup. Murder is on the outside. Being subject to judgment does not necessarily mean you go to hell. It means you are not resurrected with eternal life. It's a resurrection of judgment. This type of anger grows and consumes us on the inside. It's an anger that is not released. It's an anger that has no forgiveness. And it eats us up on the inside.

Matthew 23:25-26 ESV "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. (26) You blind

Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

If our cup is clean on the inside, what we do on the outside will be clean. Anger is on the inside. Murder is on the outside of the cup. We believe that if we are good on the outside, then we tend to believe we are clean before God. But God sees what we are like on the inside. God knows our thoughts. We can have filthy-sinful thought habits. These habits can be overcome through Christ's blood. I believe that when we inherit eternal life and spiritual bodies, everybody will know and see what we are like on the inside. We will not be able to hide. We must become clean on the inside before we can inherit spiritual bodies, and before we will be completely clean so that we can reign with Christ over the nations.

“Anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (verse 22 NIV). Often our mouth reflects what we are like on the inside.

Matthew 12:34 ESV You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Matthew 15:11 NIV What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'

Matthew 15:17-18 NIV "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? (18) But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.'

If our thoughts and our minds are pure (clean), then what we say will be pure (clean). Don't think of your mouth as being a filter between what you think and what other people believe you think. Have nothing to hide. Change your heart so that if people could read your thoughts, instead of just hearing your words, you would have nothing to hide.

Jesus tells us to reconcile things with our brother (that's anyone) before giving an offering at the altar (verses 23-24). The emphasis here is that God knows our hearts. We must cleanse our hearts before each other before we can expect to cleanse our hearts before God.

Verses 25 and 26 are about the same thing. If we have financial disputes with others then they must be settled. We must be pure before others as well as God.

If we have lust in our hearts, it's like adultery (verses 27-28). God sees that lust. Men must not have thoughts and emotions in our hearts that would be a problem if women could read the minds of the men. Lust can be very difficult to overcome. But I can testify that it can be overcome.

Lust causes us to lead double lives. We go to church on Sunday, but during the week we allow the temptation of Internet porn sites to overtake us. Again, if we had spiritual bodies, and if everyone else in our community could see every thought we had, would the sin of lust be a problem? If your spouse could see the lust in your heart, would it be a problem? We must be pure and clean in our hearts. Nothing can be hidden. Only then are we in the light. We must have hearts that would be of no embarrassment to other men and women of God, even if they could know our every thought. This means we must completely overcome lustful sexual fantasies if we are to inherit spiritual bodies and rule the world with Christ.

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away (verses 29-30). This is hyperbole, which is a rhetorical exaggeration to make a point. Literally cutting out your eye or cutting off your hand would not make you stop sinning. The problem is in the heart. It's in the way we think. Jesus is placing emphasis on just how important this is. This is especially true in the Jewish culture, even today, that believes sin involves only actions and not thoughts.

Let your 'yes' be 'yes,' and your 'no' be 'no' (verses 34-37). We must have hearts, minds, and thoughts such that truth is our only nature. People who know us should have absolutely no doubt that anything we say is the truth to the best of our knowledge. As we become pure on the inside, people will start seeing us as honest and truthful. There should never be a need for giving an oath. Giving an oath is only done when people may doubt what we say because of our character. Our hearts must be pure for everyone to see.

Divorce is adultery (verses 31-32). Don't take this verse out of context. In some situations divorce is necessary. But this is only after a sinful heart has caused the marriage to become unrecoverable. If both hearts of a marriage can be cleansed, then the marriage can be cleansed. Your spouse, more than anyone, knows the true nature of your heart. An impure heart and thought life can lead to divorce. We must have a heart, and thoughts, that would offer no embarrassment if our spouse could read our every thought and know our every secret.

1.4) Love Your Enemies (Matthew 5:38-47)

The Father "makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (verse 45). We pray for our enemies so that we may become the sons of the Father in heaven (verse 44). Right now we are sons of our earthly parents, with our natural bodies, because our parents gave birth to us. We will literally be sons of God when we have spiritual bodies. This will be done so that during the millennium we can lead to righteousness those who persecute us in this present age. We will be leading our enemies to God, because God loves our enemies. In order to do that, we must also love our enemies.

1.5) Be Perfect as the Heavenly Father is Perfect (Matthew 5:48)

Everything that has been said so far in this sermon is about overcoming sin, so that we will be perfect. Can we really be perfect? Even after we have our spiritual bodies, we will continue to make mistakes. But we can get to the point where our thoughts are clean. Jesus told the disciples that they were clean because of his words (John 13:10, 15:3). (Of course Judas was an exception.) So we can be clean in our thoughts. This is being perfect like the Father is perfect.

Does this mean you must be perfect in order to be saved? The Sermon on the Mount is not about salvation. It's about holiness. It's about inheriting the kingdom. The meek will inherit the earth. You must become a kingdom seeker, working your way through the beatitudes, in order to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, and thus become part of the Bride of Christ.

The beatitudes is a progression that we must all take towards holiness. It's a progression towards becoming "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect." We begin with spiritual begging. Later we become peacemakers. As we continue to be a disciple of Jesus, we become clean because of Christ's words. We become clean because we take the teaching of Christ seriously and his words become the most important thing in our lives. We become clean by daily looking to the cross and daily praying for holiness. We become clean by confessing our sins one to another. But there will be times when we have to go back to being a spiritual beggar.

There is one other place in Scripture where Jesus talks about being perfect.

Matthew 19:16 Behold, one came to him and said, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

At first, Jesus simply tells the rich young ruler to keep the commandments. But take careful note that Jesus didn't say this would give him "eternal life." Jesus only said this would allow the ruler to "enter into life."

Matthew 19:17 He said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

But the rich young ruler persisted and said, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Matthew 19:18-20 He said to him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, " 'You shall not murder.' 'You shall not commit adultery.' 'You shall not steal.' 'You shall not offer false testimony.' (19) 'Honor your father and mother.' And, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' " (20) The young man said to him, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Jesus responds by telling him how to be "perfect." In other words, you can simply "enter life" by keeping the commandments. But in order to be perfect, you must devote your life exclusively to being a disciple of Christ.

Matthew 19:21-22 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (22) But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions.

The rich young ruler was given the option to become poor in this age and have treasures in heaven in the age to come. The topic of having treasures in heaven comes up next, in Matthew 6, in the Sermon on the Mount. We will cover that below. But first, we need to closely examine what Jesus taught us about discipleship through this encounter with the rich young ruler. What does it take to be "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect?"

Matthew 19:23-25 Jesus said to his disciples, "Most certainly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. (24) Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." (25) When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

Why are the disciples astonished? The basic Jewish culture, as taught by the Old Testament, is to simply obey the commandments. But the disciples have now been told that to receive "eternal life" you must undergo a very intense discipleship training with Jesus Christ. And there can be nothing else in your life, such as possessions, to get in the way. At that time, relatively very few people were following Christ to be his disciple. Was Jesus saying that everyone else, including the rich young ruler, would not be saved?

No, the rich young ruler will be saved. Jesus had already told him you can "enter life" by obeying the commandments. The disciples were confused because they did not as yet understand that Jesus had to die on the cross in order to fulfill salvation even in the Old Testament. At that time, they didn't understand that it is "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Because the disciples didn't as yet understand about the cross, they didn't understand the difference between simply "entering life" and "inheriting eternal life." The blood of Jesus Christ reconciles us so that we will "enter life" if we don't reject Christ or God. But we must become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect in order to inherit the kingdom and eternal life.

Nobody can obey all the commandments perfectly for their entire lifetime. All have sinned, and one sin causes you to go to hell. In other words, they basically invalidate what Jesus told the rich young ruler, that he could "enter life" by continuing to obey the commandments in the same way that he had done all his life. Some conservative evangelicals argue that Jesus left out covetousness and any rich person will covet. But was Jesus really giving the man a trick answer? Any reasonable person of the time who heard Jesus' answer would not have understood Jesus as saying the rich young ruler is bound for hell.

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. There is no way to the Father except through a discipleship relationship with Jesus Christ. There is no other name under heaven by which a person can be saved. The rich young ruler will be resurrected. But he will not have eternal life. He simply "enters life" in the age to come, at the time of the resurrection. Jesus will literally be King over all the nations of the earth. The government will be on his shoulders. At that time, the rich young ruler will no longer have his possessions. So his possessions will no longer be in the way of him becoming a disciple of Christ, to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. If he is willing to do so at that time, he can inherit eternal life.

If today a rich man were to knock on the door of a conservative evangelical and ask him how he can inherit eternal life, what would be his answer? Would the evangelical tell the rich man to sell all his possessions? Or would the evangelical tell the rich man to simply say the sinner's prayer, believe in Jesus, and start coming to church? The rich man would do so, and would then continue his life focused on his possessions.

Matthew 19:26-30 Looking at them, Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (27) Then Peter answered, "Behold, we have left everything, and followed you. What then will we have?" (28) Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (29) Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life. (30) But many will be last who are first; and first who are last.

Read verse 30 carefully. The rich young ruler was among the first in that day. Jesus is saying he will be last in the age to come. Those who have sacrificed everything to follow Jesus will be first. That's because in sacrificing everything, they are doing the works of the Father. The Holy Spirit comes and helps them in doing the works. As they live for Christ, and do the things that Christ would do, the teachings of Christ cause them to become clean. The things of this world are pushed out. They no longer have lustful thoughts. They no longer have consuming anger. They love their neighbors and they love the Father. In doing so, they become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect.

Those who do not become perfect will still be saved. They will be resurrected to live in the nations. Christ and his Bride will reign over the nations, teaching others who are willing to come to this same level of righteousness. Eventually everyone must become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect in order to inherit eternal life. Those who refuse this teaching will eventually die the second death (Revelation 2:11, 20:6, 20:14, 21:8).

Revelation 2:26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.

1.6) Seek Treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6)

Think about all that Jesus said in light of a literal kingdom here on earth with the righteous being the kings and priests of that kingdom. What does it mean to store treasures in heaven? Does it mean that we will receive rewards when we get to heaven for our good deeds done here on earth? That's not the way the ancient Jew would have understood what Jesus was saying.

Their focus was on the resurrection. They didn't believe they would go to heaven right after they died. They believed that after they died they would await the resurrection when the Messiah comes. Then they would rule the world with the Messiah. To store treasures in heaven is to do things that that will be of value here on earth in the age to come. In other words, in the age to come the Messiah will reward those who do good deeds during this present age. The entire message of this sermon is to seek holiness and to store treasures in heaven. We do so in order to have riches in the age to come.

This is not just metaphorical riches. We are talking about literal wealth in a literal kingdom to come. Those who rule in the age to come will have literal riches in the eternal kingdom of God that far outshines the wealth of the nations.

What is the converse of storing treasures in heaven? It would be storing treasures in this present age. People who build up wealth in this present age will not be able to keep it in the age to come. And this present age is only temporary. Jesus said the last will be first, and the first will be last. The rich people of this age are first in this age. They will be last the age to come. So all their possessions and wealth in this present age will be destroyed in the age to come.

Does this mean you shouldn't work to earn a living? Of course not. Even people in full-time ministry are working to earn a living. Full-time ministers might or might not be storing treasures in heaven. The best way to store treasures in heaven is to be directly involved in a ministry. We must all be doing the works the Father has for us. Find time outside your normal work to be involved in a ministry. We can give up TV, sports, computer games, or even hobbies. Find a ministry that excites you and make it your passionate hobby.

We are kingdom seekers. We seek holiness. We further the kingdom by spreading the gospel, leading people to the Lord, and helping the needy. Christ will remember and will reward us when the kingdom of heaven comes. These rewards involve literal positions as rulers and priests in the kingdom to come. Our treasures are thereby stored in heaven (Mat 6:19-20).

What other places in Scripture does Jesus talk about storing treasures in heaven? Other than the Sermon on the Mount, the only recorded time that Jesus mentions treasure in heaven is with the rich young ruler, as discussed in the previous section. (There are, however, other places that speak of rewards in heaven.) Matthew 19:21, Mark 10:21, and Luke 18:22 all record this encounter with the rich young ruler. All three accounts record Jesus saying he could store treasure in heaven by selling all his possessions, giving everything to the poor, and following Jesus. Only Matthew's account says this would make him perfect. Mark's account and Luke's account both say "one thing you lack" instead of "if you want to be perfect."

Also, Matthew is the only gospel that records the Sermon on the Mount including, "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Perhaps this is because Matthew, being one of the disciples, was present when Jesus preached this long sermon. Mark and Luke recorded events using other sources. They were not part of the original twelve disciples. I think Matthew, being a tax collector, uniquely understood the relationship between storing your treasures in heaven and becoming perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. Becoming perfect involves both striving to overcome sin and doing the works of the Father.

In Matthew 6, Jesus tells us not to do acts of righteousness so that people will notice us (Mat. 6:1). When we give to the needy, it's to be done quietly (6:2). When we pray, it's to be done in closed rooms (6:6). We are not to pray with ongoing words, as through continuous repeating will help (6:7). Spending time with God and furthering the kingdom in secret builds holiness. However, doing these things for show only builds pride. Such pride stands in the way of holiness.

We are not to worry about money. Nobody can serve two masters (6:24). If we devote ourselves to getting money all the time, or to the love of money, then that becomes our master. Where our treasure is, our heart will be also (6:21). We can build up treasures in heaven for the age to come, by focusing on holiness. Or, we can focus on building treasures in this age by focusing on money. You can't do both. You can't serve two masters. The wise will seek treasures for the age to come because those treasures are far greater and will last forever.

People will say they strive to earn money so that they can donate some of it to worthy causes. But this is only an excuse for the love of money. We must be directly involved in the purposes of our lives.

As we become holy our faith builds. We worry less about the things of this world, such as money. Our Father feeds the birds of the air that do not sow or

reap (6:26). Our Father clothes the lilies of the field who neither labor nor spin, and they are better clothed than Solomon (6:28-29).

The eye is the lamp of the body (6:22). This verse is in the middle of all the verses about treasures in heaven and money (6:19-34). So it must be interpreted in that context. The eye represents our interest. The eye looks at the desires of our heart. If our heart is for treasures in this present age, then our whole body is full of darkness (6:23). But if your heart is for holiness, then our whole body becomes full of light (6:22). We become the light of the world in this age and even more so in the age to come. Being in the light is living without sin. Those who seek holiness in this age will shine like the brightness of the sky above and will turn many to righteousness in the age to come.

Daniel 12:3 ESV And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

The entire Sermon on the Mount is all about holiness. We seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We spend time with God to become holy. We focus on the kingdom in order to become holy. We do the Father's works in order to become holy. The kingdom to come must be far more important to us than the world of this age. As we become holy, we store treasures in heaven.

All this sums up the law and the prophets (7:12). In other words, the law and the prophets focused on being holy. Being holy requires loving both God and neighbor. As we learn to love God and our neighbor, we become better kings and priests to rule during the millennium. We are then in the position to teach love, holiness, and salvation through Jesus Christ to all the nations.

1.7) Judging Others (Matthew 7:1-12)

“Don't judge, so that you won't be judged” (7:1). Will we ever officially judge others? We must first take the log out of our own eye before we can see clearly enough to take the speck out of our brother's eye (7:3-5). We will never judge others from the perspective of determining everlasting life or eternal condemnation. But those who overcome sin will rule the nations (Revelation 2:26-27). We will be kings and priests over the nations (Revelation 5:10, 20:6). Our purpose in being judges is to lead the nations into righteousness.

During ancient times, a king was also a judge. The kings who ruled the world acted as judges. Ideally, it was the purpose of the priests to teach righteousness. Ideally, it was the purpose of the kings to enforce righteousness. During the millennium, those living in the nations will be living under the judgment of Christ, and by His authority, under the judgment of the Bride of Christ. The point being made here is that we must become holy before we are qualified to judge the nations. We must remove the log from our eyes before we can shine like the brightness of the stars and lead the nations to righteousness.

1.8) The Narrow Gate (Matthew 7:13-23)

Holiness is the narrow gate (7:13) into the age to come. Few will find it. Of course, people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Revelation 7:9) will find it during the coming Great Tribulation. But that's still few as compared with all people in all nations through all times. The narrow gate is not about salvation. Few find perfection and holiness in this age, but that does not mean that few will ever find salvation.

Of course to receive eternal life requires holiness through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Those who enter the age to come through the narrow gate will receive spiritual bodies and eternal life. Therefore, the narrow gate definitely leads to eternal life (7:14).

The wide gate leads to destruction (7:13). If people stay on that path throughout the age to come, they will be eternally condemned. Sin can also be destructive in this age. Sins separate us from God. Due to the blood of Christ, however, only the rejection of Christ will ultimately lead to eternal condemnation.

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, is the destruction of the wide gate referring to the destruction of the soul? Or is it talking about the destruction of possessions and wealth? Jesus has just spent lots of time teaching us to seek holiness instead of money, so that we will have treasures in heaven. Those who primarily seek treasures in this age enter the age to come through the wide gate. Their treasures of this age will be destroyed. But it's not a gate into hell. It's a gate into the Messianic age to come. The wide gate is a gate of destruction simply because all the personal wealth of this age will be destroyed.

We are saved by grace and through faith, and not judged by our good and evil deeds. To interpret the wide and narrow gates as being about salvation would be to say salvation is about good and evil deeds. That's because the issue of good and evil deeds is the context of the entire sermon. The wide and narrow gates are not

about salvation. The narrow gate is about entering the kingdom of heaven. The wide gate is about just entering the age to come as part of the nations.

Again, we must interpret the wide and narrow gate in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. The wide gate is all about seeking treasures in this present age instead of seeking treasures in heaven. Jesus is saying treasures obtained in this present age will be destroyed. So the wide gate leads to destruction. As Jesus told the rich young ruler, you can continue obeying the commandments and being a good person. Your cup is clean on the outside, but not on the inside. Those going through the wide gate continue to sin on the inside with sins like lust and consuming anger. You can "enter life" through the wide gate. But you will not inherit eternal life. And if you continue down this path in the age to come, you will eventually die the second death and wake up in the lake of fire.

The narrow gate, on the other hand, is for those who seek treasures in heaven and in doing so become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. As Jesus told the rich young ruler, if you want to be perfect, you must forsake your earthly possessions and follow Jesus. You must become a true disciple of Christ so that your cup is clean on the inside as well as the outside. This means that you don't sin even in your heart and mind. If others could read your mind, you would still be in the light, having nothing to hide. The narrow gate leads to eternal life.

Of course this doctrine is a bit different from the traditional interpretation of the wide and narrow gates. The narrow gate is traditionally interpreted as finding salvation, even though the Sermon on the Mount is not about salvation. With traditional interpretation, the narrow gate is easy to find. All you need to do is confess that Jesus is your Lord and Savior. But that's only the beginning of what it takes to be a disciple of Christ. That's only the beginning of what it takes to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. That's only the beginning of what it takes to find the narrow gate. Yet most preachers would simply tell the rich young ruler exactly what they tell everyone else. They say to find the narrow gate by confessing Christ, and then that's all there is to it. The overcoming of sin becomes a good thing, but not really necessary in order to enter the narrow gate. The very next verse is about false prophets. Read it in the same context.

Matthew 7:15-20 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. (16) By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? (17) Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. (18) A good tree can't

produce evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. (19) Every tree that doesn't grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. (20) Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, what is good and bad fruit? What is a wolf in sheep's clothing? Verse 15 starts out warning against false prophets. A prophet is anyone who proclaims the word of God. In this context, a prophet is any preacher, Sunday-school teacher, or even a small group leader. In this context, anyone who teaches the Bible is a prophet. False prophets usually don't know they teach false doctrine. False prophets have themselves been taught by false prophets. So they can be very honest people. But they unknowingly teach false doctrine, passing it on from generation to generation. Think of false prophets simply as false teachers. They don't know or believe they are teaching false doctrine.

Jesus is saying we will know false teachers not by their doctrine, but by their fruit. In other words, we don't have to judge their doctrine. We know their doctrine is false if their disciples are not becoming holy and perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. The disciples of Jesus became "clean" because of his words (John 13:10, 15:3). But today there is very little difference in holiness between people who go to church every Sunday and the rest of the world.

Most pastors avoid the topics of sin, holiness, and money. Yet these are the primary topics of the Sermon on the Mount. These are the primary topics that Jesus taught throughout his ministry. Again, I'm sure most pastors are honest and good people. But if they are not producing perfect and holy people, they are not producing good fruit.

Most pastors say that nobody is perfect. If you ask them about being perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, or if you ask them about becoming perfect by selling your possessions and following Christ, they will probably say that Jesus didn't really mean perfection, or that it was simply an unreachable goal. They often say that they have never met anyone who is perfect, and thus their claim that nobody is perfect is used to invalidate this interpretation of Jesus' words. The problem is that when this becomes accepted doctrine, then even people who are clean on the inside will continue to think they are sinning. And this doctrine tends to prevent people from overcoming sin when temptations come. Christian perfection does not mean that you never make mistakes. It means that you are in the light and have nothing to hide, even if people could read your mind.

There are many ways to interpret Scripture. I think Satan tries to distort our understanding of Scripture by finding ways to make the topics of holiness, overcoming sin, and storing our treasures in heaven become less important.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' (23) Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'

These ministers truly believe they are preaching for Christ. In this context, these ministers are the false prophets and the wolves in sheep clothing (7:16-20). They actually believe that Christ knows them. They actually believe they are serving the Lord. Surely, they believe that Christ rose from the dead. Surely they confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord. So they are saved. They will be very surprised when Christ says he doesn't know them.

By their fruits we can know who they are (7:20). This is not a fruit of many followers. It's not a fruit of numbers because Jesus explicitly says it's good fruit or bad fruit. Good fruit comes from a good tree and bad fruit comes from a bad tree. Therefore, good fruit must be church-goers who overcome sin and bad fruit must be church-goers who are like the rest of the world. Does the preacher lead others to Christ's holiness? Or do they say that salvation is all that is necessary?

Compare this verse in Matthew 7:22-23 to a similar verse in Matthew 25:11-13.

Matthew 7:22-23 Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' (23) Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'

Matthew 25:11-13 Afterward the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' (12) But he answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, I don't know you.' (13) Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

The only difference between the wise virgins and the foolish virgins is the amount of oil they have. Both are asleep when the Master comes. Both are waiting for the Bridegroom. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that he was raised from the dead and you will be saved. The foolish virgins say

“Lord, Lord.” Certainly they confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord. And since they are waiting on the bridegroom to return, they certainly believe he was raised from the dead. But Jesus says, “I never knew you” because they have not had a discipleship relationship with Christ.

At the Last Supper, when Jesus went around the table to wash the disciple’s feet, Peter said “You will never wash my feet” (John 13:8). Jesus said that if I don’t wash your feet, you cannot be my disciple. (“If I don’t wash you, you have no part with me.”) Why did Jesus say this? He explained it when he said, “No servant is greater than his master.”

John 13:14-17 If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (16) Most certainly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his lord, neither one who is sent greater than he who sent him. (17) If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

If we don’t serve others, we cannot be Jesus’ disciple. We are still saved because he is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe (1 Timothy 4:10). But we have to do more than just believe in order to be a disciple of Christ. We have to do the works that the Father has given us to do. And as we love our neighbor, serving others because we love Jesus, walking as Jesus walked, we overcome sin. When Jesus says, “I never knew you”, he is saying the person did not become his disciple. Jesus is a servant. No servant is greater than his master. So we must be servants in order to be disciples. Servants do work.

Those who say “Lord, Lord” but don’t do the works of the Father are not really his disciples. They are saved, because salvation is not about works. You cannot earn salvation. But without works, you cannot be his disciple because no servant is greater than his Master. There is nothing you can do to earn salvation. But inheriting the kingdom requires a lot of work.

Are these ministers condemned to hell? Are the foolish virgins condemned to hell? No, because they have not committed the unpardonable sin. They have not hardened their hearts against Christ. Nevertheless, they are still sinful. They enter through the wide gate. Consequently, Jesus will not give them the reward of ruling during the millennium. When Christ says he never knew them, it means they have not matured in a discipleship relationship with Him. They have not become a true disciple. It does not mean they are condemned to hell.

1.9) Build Your House on the Rock (Matthew 7:24-29)

The wise man builds his house on the Rock. The foolish man (or foolish virgin), builds his house on the sand. (In the Old Testament, the Rock is Christ.) The wise are those who will rule in the millennium. The foolish are the middle group, which will be saved, but are not a part of the Bride of Christ. The wicked will not be raised. They no longer hear Christ's voice. They do not have a gate to enter into the age to come, because Christ is the gate (John 10:1-18).

Whether they are lost sheep or believers, Christ's sheep hear his voice (Psalm 95:7, John 10). But the wicked, who do not have eyes to see or ears to hear, can no longer hear his voice. They see the miracles of God but attribute them to Satan. Or they explain them away by other means. At the resurrection all who hear Christ's voice (Christ's sheep) will be raised (John 5:28-29). The wise, who enter through the narrow gate, have a resurrection of eternal life. For them, there is no longer a judgment (John 5:24). They will have spiritual bodies that do not die. But for the foolish who enter through the wide gate, and are still doing evil, it's a resurrection that's still under judgment (John 5:29). Their bodies will be natural bodies that could eventually die again.

The wise put all their focus on Christ. They build their houses and treasures in heaven. They enter through the narrow gate. The foolish build their treasures in this age. They focus on the present age. They enter through the wide gate. When the rains come, the things of this world come crashing down. When the rains come, the treasures of those entering through the wide gate will be destroyed. But the foolish are still Christ's sheep.

The Sermon on the Mount commences with the beatitudes, and concludes with this parable of building your house on Christ. The beatitudes are about holiness. Building your house on Christ is about discipleship. But neither holiness nor discipleship is required for salvation. How much holiness would you need to be saved? How much discipleship would you need to be saved? The sermon is not about salvation. It's about inheriting the kingdom of heaven.

We must not allow this sermon to be watered down by confusing it with salvation. We must not lower the bar of holiness by mistaking it for the free gift of salvation. We must build our houses, our whole lives, upon the Rock of Jesus Christ. To seek the kingdom of heaven and his righteousness, we must build our houses on the Rock, no matter the cost.

Chapter 2

The Christian Perfection of John

The first letter of John is the most comprehensive letter in the New Testament dealing with Christian perfection. Sin is darkness. Living without sin is living in the light. There is no gray. You are either in the light or in darkness. The light is Christian perfection. Christians, however, move back and forth between the light and the darkness. When filled with the Holy Spirit, you are in the light.

This letter uses the word "perfect" with regard to love. We are perfect, living without sin, living in the light, when we have perfect love. John associates abiding in Christ with living without sin. John says whoever is born of God cannot sin. So even being born of God is something that one can move in and out of as one is filled with the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit withdraws. The Holy Spirit withdraws if we choose to sin and move back into the darkness.

John also talks about the spirit of antichrist in this letter. This is very much related to the Gnostics of that day. But it's also very insightful in understanding the final antichrist and the one-world religion that is coming.

2.1) John's Authority as One Who Lived With Christ (1 John 1:1-4)

John begins by reminding us that John himself was physically with Christ. John was a disciple. This means that John physically abided (lived) with Christ. Jesus was with the Father and brings eternal life. In order to receive eternal life we must also abide with Christ in much the same way that John was a disciple of Christ. But we need to understand what John said at the start of chapter 2.

John said, "And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." Christ's death atoned for not only the sins of his disciples, but also for the sins of the whole world. The whole world does not keep Christ's commandments. Only Christ's disciples keep his commandments.

This same verse, at the start of chapter 2, says that only those who keep his commandments actually know, or dwell with, Christ. Only those who keep his commandments are his true disciples. Thus, salvation is not only for the disciples of Christ. Salvation is for the whole world. But eternal life is only available for those who become a disciple of Christ, and obey his commandments. With this in mind, what does John mean by the "Word of life"?

1 John 1:1-4 That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we saw, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life (2) (and the life was revealed, and we have seen, and testify, and declare to you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was revealed to us); (3) that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Yes, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (4) And we write these things to you, that our joy may be fulfilled.

2.2) Qualifications for Those Who Know Christ (1 John 1:5 – 2:17)

After qualifying himself as one who saw, touched, lived with, and was personally taught by Christ, John gets into a major point that continues throughout the letter. We must live without sin. We must remain in the light. John uses light and darkness as a metaphor for living in sin or living without sin. John compares the light of God with the light that we must have if we expect to have fellowship with Christ. John is saying this comes from the teaching of Christ himself. In other words, John just pointed out that he was a personal witness to everything Christ had said. And the first thing that John testifies to us about what Christ said is that we must also live in the light, which is to live without sin.

1 John 1:5-10 This is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (6) If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and don't tell the truth. (7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we haven't sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

The Reformed view is that you can't completely stop sinning. To make this case, verse 8 is often taken out of context. But John is talking about past sins. Verse 10 says the same thing. Verse 9 says we need to be forgiven. So verse 8 is simply saying that we have sinned in the past and thus need to be forgiven. It's not saying we can't completely stop sinning. This is undeniable when you consider that John has just stated that we must walk in the light just as God is in the light. In God

there is no darkness at all. Likewise, we must walk with no darkness at all. As we progress through John's letter, the sinless walk is stated over and over. So taking verse 8 out of context is to also take it out of context for the entire letter. There is no gray between the light and the dark.

As mentioned in the introduction, most Reformed theologians will concede that verse 10 is talking about past sins. But they insist that verse 8 is talking about present sins. In the Greek, verse 1:10 uses a verb for "sinned". And of course that verb is in the past tense (indicative, perfect, active). But in verse 1:8, a noun is used for "sin" instead of a verb. In this translation, the word "no" is modifying the noun "sin." But in this verse, the Greek word for "no" is an adverb. Therefore, it should modify the verb, not the noun.

The verb means "to have", or "to hold." So literally speaking, it could be translated as: "If we say we do not hold sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." If we don't translate it like this, we have an adverb modifying a noun. Having sin, or holding sin, can easily be talking about having or holding the guilt of sins that were committed in the past. It would be like an alcoholic saying he or she "holds" alcoholism but might or might not be currently acting upon it.

So why do Reformed theologians insist on this traditional translation where an adverb modifies a noun? Why do Reformed theologians insist that John is not teaching that you cannot completely stop sinning? It's because they are working under the Greek-like paradigm that everyone goes to heaven or hell when they die. If the only way to go to heaven is to overcome all sinful habits during this age, then very few people will be saved. Very few would find this narrow gate. But if the wide gate does not lead directly to hell, then we can interpret John literally and avoid clinging to a traditional mistranslation of a single verse, which tends to be used to change the meaning of the entire epistle.

1 John 2:1-6 My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not sin. If anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. (2) And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. (3) This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commandments. (4) One who says, "I know him," and doesn't keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth isn't in him. (5) But whoever keeps his word, God's love has most certainly been perfected in him. This is how we know that we are in him: (6) he

who says he remains in him ought himself also to walk just like he walked.

Again, John is treating sin as something that you either are doing, or you are not doing. If you sin, you can repent. Jesus forgives us. Jesus speaks to the Father on our behalf. Then John talks about keeping the Father's commandments. This is like Matthew 7:21, in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus talks about those who will say "Lord, Lord" when Christ returns. They don't do the will of the Father.

These commandments are instructions for doing the works of the Father. As we do the good things the Father has for us, God's perfect love is perfected in us and we do not sin. This is Christian perfection. The only way to stop sinning is to walk as Jesus walked. This means we must walk without sin, as Jesus walked without sin. But more importantly, in this context, it's a walk of obeying God's commandments. It's a walk of doing the works the Father has for us. We know Christ only if we keep his commandments and do his works.

The secret to understanding how to overcome all our sinful habits is to understand this relationship between doing the works of the Father and remaining in the light. We remain in the light when our thoughts are pure. We remain in the light when we don't have lust, anger, or covetousness popping up in our hearts. We remain in the light when we love the Father and love our neighbors. This happens only by obeying the commandments of the Father. This means doing the good works that the Father has for us. As we do the good works of the Father, the Holy Spirit fills us and we don't sin. We become consumed with doing works, and sin no longer has a place in our lives. The sinful habits simply disappear as we become consumed with doing the Father's works.

1 John 2:7-17 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. (8) Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. (9) Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. (10) Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. (11) But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. (12) I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. (13) I write to

you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. (14) I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (15) Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. (17) The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

These verses also bring us back to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus speaks of lust and anger as being adultery and murder. Sandwiched between Jesus' teaching about anger and lust is a teaching that is often skipped over. We must come to terms quickly with an accuser that is bringing you to court (Matthew 5:25-26). The issue here is about money and possessions. The commandment involved in this issue is covetousness. This is another sin that can consume us on the inside while we appear to be clean on the outside.

We can appear clean on the outside, but on the inside we have not defeated the evil one. This is darkness because we hide what is on the inside. When our thoughts are clean, we are truly in the light. When our thoughts are clean, we have nothing to hide. John relates these temptations to the things of the world. Lust of the eyes certainly includes sexual temptation that can manifest in our thoughts without necessarily leading to physical sex outside of marriage. The lust of the eyes also includes covetousness. This is living in darkness. But if our thoughts are clean, we are living in the light.

2.3) Qualifications for Antichrists (Gnostics of that Day) (1 John 2:18–25)

1 John 2:18-25 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. (19) They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. (20) But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. (21)

I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. (22) Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. (23) No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. (24) See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. (25) And this is what he promised us—even eternal life.

Those who left John's followers were probably the Gnostics of that day. They taught that the spirit of Christ came upon Jesus at the time of his baptism. They taught that the man Jesus became possessed by a spirit which is Christ. And that spirit left him before the crucifixion. From this one would conclude that Jesus himself is not really the Son of God. The spirit of antichrist will always allow for a certain amount of truth, but will distort the truth in such a way that it denies that Jesus is the Christ. The spirit of antichrist also denies that Christ died for our sins.

The "many antichrists" that have come were probably the Gnostics of that day. But John also understands that "the antichrist is coming." The final world ruler, the antichrist, will come when Christ returns. The man who denies that Jesus is the Christ is the antichrist. The Gnostics of that day were moving in the spirit of the antichrist. This made John believe he was living in "the last hour." In other words, John most likely believed that Christ would return in his lifetime. Paul believed the same thing when he included himself in those who would be caught up in the clouds. Paul said, "We who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). Every generation is taught to believe that Christ will return in their lifetime.

The implication here is that in the end times there will be another false religion that has this same characteristic of denying that Jesus is the Christ or that Jesus is the Son of God. In Revelation John gives us more about this false religion.

Revelation 17:9-11 Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits. (10) They are seven kings. Five have fallen, the one is, the other has not yet come. When he comes, he must continue a little while. (11) The beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goes to destruction.

The empire that controlled Jerusalem at the time of John was the Roman Empire. The five empires which controlled Jerusalem prior to John were the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and the Greek empires. The empire which would control Jerusalem after John is the Islamic Caliphate. Thus, at the time of John, five had fallen, one was, and another had not yet come. The empire of the antichrist is an eighth empire. He belongs to at least one of the seven and goes to his destruction. Since the eighth belongs to one of the seven, there are still seven heads. As the following verse shows, one of the heads has a fatal wound which is healed. Thus, the eighth belongs to the seventh. The seventh has the fatal wound and is healed, giving rise to the eighth.

Revelation 13:3 One of his heads looked like it had been wounded fatally. His fatal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled at the beast.

Thus, the Islamic Caliphate will be healed and Islam will become the one-world religion of the end times. In other words, the Islamic Caliphate will be reformed.

We seem to be seeing the start of that head being healed today. The Arab Spring that we see happening today is removing all the dictators and kings in the Muslim world. This is making room for a revived caliphate.

Many, if not most, of the Muslims do not consider most of the dictators and kings of the Islamic countries to be truly Islamic. A truly Islamic nation is ruled only by sharia law and is governed only by a single caliphate.

The caliphate is the single governmental ruling body of Islam. In some ways, it's like the Vatican and the pope. But with sharia law, you can't separate church and state. The caliphate goes all the way back to Mohammed. It was abolished in 1924. Revelation 13:3 would seem to indicate that this fatal head wound will be healed. The caliphate will be reformed and Islam will become the global religion of the one-world government, ruled over by the antichrist.

How does Islam fit the antichrist empire that is coming? John says the antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ. The antichrist also denies that Jesus is the Son of God. The greatest sin in Islam is to believe that God has a Son, or that God would die for our sins. Islam states that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah). But they don't consider the word Messiah to mean the same thing. In Islam, Jesus is a prophet. But he is not the greatest of all prophets. Muhammad is considered to be a greater prophet than Jesus. The true meaning of the Messiah, however, is that of the highest king. Jesus Christ is the King of all Kings and the Lord of all Lords.

This makes Jesus the Prophet of all Prophets. So Islam really does deny that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah). And Islam denies that Jesus is the Son of God.

The third common characteristic that Islam holds with the old Gnostic religion is that they both deny Jesus died for our sins. The Gnostics believed the spirit of Christ left Jesus before Jesus died on the cross. Thus they do not believe Christ (the Messiah) died for us. In a similar fashion, Islam believes that someone else died on the cross instead of Jesus. John will revisit the subject of the antichrist in 1 John 4:3. He also comes against Gnostic beliefs again in chapter 5.

2.4) Hope of Christ's Return; Purifying Ourselves as a Response (1 John 2:26 – 3:9)

1 John 2:26-29 These things I have written to you concerning those who would lead you astray. (27) As for you, the anointing which you received from him remains in you, and you don't need for anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, you will remain in him. (28) Now, little children, remain in him, that when he appears, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. (29) If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of him.

What is the "anointing"? In the Old Testament, kings were anointed by pouring oil over them. The word "Messiah" means the "Anointed One." The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. This is why the "anointing teaches [us] concerning all things." When Jesus left, he promised the Holy Spirit would come. He said, "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you" (John 14:26).

In verse 2:29, John compares the righteousness of Christ with the righteousness that is expected of us. This is very similar to the comparison of the light of God. In God there is no darkness. We are expected to live in the same light. Right after saying Jesus is righteous, John says, "Everyone who practices righteousness is born of him." So everyone who does not practice righteousness is not born of Christ. There is no middle ground. John continues with the topic of being born of God in chapter 3.

1 John 3:1-2 Behold, how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! For this cause the world doesn't know us, because it didn't know him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will

be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is.

What does it mean to be "born of Him?" What does it mean to be "children of God?" The difference between being literally born again and being spiritually or figuratively born again is a new concept for many Christians. But this distinction is important in understanding the next verses in John's letter. In other words, 1 John 3:9 (several pages below) says, "Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, ... and he can't sin, because he is born of God." Most Christians interpret the term "born again" as a one-time event that begins their Christian journey. Is John really saying that those who profess faith in Christ will never sin again after they profess Jesus Christ as Savior for the first time?

This can be confusing for those who don't understand the distinction between being literally born again and being figuratively born again. Because of this confusion, many simply water-down what John is saying and take the Reformed view that you can't completely stop sinning. For this reason, we must take a short detour into John's gospel. We must see what John said that Jesus really taught about being born again.

John 3:4-8 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (5) Jesus answered, "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God! (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Don't marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' (8) The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Notice the parallelism between being born of water and being born of flesh. Just before babies are born, the mother's water breaks. We come into this world as born of flesh. In the next life, we hope to be born from the Holy Spirit. We will have a new spiritual body that is made by the Holy Spirit. We will literally become a child of God instead of being a child of our parents. Those who have spiritual bodies can appear in the middle of locked rooms like Jesus did after the resurrection. So we can "come and go like the wind." But this doesn't mean that the spiritual body is just a spirit. It simply means the body was made by the Spirit.

We refer to ourselves as being saved if we have the promise of the resurrection. The resurrection saves us from the grave. So we figuratively refer to ourselves as

past-tense saved if in the future we will literally be saved from the grave. Likewise, we can refer to ourselves as figuratively born again if in the future we will literally get a new spiritual body. We don't have to enter our mother's womb. But we really do get a new body. This is what it means to be born again. To literally be born again is not something that happens at the start of our journey with Christ; it happens at the completion of the journey.

Why do New Testament writers use past-tense verbs to refer to future-tense events? It's from Old Testament or the Hebrew way of writing. Paul writes, "God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were" (Romans 4:17). In that very same verse Paul quotes Genesis 17:5, which says, "I have made you a father of many nations."

This was said and written long before it was fulfilled in Abraham. But it's stated in the past tense. God uses a past-tense verb in speaking of the future. In Hebrew thinking, the past is clear to see. The future cannot be clearly seen. When God speaks about the future using a past-tense verb, God is saying that it's as certain as past-tense events. In the New Testament, the future events of being saved from the grave and being born again into a new spiritual body are referred to with the same absolute certainty. Thus, past-tense verbs are used. In the New Testament, we can read verses that say we are past-tense "saved." But we are still on a journey of salvation that has not yet been completed. Here are more Old Testament examples of past-tense verbs being used for future events.

Isaiah 9:6 YLT For a Child hath been born to us, A Son hath been given to us, And the princely power is on his shoulder, And He doth call his name Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed.

So now we can return to John's letter. What does it mean to be "born of Him?" What does it mean to be "children of God?" Spiritually, or figuratively, it's a promise of that which will come. When it comes, we will be like Christ. He has a spiritual body. His body was born of the Holy Spirit. Of course Christ's biological father was the Holy Spirit. So he was always the Son of God. But when Christ returns, we will be like Him. We will literally be born of the Spirit. We will literally be born into new spiritual bodies. And thus, in the future, we will be called children

of God just as Jesus is the Son of God. Of course Jesus is God. We will not be God. So what does it take to literally become born of God?

1 John 3:3-9 Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure. (4) Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. (5) You know that he was revealed to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. (6) Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him. (7) Little children, let no one lead you astray. He who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. (8) He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. To this end the Son of God was revealed, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (9) Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, because his seed remains in him; and he can't sin, because he is born of God.

Verse 9 says, "Whoever is born of God doesn't commit sin, ... and he can't sin, because he is born of God." Most Christians interpret the term "born again" as a one-time event that begins their Christian journey. But literally speaking, it's a future event. Figuratively speaking, we are "born of God" when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a promise of becoming a literal child of God. If we sin, the Holy Spirit withdraws. But if the Holy Spirit is in us, we cannot sin because the seed (beginning) of that spiritual birth is within us.

The phrase "everyone who has this hope" connects us back to verses 3:1-2, where John says, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is." So we are figuratively "now ... children of God." But in the future we will be "revealed" as literal children of God. In order to become literally born again, to obtain a spiritual body, to obtain eternal life, one must "purify himself, even as he is pure." There is no room for compromise.

"Whoever remains in him doesn't sin." How can there be a gray area of just a little sin in this bold statement? We are in Christ when the Holy Spirit is in us.

"Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him." This brings us back to John's initial statement, that John himself spent time with Christ. John literally and physically abided with Christ. John literally and physically got to know him personally. When Christ physically left, he promised the Holy Spirit to take over this role of Counselor, Teacher, and Helper. When the Holy Spirit abides in us, we know Christ. In the Holy Spirit there is no sin. Whoever remains in the Holy Spirit

does not sin. There is no gray between light and darkness. We are either in the light, or in darkness. We are either filled with the Holy Spirit, or we are not. When the Holy Spirit fills us, we cannot sin because the God cannot sin.

When we are not filled with the Holy Spirit, and when we fall back into sin, we are "of the devil". This means we belong to the devil. Belonging to the devil means you won't be reconciled with the Father. But Christ came to "destroy the works of the devil." Through faith in Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit, we can live without sin. Until the time when we literally have a new spiritual body, it's possible for us to fall back into sin. During those times, we are not in the light. During those times, we want to hide in the darkness. So we do not know Christ. When we are in darkness, we are not figuratively born again. We are not filled with the Holy Spirit. So we must purify ourselves even as Christ is pure if we expect to be literally born again when Christ returns.

The Holy Spirit is not going to give us a spiritual body until we have completely purified ourselves to the point where the Holy Spirit is no longer pushed out because of sin. All the sinful habits that cause us to move into darkness can be overcome. Always be mindful of whether we are in the light or the darkness. Always remain in the light. This is Christian perfection.

2.5) Purity Comes as We Love One Another (1 John 3:10 – 3:24)

1 John 3:10-17 In this the children of God are revealed, and the children of the devil. Whoever doesn't do righteousness is not of God, neither is he who doesn't love his brother. (11) For this is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; (12) unlike Cain, who was of the evil one, and killed his brother. Why did he kill him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous. (13) Don't be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. (14) We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. He who doesn't love his brother remains in death. (15) Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. (16) By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (17) But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and closes his heart of compassion against him, how does the love of God remain in him?

These verses again bring us back to the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. This also brings us back to the words of Jesus spoken to Peter about feeding his sheep.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us that false prophets would come. They are like wolves in sheep clothing. We can know them by their fruits. We know these false prophets by observing the righteousness of their followers. John is saying the same thing. We know the children of God by the fact that they do works of righteousness. We know the children of the devil by the fact that they do works of unrighteousness. In other words, a good tree bears good fruit. The good church leader will have followers who walk in the light. The good church leader will teach against sin, and their followers will for the most part walk in the light. Those who do not accept this teaching will leave.

Jesus also spoke about anger towards one's brother. Consuming anger is the same as murder. John is saying the same thing by relating it back to Cain who murdered his brother Abel. John states that the works of Cain were evil and the works of his brother Abel were righteous. When we do the works of the Father it will result in walking in the light, which is righteousness. When we do the works of the devil we are walking in darkness, which is unrighteousness.

Works of righteousness come only out of love for our Father in heaven, and love for our neighbors. The ultimate love is being willing to lay down one's life for another. But short of that, works of love is seeing a brother in need, and having compassion for him. If we have some of the goods of this world we share them with a brother in need. This is love of our neighbor.

Peter thought he loved Jesus, but not to the point where he was able to lay down his life. Instead, Peter denied Christ three times. After the resurrection, Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. Peter responded honestly by simply saying he had affection for Christ. So Jesus simply said, "Feed my sheep." In other words, we do the righteous works of the Father in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit all the time. This lets us live in the light all the time. After walking as Jesus walked for some time, our affection for Christ turns into true Godly love, and we will be willing to lay down our lives for Christ. This is what Jesus meant when he said that we must take up our cross and follow Him if we are to be his disciple (Luke 14:27). This is the only way to get to the point where we are really ready for Christ to return, so that we will no longer be moving into the darkness, and so that the Holy Spirit will give us spiritual born-again bodies when Christ returns.

This is not to say that works are required for salvation. Jesus paid the price for not only our sins, but for the sins of the whole world. No amount of work can earn salvation. You can't buy your resurrection. Everyone who has not deliberately and knowingly rejected Jesus will be resurrected. So they will be saved from sin and death. But that doesn't mean they will all inherit the kingdom. That doesn't mean they will all be revealed as children of God. Only those who learn to walk as Jesus walked, in the light, filled with the Holy Spirit all the time will be resurrected with a spiritual body. Instead, they will get a new natural body.

1 John 3:18-24 My little children, let's not love in word only, neither with the tongue only, but in deed and truth. (19) And by this we know that we are of the truth, and persuade our hearts before him, (20) because if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. (21) Beloved, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have boldness toward God; (22) and whatever we ask, we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight. (23) This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he commanded. (24) He who keeps his commandments remains in him, and he in him. By this we know that he remains in us, by the Spirit which he gave us.

We know that we are in Christ when we know that the Holy Spirit is in us. When the Holy Spirit is in us, we are in the light. We know when we have a pure heart. We know when our minds have pure thoughts, without lust, anger, or covetousness. We know when our motives for all that we do is solely out of love for the Father and for our neighbors. When we know this, we have a boldness toward God. And God is pleased to give us all that we ask.

Entire sanctification is reaching that point, and staying at the point, where Christ is truly the only real thing that matters in this world. Christ is everything. When Christ is everything to us, we are naturally obedient to everything the Holy Spirit tells us. When all our sinful habits have been overcome, we naturally hear Christ's voice more clearly and we naturally take joy in doing what we know the Father wants us to do.

We learn to know when we are in darkness and when we are in the light. When we are in the light, the Holy Spirit remains in us. When we are in the light all the time, we are at peace with the Father. We are in God's Rest.

2.6) Tests for False Prophets (1 John 4:1 – 4:6)

1 John 4:1-6 Beloved, don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, (3) and every spirit who doesn't confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God, and this is the spirit of the Antichrist, of whom you have heard that it comes. Now it is in the world already. (4) You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. (5) They are of the world. Therefore they speak of the world, and the world hears them. (6) We are of God. He who knows God listens to us. He who is not of God doesn't listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

John now returns back to the spirit of antichrist. Specifically he is referring to the false prophets of his day, which were the Gnostics. There can be spirits or demons involved. But we recognize it as religious leaders who, in very deceptive ways, speak against Christ. That's what the word "antichrist" means. It means "against Christ." And the antichrist teachers are usually unaware that what they teach is false. They honestly believe what they teach. Those who personally know them will see their honesty. But they are deceived.

The Gnostics of that day taught that the spirit of the Messiah had come upon the man named Jesus when he was baptized. So they did not believe that Christ had really come as a man in the flesh. They taught that Christ, as a spirit, came and temporarily filled the man Jesus. In other words, Christ himself is portrayed as being a spirit. They did not confess that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. The world is quick to believe the spirit of antichrist. But the Holy Spirit in us is greater than the spirit of antichrist which is in the world.

John makes the point that he and those who followed him are of God. As he pointed out from at the start, he was physically and literally with Jesus when Jesus was here teaching. So he testifies about God first-hand. Therefore, those who know God are those who listen to John. Those who listen to the spirit of antichrist do not listen to John. They listen to the spirit of error. This means they are willing to be deceived because they have a love for the things of this world. So they become deceived by the spirit of antichrist and then they wind up passing on that false teaching without knowing that it's false.

2.7) Tests for False Prophets (1 John 4:7 – 4:21)

1 John 4:7-14 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God. (8) He who doesn't love doesn't know God, for God is love. (9) By this God's love was revealed in us, that God has sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. (10) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (11) Beloved, if God loved us in this way, we also ought to love one another. (12) No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love has been perfected in us. (13) By this we know that we remain in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. (14) We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world.

Jesus gave his life for us. That is God's ultimate love. Everyone who accepts this love must in turn love one another in the same way. Everyone who does so will be born of God and will inherit eternal life. But Christ's atoning sacrifice is not only for those who will be revealed as children of God. Christ's atoning sacrifice is for the whole world. The Son is the Savior of the world. Those who are perfected in love find Christian perfection. Christ is the Anointed One. When he returns, he will be the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He will reign over all the world. And we who are perfected through God's love will reign with Christ over all the nations. Then righteousness will go out to all the nations.

1 John 4:15-21 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him, and he in God. (16) We know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. (17) In this love has been made perfect among us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, even so are we in this world. (18) There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love. (19) We love him, because he first loved us. (20) If a man says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (21) This commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should also love his brother.

2.8) Those with Faith in Christ to Overcome Sin are not Antichrists (1 John 5:1-11)

The confession that John speaks of in verse 15, in this context, is a confession against the spirit of antichrist which denies that Jesus is the Son of God. This confession is a continual confession. As long as we continue this confession, God remains in us. This means the Holy Spirit remains in us. Perfect love is the love of those perfected by the Holy Spirit. Perfect love casts out fear because those with perfect love are willing to give up their lives just as Christ gave his life in perfect love for us.

1 John 5:1-5 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. Whoever loves the Father also loves the child who is born of him. (2) By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. (3) For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. His commandments are not grievous. (4) For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith. (5) Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

By context, the above verses about overcoming the world are talking about the spirit of antichrist that is in the world. John is talking about the Gnostics of his day. And by extension, John is talking about the continued spirit of antichrist that has existed ever since Christ came. The spirit of antichrist adopts any lie that goes against Jesus as being the Messiah who will rule the world.

The spirit of antichrist adopts any lie that says we don't have to obey Christ's commandments. The spirit of antichrist adopts any lie that says we do not have to have God's love in us for our brothers. The spirit of antichrist adopts any lie that says Jesus is not the Son of God. The spirit of antichrist adopts any lie that says we do not have to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect in order to inherit eternal life. But those who do not listen to the world, who instead listen to the Holy Spirit, will overcome the spirit of antichrist that is in the world.

We know that John was talking about the spirit of antichrist in verses 1-5 above. That's because the verses below go back to the topic of the Gnostics, which were the antichrists of John's day.

1 John 5:6-11 This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. (7) For there are three who testify: (8) the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the

three agree as one. (9) If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is God's testimony which he has testified concerning his Son. (10) He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who doesn't believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. (11) The testimony is this, that God gave to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Remember that the Gnostics of John's day taught that a spirit of Christ came into Jesus at the time of his baptism. And that spirit left Christ before the crucifixion. This is why John says Jesus "came by water and blood." The Holy Spirit testified at the baptism of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit testifies to us as we are filled with the Holy Spirit. The water refers to the baptism of Christ and the blood refers to the crucifixion of Christ. John states that "He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself." This is the Holy Spirit in us that testifies. By faith, we know that we have eternal life, strictly by the Son, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

2.9) The Wise, the Foolish, and the Wicked (1 John 5:12-21)

1 John 5:12-15 He who has the Son has the life. He who doesn't have God's Son doesn't have the life. (13) These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (14) This is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he listens to us. (15) And if we know that he listens to us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him.

Why is John concerned that we may not continue to believe? It's because the spirit of antichrist has gone out into the world. Those who know Christ, but then deny Christ, are committing the unpardonable sin.

1 John 5:16-18 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for those who sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death. I don't say that he should make a request concerning this. (17) All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death. (18) We know that whoever is born of God doesn't sin, but he who was born of God keeps himself, and the evil one doesn't touch him.

John speaks of three types of people in these two verses. The wise are those who don't sin. They will inherit the kingdom and reign with Christ over the nations. They will inherit eternal life. The foolish continue to sin, but not the sin that leads to death. The wicked are those who commit the sin that leads to death.

The Wise: The wise are those who overcome the evil one. John says, "Whoever is born of God doesn't sin." They keep themselves pure. "The evil one doesn't touch him." Jesus calls these people the wise. They will be born of God and will inherit eternal life. They will inherit the kingdom and rule with Christ over the nations.

The Foolish: The sins that do not lead to death are sins not involving the deliberate and knowledgeable rejection of Christ. John says that, "God will give him life." Some will repent and turn to Christ. But many are still sinning when they go to their graves. This includes those who profess Christ as Savior but are still sinning. God will "give them life." They will be resurrected. But they will not inherit the kingdom. They will not have eternal life. They will live in the nations. Jesus calls these people the foolish.

The Wicked: The sin that leads to death is having really known Jesus, perhaps through the power of the Holy Spirit, and then rejecting Jesus. It's the same as those who saw the miracles of Jesus, and thus knew that Jesus is the Messiah, but they still rejected Jesus and said the miracles of the Holy Spirit were from Beelzebub. These would include the Gnostics of John's day and those who take the mark of the beast (antichrist) when Christ appears.

Matthew 12:30-32 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters. (31) Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. (32) Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.

Hebrews 6:4-6 ESV For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Jesus died for everyone. But those who reject Christ in this way forfeit their salvation. They will not be resurrected. During the great tribulation, those who take the mark of the beast are committing this unpardonable sin. This is a "sin that leads to death." They will not be resurrected. For those who commit this sin during Christ's millennial reign, there is the second death, of which John speaks about in Revelation.

The primary goal of the spirit of antichrist is to get people to deny Christ. Even the word "antichrist" means 'against Christ.' For those who teach Gnostic or Islamic teachings, there is the danger of committing the unpardonable sin. But God turns sinners over to the blindness of their sins. Their sins are not the unpardonable sin leading to death. So we should pray for them. But if Christ is rejected by people who really know the truth, the sin is unpardonable. That sin leads to death. This is the goal of the evil one.

1 John 5:19-21 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (20) We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. (21) Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

"The whole world lies in the power of the evil one." This will be especially true when Islam becomes the religion of the end-time one-world government, ruled by the antichrist. Islam denies that Jesus is the Son of God. Islam denies that Christ died for our sins. In Islam, belief in either of these truths is the greatest of all sins. After Christ returns at the start of the seven years, those who embrace these lies will take the mark of the beast, and will forfeit their salvation.

In Revelation 13:14-18, John tells us the world will make an image of the beast, and that the image will have the breath to speak. All the world will be forced to worship this idol or be killed. Perhaps this is why John concludes his letter with "Little children, keep yourself from idols."

Chapter 3

The Christian Perfection of Paul

John was probably a teenager during Christ's ministry. When John wrote Revelation, he was an old man, perhaps in his nineties. When 1 John was written, John considered himself to be spiritually mature. Seven times he refers to his audience as "little children." (1 John 2:1, 2:12, 2:28, 3:7, 3:18, 4:4, and the last verse of the letter, 5:21) John was writing from the authority of one of the twelve disciples, and as one who had matured to Christian perfection.

Paul, on the other hand, wrote as one who continued to struggle with sin during most of his ministry. Paul was considered to be an apostle. But he had not actually lived with Christ and matured under his discipleship. Also, Paul was martyred. So Paul's ministry was much shorter than John's. His ministry probably lasted about 30 years from his conversion around 34 AD until his martyrdom around 64 AD.

3.1) Paul's Race to Perfection; the Prize of Inheriting the Kingdom

Paul used the metaphor of the race in reference to his journey to Christian perfection. Towards the end of his life, Paul states that he had completed the journey. It's very informative to take a survey of all the times Paul used this metaphor. The meaning of the race is often debated. Some may see the race as involving holiness. But the Reformed position does not recognize Christian perfection. Thus, they do not generally associate the race with holiness unless it's a race that is never completed until after death. For this reason, let's begin with Philippians to get a good idea of what Paul means by the race and its prize.

Philippians 3:10-16 that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death; (11) if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (12) Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on, if it is so that I may take hold of that for which also I was taken hold of by Christ Jesus. (13) Brothers, I don't regard myself as yet having taken hold, but one thing I do. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (15)

Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, think this way. If in anything you think otherwise, God will also reveal that to you. (16) Nevertheless, to the extent that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule. Let us be of the same mind.

Paul states that he has not as yet obtained Christian perfection (verses 12, 13). But Paul is not saying that none are perfect. He says, "As many as are perfect, think this way" (verse 15). Even if you are perfect, you should continue to "press on." Some may be mistaken. It's possible that the Holy Spirit still has some work to do in you regarding a sinful habit that you are unaware. Verse 15 goes on to say, "if ... you think otherwise, God will also reveal that to you." In other words, God will reveal to us when we have been made perfect, and when we have not been made perfect. But we should usually keep it to ourselves. We should not boast. In verse 16, Paul concludes with "Let us be all of the same mind." We should all "press on" even after God has revealed to us that we have reached Christian perfection.

We should note that in these verses (above) Paul uses the metaphor of the goal and the prize. He does not explicitly refer to a race. But it's strongly implied.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul uses the metaphor of a race to portray the Christian life. He speaks of a strict training, which would be compared to the training and self-discipline required to overcome sin. If we are successful in running the race, we obtain the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIV Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. (25) Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (26) Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. (27) No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Is this prize salvation itself? If this is true, then why does Paul fear being disqualified for this prize? Paul says he beats his body, and makes it his slave, so that he will not be disqualified for this prize. He considers the possibility that others to whom he has preached the gospel could achieve the prize but that he himself could be disqualified. Beating one's body to make it his slave is not consistent with salvation. We don't have to beat our bodies to get saved.

Many theologians argue that the prize is heavenly rewards for works of service in building the kingdom. Beating of one's body, however, is not consistent with a prize of rewards for furthering the kingdom. No amount of beating one's body will further the kingdom. However, the beating of one's body is consistent with the overcoming of sin. Also, heavenly rewards would most likely be plural. It would be different rewards for various services in building the kingdom. Paul, however, seems to be referring to a single goal and a single prize.

Some would argue that the beating of the body is not to be considered literal. The beating of the body simply expresses motivation in furthering the kingdom. In this case, however, there is no reason that Paul would be fearful of failing to obtain the prize, when others to whom he preaches would have been successful. Would God reward only those who have accomplished a certain high level preaching? No, if there are to be rewards given in heaven for works that are done in this life, then everyone will receive rewards for their works. Nobody will be disqualified because someone else did more.

Paul says the prize is a crown. Those who overcome their sinful habits will rule the nations (Revelation 2:26-27). They will inherit the kingdom. The prize is the reward of becoming priests and kings. The prize is not salvation. We don't go into "strict training" to earn the free gift of salvation. The prize is a reward that comes from beating our bodies to make it our slaves, and free from sin. The wise are those who beat their bodies to overcome sin. The foolish are those who allow sin to remain, thinking that sin cannot be overcome. Both are saved. But only the wise will reign with Christ. Only the wise will inherit the kingdom. Only the wise will inherit eternal life. Only the wise will no longer be under judgment, because they will have overcome all their sinful habits.

Some will argue that Paul mixes this metaphor. In some places, they argue, the race can be about holiness, and in other places the race can be about furthering the kingdom. Actually, there is some truth to this. But what if Paul does not distinguish the two? What if Paul understands that you overcome sin by doing the works of the Father? Since this is the teaching of both Jesus and John, it would make sense. When we do the works of the Father, the Holy Spirit fills us, and we overcome sin. God becomes a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29). We no longer have room in our lives for sin when we are focused on doing the Father's works. So the race is for both good works and the overcoming of sinful habits. It's all part of the same journey of salvation.

Acts 20:22-24 Now, behold, I go bound by the Spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there; (23) except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions wait for me. (24) But these things don't count; nor do I hold my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to fully testify to the Good News of the grace of God.

Galatians 2:1-2 Then after a period of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with me. (2) I went up by revelation, and I laid before them the Good News which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately before those who were respected, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.

Galatians 5:6-7 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision amounts to anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love. (7) You were running well! Who interfered with you that you should not obey the truth?

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore let us also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, (2) looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In the following, Paul speaks about the end of his life, having run a good race. Paul expects to receive that crown. This is entire sanctification. This should be a challenge to the Reformed view that righteousness is never perfected in this life. Paul seems to believe that he has successfully run the race. He therefore expects to receive the prize.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure has come. (7) I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. (8) From now on, there is stored up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing.

If we are successful in running the race, we receive the prize. The prize cannot be just heavenly rewards, because Paul was fearful of being disqualified, and you don't beat your body for heavenly prizes. The race includes doing the Father's works. But the race must also be associated with the overcoming of all sinful habits. It is, therefore, entire sanctification. Paul says the prize is a crown. Those who overcome sinful habits will rule the nations (Revelation 2:26-27). By implication, the prize is the reward of becoming priests and kings in the millennium.

Entire sanctification does not mean perfection without mistakes. You can still make mistakes. But you can overcome all your sinful habits.

1 Thess. 5:23-24 ESV Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Theologians all seem to agree that sanctification is the long-term process of our being changed to make us more and more like Christ. As we overcome sin, we are being sanctified. But the Reformed view is that this process cannot be completed until the time of the resurrection, or until Christ returns. That's because they believe you can't completely overcome all sinful habits.

Therefore, Reformed theologians will tend to read this verse as saying our sanctification will be completed when Christ returns. But the verse does not say we are sanctified completely at the coming of Christ. We are "kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, we can be completely sanctified so that we are ready for Christ to return. We can be "kept blameless" until Christ returns. We are not ready for Christ to return until we have overcome all our sinful habits for complete sanctification.

In many respects, this short letter of Paul covers many aspects of eschatology. The coming of Christ in the clouds to gather his people is at the end of chapter 4. Now, at the end of chapter 5, Paul seems to be concluding that we should become completely sanctified in order to be ready for Christ to come in the clouds and for us to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

3.2) Confirmation in Old Testament Eschatology

To understand Paul better, let's go to the Old Testament and see the same thing. In other words, let's take a look at it in Paul's Bible. Daniel 9 is about a prayer that Daniel prayed. Daniel knew that Israel had been dispersed to Babylon

because of sin. Daniel also knew that God had promised the dispersion would end in 70 years. Thus, Daniel prayed to ask God to forgive the sins of Israel. And Daniel prayed for the desolation of Jerusalem to come to an end, according to what God had promised.

The answer to the prayer was given in a vision. Daniel was also told in this vision that after the command to rebuild Jerusalem, Daniel's people would have seventy weeks of years to completely stop sinning before the Messiah (Christ) would come.

Daniel 9:23-24 As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision: (24) "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

This is not something that Christ (the Messiah) would do at the cross, as many have argued. This is something that "your people and your holy city" must do before the Messiah (Christ) would come.

Think about it from the perspective of Old Testament Jewish eschatology. When the Messiah comes, Israel will rule the nations with the Messiah. Righteousness will go out to all the nations as a result of that rule. But in order for righteousness to be brought out to all the nations, Israel must first become righteous. So Israel must become righteous before the Messiah can set up his kingdom.

When Christ came the first time, Israel was not ready. Israel was still sinning. So Christ will come a second time. When the last seven weeks are finished, Christ will come again. We must be completely sanctified before Christ comes. Today, the Church is not ready for Christ to return. The true Church (Bride of Christ), which is Israel, must completely stop sinning before Christ can set up the kingdom of heaven here on the earth.

Chapter 4

The Christian Perfection of James

Most Protestants tend to associate James as being about faith and works. For the Protestant, the verses that say, "Faith without works is dead" come to mind when thinking about James (2:17, 2:20, and 2:26). But the primary theme of James is actually that of Christian perfection. As we will see, James is all about maturing in Christ to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. And the primary way to mature in Christ is through works.

James 1:1-4 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are in the Dispersion: Greetings. (2) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various temptations, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) Let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James starts out by stating his purpose in writing his letter. James is writing to the Church. He is writing to all believers, both Jewish and Gentile. And he addresses them as the "twelve tribes which are [scattered among the nations]." In other words, he addresses the Church as Israel. (Gentile believers are grafted into Israel.) Then he speaks about us becoming "perfect and complete."

The true Israel is all those who become perfect and complete, through a discipleship relationship with Jesus Christ, before Christ returns. According to verse 1, Israel is currently in the dispersion, or among the nations. Being among the nations, we are experiencing "various temptations" to sin. This "testing of your faith produces endurance." As we learn to resist temptations, we become "perfect and complete." This is Christian perfection. This is walking as Jesus walked. This is living without sin. The entire letter of James should be interpreted in the context of this introduction. The primary theme of James is Christian perfection.

James 1:5-8 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. (7) For let that man not think that he will receive anything from the Lord. (8) He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

In the Old Testament, the word for wisdom also means teacher. It means maturity. In this context, James is speaking about the maturity that comes with the overcoming of sin. Knowledge is involved in this wisdom. But it's primarily the wisdom of having been discipled (taught) by Jesus Christ, through the filling of the Holy Spirit.

James is saying that if anyone lacks wisdom with regard to resisting temptations and endurance, that he should ask God. The Father will fill us with the Holy Spirit, who is our Teacher, Helper, and Counselor. With regard to asking God for this help, James speaks about having faith and not doubting. The waves of the sea and being tossed by the wind is an allusion back to Peter's experience of walking on the water. As long as you keep your eyes on Jesus you don't sink into the water. Faith is an important aspect of maturing to Christian perfection. And faith is an important aspect of what James says in this letter.

James 1:9-11 But let the brother in humble circumstances glory in his high position; (10) and the rich, in that he is made humble, because like the flower in the grass, he will pass away. (11) For the sun arises with the scorching wind, and withers the grass, and the flower in it falls, and the beauty of its appearance perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in his pursuits.

This is an allusion to the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus uses the clothing of flowers as an illustration of faith. Jesus also talks about storing treasures in heaven. Spend your time, money, and energy doing the works of the Father.

4.1) The Crown of Life is Given to Those Who Endure Temptation

In the very next verse, James gets back to the topic of enduring temptation and Christian perfection. Has James wandered off into another subject and then returned to Christian perfection? No, because it's through faith and doing the Father's works that Christian perfection is obtained. Faith (asking for wisdom) and doing the works of the Father are both closely tied to the topic of maturity.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him.

To endure temptation is to become "perfect and complete" (verses 2-4 above). Only those who become "perfect and complete" will receive the "crown of life." A crown is a reward. The "crown of life" simply means to be rewarded with eternal

life. The crown itself is also an allusion to the fact that Israel (those who overcome sin) will reign with Christ over the nations.

This happens "when he has been approved." The Lord promised this to all "those who love him." But it's directly promised to "the man who endures temptation." It can be argued that all believers love Christ, so all believers will receive the crown of life, regardless of whether they "endure temptation." But think back to the story of Peter being asked three times if he loved Jesus. Two different Greek words were being used for love.

Agape love is unconditional love. Philos love is brotherly love. When Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me," these two types of love were being used in the conversation. In this translation, "affection" is used for philos love and "love" for agape love. With this distinction being made in the translation, you can get the idea of what was really being said.

John 21:14-17 This is now the third time that Jesus was revealed to his disciples, after he had risen from the dead. (15) So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." (16) He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." (17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?" Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, "Do you have affection for me?" He said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection for you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Peter knew that he had failed the test. He had denied Christ three times because he was afraid for his life. To Peter's credit, he displayed honesty in his conversation with Christ. His love for Jesus was not unconditional, and this realization pained him greatly. Peter's grief over Jesus' repetition of the question was a completely different type of emotion than it would appear when read in a translation that does not distinguish these two different types of love.

Jesus' remedy for the situation is to "feed my sheep." This means doing the works the Father has for us. As we do the Father's works, the Holy Spirit fills us and we overcome all our sinful habits. As we go from brotherly love to an agape love, we become willing and ready to die for Christ. Those who have an agape love

for Christ are those who will "receive the crown of life." We get there by enduring temptation until we are "perfect and complete."

James 1:13-16 Let no man say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God," for God can't be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. (14) But each one is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. (15) Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. (16) Don't be deceived, my beloved brothers.

James has been saying that as we endure temptations we become "perfect and complete." It would be a deception, however, to conclude that God tempts us to sin. We are tempted when we are "drawn away by [our] own lusts."

James 1:17-18 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, nor turning shadow. (18) Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

James is not changing the subject. When we ask for wisdom to endure temptations, we are asking for God's good and perfect gift. We are asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This echoes Paul's words that salvation is a gift so that no man can boast. The Holy Spirit changes us as we do the works of the Father. Those changes are good and perfect gifts from the Father. Of course the crucifixion was an all-important gift from Christ. Without the crucifixion, the Holy Spirit would not have come because our sins would not be forgiven. It's all part of God's plan.

The "Father of lights" and not "turning shadow" reminds us that Christ is the light of the world, and in Him there is no darkness. The "perfect" gift from God does not allow for any sin. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we cannot sin because God is in us and God cannot sin.

4.2) The Church (Israel) are Firstfruits of the Harvest

James says, "We should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." It's important to understand what is meant by "firstfruits." Paul spoke of the resurrection of Christ as being "firstfruits."

1 Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the firstfruits of those who are asleep.

The Jewish feast of firstfruits is one of the seven feasts given to Moses on Mount Sinai. This feast is during Passover week. It's on the day after the Sabbath. During the Passover week of Christ's crucifixion, the feast of firstfruits would have been on Sunday. Christ's resurrection occurred on the feast of firstfruits.

Paul recognizes this and relates the resurrection of Christ as the "firstfruits of those who are asleep." Christ was not the first to be brought back from the dead. Lazarus was brought back from the dead. But Christ was the first to be resurrected with a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44). Christ was given a body that does not age and die. He was the first to be given a body that has eternal life. But Christ is not the only one who will be raised as "firstfruits."

Romans 8:23 Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 ESV But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

So this verse in James is saying the same thing:

James 1:18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

The idea that the Church, which is Israel, is the firstfruits of the harvest comes from the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 2:3a ESV Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest.

When we are resurrected, or caught up in the rapture, we will also be "firstfruits." Relate this back to the feast of firstfruits. The first of the harvest was given to God as being holy. Then, the rest of the crop was harvested. The resurrection of Christ is the "firstfruits." Next, the Church (which is Israel) is resurrected as "firstfruits." So there must be a final harvest after the resurrection of the Church. Just as the "firstfruits" of the harvest is holy, we are a holy nation. We are elected (or chosen) to bring this righteousness to the nations after the Messiah comes.

1 Peter 2:9 NIV But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the

praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Exodus 19:5-6 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine; (6) and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

And now, let's get back to James 1:18. We, as a holy nation, are brought forth by "his own will" (James 1:18). God chooses those who are made "perfect and complete" in this present age. But we, the "perfect and complete" in this present age, are only the "firstfruits" (James 1:18) of the harvest. God chooses (elects) those who will be priests and kings in the age to come. Those who overcome sin in this age will reign with Christ over the nations in the age to come. This is so the nations can also be taught to become "perfect and complete." Those who become "perfect and complete" during the age to come will also inherit eternal life. That's why we are "firstfruits."

James 1:19-21 So, then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; (20) for the anger of man doesn't produce the righteousness of God. (21) Therefore, putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with humility the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

The word of God is "implanted" in us. It's the teaching of the Holy Spirit to overcome all the sinful habits in our lives. To this end, we must be humble. We must be "swift to hear" and "slow to speak" so that we can be taught by the Holy Spirit. Getting angry about being taught will not bring about the complete righteousness of Christian perfection.

4.3) Don't be Talkers of the Word; be Dowers of the Word

As we will see in the next chapter, salvation is a journey. We must complete that journey in order to inherit eternal life. We must complete that journey to eternally save our souls. But if the journey is not completed in this age, it can be completed after the "resurrection of the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15). The unjust, who have not yet become "perfect and complete" will have the continued opportunity to do so under Christ's millennial reign.

James 1:22-25 But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves. (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror; (24) for he sees himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. (25) But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does.

Again, the "word" being spoken of is the word God "implanted" in us. It's the teaching of the Holy Spirit to endure against temptation and to overcome all the sinful habits in our lives. But the only way for this teaching to stick is to do the works of the Father. If we don't become doers of the word, it's like seeing yourself in the mirror and then forgetting what you look like. It's like continuing to sin and yet forgetting what kind of sinner we are, because sin is blinding.

This brings us back to what Jesus told Peter. We must "feed his sheep" in order to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. As we do the Father's works, the Holy Spirit fills us. Our eyes must remain focused on Christ instead of the things of this world. To be "hearers of the word" is to believe in Christ, but to not act upon that belief. To be "doers of the word" is the only way to find Christian perfection.

James 1:26-27 If anyone among you thinks himself to be religious while he doesn't bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this man's religion is worthless. (27) Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

People can easily become talkers of the word and not doers of the word. This is a form of religion, but it's worthless. It will not bring about salvation. To visit the fatherless and widows is an example of doing the Father's works.

James 2:1-8 My brothers, don't hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with partiality. (2) For if a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, comes into your synagogue, and a poor man in filthy clothing also comes in; (3) and you pay special attention to him who wears the fine clothing, and say, "Sit here in a good place;" and you tell the poor man, "Stand there," or "Sit by my footstool;" (4) haven't you shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (5) Listen, my beloved brothers. Didn't God

choose those who are poor in this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which he promised to those who love him?

(6) But you have dishonored the poor man. Don't the rich oppress you, and personally drag you before the courts? (7) Don't they blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called? (8) However, if you fulfill the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well.

James echoes the teaching of Jesus about showing favoritism in the synagogue. We are also seeing additional allusions to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus teaches us to store our treasures in heaven. The rich have a huge obstacle standing in their way, as Jesus taught about the rich young ruler. The poor do not have money to get in the way of developing a true agape love for Christ. What rich person would be willing to give up everything they have, including their life, for Christ? But those whom God chooses (elects) to become "perfect and complete" will be "heirs of the Kingdom." They will reign with Christ over the nations. Those in the nations can still be saved during the millennium.

James 2:9-13 But if you show partiality, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors. (10) For whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (11) For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (12) So speak, and so do, as men who are to be judged by a law of freedom. (13) For judgment is without mercy to him who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James is talking about living under grace instead of living under the law. But he is not changing the subject. To be filled with the Holy Spirit, and thus do the works of the Father, is living under grace. That's living "by a law of freedom." In so doing, you become "perfect and complete."

So you are not sinning even though you are not keeping all the Old Testament laws of Moses. However, if you show partiality to the rich, you are not acting as one who is filled with the Holy Spirit, because God would not show partiality or favoritism. You then become guilty of the whole law.

4.4) Faith Without Works is Dead

The only way to stay filled with the Holy Spirit is to be doers of the word (of the Holy Spirit) and not simply hearers of the word. Faith without works is dead.

James 2:14-20 What good is it, my brothers, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can faith save him? (15) And if a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food, (16) and one of you tells them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled;" and yet you didn't give them the things the body needs, what good is it? (17) Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. (18) Yes, a man will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith. (19) You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe, and shudder. (20) But do you want to know, vain man, that faith apart from works is dead?

This letter of James is the one book that Martin Luther had problems in trying to make it fit his doctrine. People have said that we are saved by faith and not works, but that works is the evidence that we have faith.

But the truth is that we do the works because of our faith, and as we do the works, the Holy Spirit fills us. We are not earning salvation by paying for sins. We are saved (sanctified) by the filling of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit backs off if we yield to temptation. We yield to temptation because we are weak and self-oriented. The works helps us get away from self and the temptations of this world as we become excited about doing the Father's work. This in turn brings the Holy Spirit to help us do our works. Faith is the desire to please a God that cannot be seen. We do the will of the Father as a result of that desire. Over time, this desire becomes true agape love. The only way to become "perfect and complete" is to do the works of the Father. That's why salvation is a journey.

Read (below) what Paul says in Romans about Abraham being justified by faith and not by works. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 to make his point. Then, read what James says about Abraham being justified by works as well as faith. James quotes the exact same verse to make his point.

Romans 4:1-5 What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather, has found according to the flesh? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not toward God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (4) Now to him who

works, the reward is not counted as grace, but as debt. (5) But to him who doesn't work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

James 2:21-26 Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? (22) You see that faith worked with his works, and by works faith was perfected; (23) and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness;" and he was called the friend of God. (24) You see then that by works, a man is justified, and not only by faith. (25) In like manner wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way? (26) For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead.

In a preface to James, Martin Luther wrote that it "contradicts Paul by teaching justification by works." I think the reason Luther could not reconcile James and Paul is that Luther started to view salvation as a decision, and not as a journey. If salvation is a one-time decision, then how can works be involved?

Paul was addressing works involved in following the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses included many sacrifices in payment of sin. But in the age of grace, the sacrifice of Christ is the only payment for sin that is possible. James was addressing works involved in following Christ. The works James speaks of are good works that are done out of love. The Holy Spirit performs works of sanctification as we are filled. But without works of love, there is very little filling of the Holy Spirit.

4.5) Teachers Receive a Heavier Judgment

James 3:1-2 Let not many of you be teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive heavier judgment. (2) For in many things we all stumble. If anyone doesn't stumble in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.

The entire third chapter of James is about the use of the tongue, which involves teaching, preaching, and speaking. Ideally only those who are "perfect and complete" should teach. The "perfect man" is one who does not stumble in the word of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit cannot make mistakes about what they say or teach. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you cannot sin. Mistakes, however, are not sins. What one says, while filled with the Spirit, does not come from self-oriented motivations.

For example, a preacher can easily become fearful about preaching against sin if he thinks doing so could cause church members to leave. He can rationalize that the church members who might leave could instead benefit from his less controversial teachings. It's easy for such a preacher to believe that the Scripture does not teach Christian perfection. Over time, the preacher is less and less filled with the Holy Spirit because pastors who do not make a difference with regard to continued sin are really wolves in sheep clothing. And they don't realize it.

The "word" being spoken of here is the same as previously in this letter of James. The "word" is the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches us to overcome sin. Likewise, we can teach others to overcome sin. Of course this teaching can also include many other doctrinal aspects about God, as learned from the Scriptures. But the primary purpose of Scripture is salvation, which is a journey of righteousness through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

In other words, the "perfect man" teaches the "word" of the Holy Spirit, which is to overcome sin. The "perfect man" teaches Christian perfection. That's because the "perfect man" is "able to bridle [steer] his whole body."

James 3:3-5a Indeed, we put bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, and we guide their whole body. (4) Behold, the ships also, though they are so big and are driven by fierce winds, are yet guided by a very small rudder, wherever the pilot desires. (5) So the tongue is also a little member, and boasts great things.

The "perfect man" is able to "bridle [steer] the whole body" away from sin. James considers our tongues to steer our whole body in refraining from sin. As we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we say and teach things from the Holy Spirit. But when we speak out of self-oriented motivations, we steer our body and others into sin.

James 3:5b-6 See how a small fire can spread to a large forest! (6) And the tongue is a fire. The world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire by Gehenna.

What we say, when not filled with the Spirit, can corrupt us. James uses the fire of hell as a metaphor for a fire that comes from what we say. What we say is very consuming. When a thought remains in the heart, the Holy Spirit can change it if it's not from God. But when a thought is spoken, it becomes decided upon. It has a dramatic effect on the one speaking as well as those who hear.

James 3:7-12 For every kind of animal, bird, creeping thing, and thing in the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by mankind. (8) But nobody can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (9) With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the image of God. (10) Out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. (11) Does a spring send out from the same opening fresh and bitter water? (12) Can a fig tree, my brothers, yield olives, or a vine figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh water.

James uses allegories to show there is no middle ground between someone speaking things which are from God, and someone speaking things which are from selfish motivations or Gehenna (hell). When one is filled with the Holy Spirit, the things being taught have the motivations of God. When one is not filled with the Holy Spirit, one should refrain from teaching.

In the following verses, I've replaced the word "wisdom" with "teaching." In the Old Testament, the word for wisdom means teacher. James is continuing to talk about the tongue and the dangers of teaching without Christian perfection.

James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good conduct that his deeds are done in gentleness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and don't lie against the truth. (15) This [teaching] is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. (16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is confusion and every evil deed. (17) But the [teaching] that is from above is first pure, then peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. (18) Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

We have now covered the first three chapters of James. Chapters 4 and 5 are less about the need for Christian perfection and more about the way we should live in order to get there. You might want to read these last two chapters of James with Christian perfection in mind.

Chapter 5

Christian Perfection by Grace

When we follow Christ, no matter the cost, our eyes are only on Christ. When we take our eyes off Christ, and we begin to look at the waves around us, and we begin to sink.

Matthew 14:28-31 Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters." (29) He said, "Come!" Peter stepped down from the boat, and walked on the waters to come to Jesus. (30) But when he saw that the wind was strong, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" (31) Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

This is how we overcome sin. We keep our eyes on Jesus. We don't worry whether or not we have as yet overcome sin. We overcome sin by faith. We have faith that the Holy Spirit in us will complete the work that he began.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

This verse above is saying two things. First is that the Holy Spirit is doing a work in us that will be completed. Secondly, there is a deadline. The work must be completed by the time Christ returns. Paul always wrote with the assumption that Christ could return in his lifetime. As it turns out, that was not the case. If we die before Christ returns, we can have faith that the Holy Spirit will complete the work before we die. This work must be completed before Christ returns if we are to reign with Christ over the nations when he returns.

Revelation 2:25-26 Nevertheless, hold that which you have firmly until I come. (26) He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.

The work of the Holy Spirit is a process called sanctification. Protestants tend to see sanctification as something that is separate and distinct from salvation. Many Protestants see salvation as a "born again" event that starts our journey of sanctification. But literally speaking, to be "born again" is to be literally born with

a new spiritual body. Thus, we are born again at the end of the journey. And salvation is that journey.

John 3:5-7 ESV Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Catholics view salvation as a journey. If it's a journey, one must ask, when does the journey begin? The Catholic answer is at infant baptism. They simply state, without evidence, that being born of water is baptism. But notice the parallelism between being born of flesh and being born of the Spirit. If you follow the parallelism, to be born of water is to be born of the flesh. The mother's water breaks just before the infant is born. The traditional Catholics view is that you must be baptized into the Catholic Church in order to enter the kingdom. Protestants would say that if salvation is really a journey, then it begins when we first put our faith in Jesus Christ.

If salvation is a journey, one must also ask what happens if one does not complete the journey before death. The Catholic answer to this question is that you will have to spend some time in purgatory. The New Wine System, on the other hand, is like a free-grace alternative to purgatory. It's all about interpreting the New Testament in the context of the Old Testament. It's just like the Jews believed based on Old Testament Scripture. The dead are asleep and await the resurrection of both the just and the unjust. The unjust continue their journey during the millennial reign of Christ. The wicked, on the other hand, who deliberately and knowingly reject Jesus Christ, are not resurrected.

Acts 24:15 having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

Protestants reject the idea of purgatory. And of course, the Protestants who believe in infant baptism do not believe sprinkling switches the infant from eternal hell to temporary purgatory. The Protestant solution is to avoid thinking of salvation as a journey. Salvation becomes a one-time decision for Christ. However, there is much more Scriptural evidence for salvation being a journey than a one-time decision for Christ.

Philippians 2:12-13 So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (13)

For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.

If we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, then salvation must be a journey. But we have assurance that God will complete the work that he is doing in us (Philippians 1:6, quoted above). So we have an assurance of salvation. Yet we must do our part. We must have the desire (will) to overcome sin, and to do the works of the Father. If our faith in God moves us in that direction, God will work in us to bring about his "will and work," which is to desire and do the works of the Father. So it's a process. It's a journey. It's a journey that we must undertake for ourselves. Yet as we take that journey, God does the greater work.

1 Thessalonians 5:21-24 Test all things, and hold firmly that which is good. (22) Abstain from every form of evil. (23) May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) He who calls you is faithful, who will also do it.

It must be understood that salvation is a journey of righteousness to entire (complete) sanctification. Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). In addition, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The Greek word used for "way" means road. Thus, the verse can better be translated as, "I am the [road], the truth, and the life. No one [journeys] to the Father except through me." Salvation is a journey of righteousness; a path that we must take.

Most Christians believe in Jesus but they don't take the journey seriously. They don't think they can really overcome all their sinful habits. They are told, "Nobody is perfect." So they die without completing the journey. But they are still saved. They will be resurrected. They won't reign with Christ because they don't overcome sin. For those who die before they complete the journey, the journey can continue into the millennium. But until the journey is completed, there is no eternal life.

Through the Holy Spirit, we are being conformed into the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:5). The journey ends with the glorification of our bodies (1 Cor. 15:50). We were saved by hope in the promise (Romans 8:24). We are being saved by God's power in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1:18). And we will be saved because we have been reconciled by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:10).

Romans 8:24 For we were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for that which he sees?

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Romans 5:10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life.

Salvation must include reconciliation, justification, sanctification, and finally the glorification of our bodies. Reconciliation means Christ paid the price for everyone's sins at the cross. This allows everyone to be resurrected. When we become a believer we are justified. Justification means to be declared righteous. Our sins are forgiven when we are justified. Abraham was saved by faith. God credited (NIV), reckoned (WEB), counted (ESV), or imputed (KJV) Abraham with righteousness because of his faith (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, 4:22-23, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23). This does not mean that Abraham had already achieved righteousness. It simply means that Abraham had begun a journey that would lead to righteousness. God calls things that are not as though they are (Romans 4:17). God knows the future, and speaks of the future as if it's already past. God calls the man of faith righteous because God knows he will be righteous. This can only be understood if salvation is a journey.

Abraham was credited with righteousness when he acted on his faith. God told Abraham to leave his home and all he knew, and to go to a promised land. This journey to the Promised Land is symbolic of the journey to righteousness. It's a journey to holiness. It's a journey to Christian perfection.

When we understand that salvation is a journey to holiness, we understand that faith is not just belief that Jesus is the Messiah. It is faith, hope, and a genuine desire that God will work in us, through the Holy Spirit, to make us righteous. It's faith that God will make us "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect." It's a faith to become like Jesus, which is to walk without sin. It's a faith that brings about Christian perfection. And it's a faith that we ourselves participate in and act upon. We sincerely and fearfully work towards Christian perfection and believe that God will do the greater work in us.

Sanctification is the journey towards that righteousness. For those who are mature in Christ, the glorification of their bodies will happen when Christ returns. Many however, have a belief in Christ but not a faith for Christian perfection. For

many, the glorification of their bodies must wait until they are entirely sanctified during the millennium.

What is grace? What does it mean to be saved by grace? A well-known definition for grace is the unmerited favor of God. The Greek word for grace means favor. Grace and favor is the same Greek word. When God decides (or elects) to favor us, it's unmerited. When we read verses about grace, you can substitute "unmerited favor."

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by [unmerited favor] you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, that no one would boast.

When salvation is incorrectly understood to be a decision and not a journey, unmerited favor is perceived to simply be an election for salvation. Calvinists believe that God chooses, by unmerited favor, who will be saved and who will go to hell. But when salvation is understood to be a journey, then unmerited favor means that God elects whom He will fill with the Holy Spirit to completely overcome all sinful habits in this age. God chooses who will be made perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect during this age, so that we can reign with Christ during the age to come. But it doesn't happen overnight. It's a journey.

Romans 6:21-23 What fruit then did you have at that time in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. (22) But now, being made free from sin, and having become servants of God, you have your fruit of sanctification, and the result of eternal life. (23) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Those whom God does not elect to become perfect in this age are simply resurrected to continue their journey when Christ returns. The elect are chosen to be firstfruits of the harvest.

1 Corinthians 15:20 ESV But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Romans 8:23 NIV Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

James 1:18 NIV He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

The elect are those chosen by God to reign with Christ over the nations. The elect is the Bride of Christ. Grace is unmerited favor, which is election. The elect are those who complete their journey of salvation, through unmerited favor, to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, before Christ returns.

The elect are the firstfruits of the harvest. The rest of the harvest happens during Christ's millennial reign. At the resurrection of the just and the unjust, the elect are the just. The unjust still have an opportunity to continue their journey of salvation during Christ's millennial reign.

The rest of the harvest, however, will not be saved by grace and through faith. They are still justified by the blood of Christ. But their journey of salvation is not that of election. So it will not be by unmerited favor. They are not saved by faith because faith is hope in that which is not seen. Christ will have returned, so everyone will see him. Every knee will bow and worship Christ. So the journey of salvation during the millennium will not be by grace and through faith.

Instead, salvation during the millennium will be by the Law of Christ, similar to the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses was a theocracy and foreshadowed the theocracy and Law of Christ. Instead of being taught by the Holy Spirit, the nations will be taught by the Bride of Christ. Those who overcome sin in this age will reign over the nations as priests and kings in the age to come (Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6). Satan will be locked up for the thousand years. And the world will not be filled with pornography, prostitution, and every other form of open sin wherever you turn. Those who do not reject Christ's reign will overcome all their sinful habits, and will also become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect.

Chapter 6

Christian Perfection by Works

We are saved by grace (favor/election), through faith, and not of works, that no one should boast. But at the same time, grace comes as we do the works of the Father. We love the Father and we love our neighbor. But what is love without works? What is faith without works? Can there be grace without works?

Ephesians 2:4-9 But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (6) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (7) that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; (8) for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, that no one would boast.

This verse is often quoted to emphasize that works is not involved in salvation. It's not something that we do. It's only something that God does. But what about the very next verse?

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

The works expected of us were "prepared beforehand." This sounds very much like election. We were elected to be saved in this age, the firstfruits of the harvest. We were elected to be saved so that we can do the works that God has prepared for us to do. With salvation being a journey, if we are not involved in doing the works that were prepared for us, can we complete the journey?

I'm not saying that missing an opportunity to serve Christ is a "sin of omission." I'm saying that doing the works for the Father is a consuming fire. It becomes exciting. It becomes the major part of one's life. And if we are not being consumed by the fire of doing the Father's works, then we should question whether or not we are on the path of salvation that will bring about Christian perfection. Until we reach Christian perfection, we can't inherit eternal life.

Deuteronomy 4:24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

Hebrews 12:29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Every true Christian was elected by God to do good works. Every Christian was "created in Christ Jesus for good works." We must all earn a living. But what consumes us when we are not earning a living? What is our consuming fire? Is it sports? Is it TV? Is it socializing? Is it computer games? Perhaps it's a consuming hobby such as amateur radio. Or is it doing the works that God prepared for us? In other words, when we are not earning a living, does the fire that consumes us primarily benefit ourselves, or does it benefit our neighbors and further the kingdom of God? "God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

My parents had three sons and no daughters. All three of us have consuming-fire ministries for which we are not paid.

My brother, Keith Brown, has three consuming-fire ministries which pay him no money. So he must also earn a living to support his wife and two children. Keith is a scout master. He has a tremendous impact on the lives of many teenage boys.

Keith is also chairman of the board for Camp Living Water. (www.camplivingwater.com) This is a children's Bible camp which was founded by our grandfather in 1947. In addition to his responsibilities on the board, Keith is heavily involved in fund-raising efforts for some new buildings being built on the property. This is a Bible camp in the mountains of North Carolina, which is a four and a half hour drive from where Keith lives.

Keith is also heavily involved in fund-raising efforts for the Mukhanyo Christian Academy in South Africa. (<http://www.friendsofmukhanyo.com>) Here is a website quote:

Mukhanyo Christian Academy is a faith-based K-12 private school serving AIDS orphans and vulnerable children in Mpumalanga, a poor region near Pretoria, South Africa. The academy offers free schooling, foster homes, daily meals, and healthcare and other services to some of South Africa's most vulnerable children.

Keith has taken his entire family to South Africa so they could also experience the burden of the need, and the excitement of doing something about it. I have witnessed a huge impact in my brother's walk with God as he has learned the true meaning of living by faith, and doing the works that the Father prepared

beforehand for him to do. At first Keith wondered why God had him doing some of the things he was doing. Much if it didn't seem to fit his specific talents. Now, he is beginning to see more clearly how it all fits together. He is seeing how all his life-long ambitions are coming together in the works that God prepared beforehand for him. For him, God is a consuming fire.

My other brother is Vance Brown. Vance is a licensed attorney and has extensive business and entrepreneurial experience. He is Chairman and CEO of Cherwell Software (www.cherwell.com). Vance is a co-founder of the company. The company employs over fifty people and is without debt or venture capital. Vance has a wife and three children, two of which are in college.

Most people would think that any successful entrepreneur would be completely consumed by his business. But that's not the case with Vance. He has a consuming-fire ministry that he started called Band of Brothers (www.bandofbrothers.org). Also see (www.beartrapranch.org). The following quote was taken from the Amazon page for his recently published book titled, "No matter the Cost."

Vance Brown is chairman and CEO of Band of Brothers ministry, which helps men "fight the good fight." The ministry offers church conferences, small-group materials, and online community forums for men.

His church conferences are all-day events involving seventy to several hundred men. I've been to one of his church conferences and was amazed at how well my little brother can preach. The other men attending would comment that they had not expected how intense the conference would be. Afterwards, these men tended to form band-of-brothers small groups that had a big impact on their lives for years to come. For Vance, this ministry is God's consuming fire.

It's not just my brothers. Several of my friends have consuming-fire ministries. Eddie has been a close friend of mine since the eighth grade. (We are both now over fifty-five years old.) Eddie enjoys teaching classes in association with Crown Financial Ministries (www.crown.org).

Another friend of mine does volunteer work for the TLC Pharmacy (www.tlcpharmacy.org). This organization runs entirely with non-paid volunteer workers. They operate from an old bank branch building in downtown Colorado Springs. It was started by a pastor whose faith brought the money needed to buy the bank. With today's health system, many people literally have to choose between

buying food or prescription drugs. The organization provides free prescription drugs to low-income people who do not have health insurance.

Working for the TLC Pharmacy had such a big impact on my friend that she decided to quit her job as a computer programmer and go back to school to become a social worker. Unfortunately, she had a rude awakening about the social worker school. It was way too liberal for her. As a Christian she could not tolerate the things being taught. So she decided to go back to computer programming. Being a full-time social worker was not God's plan for her.

There are some situations where God leads people into a full-time ministry. But for most of us, God has a consuming-fire ministry without earning money. These ministries have the biggest impact on our lives. No money is earned. This is what it means to store our treasures in heaven. Pastors and other full-time paid ministers can certainly be doing work for the Father. But full-time ministry can easily become self-oriented. The pastor who earns his living from his church tends to refrain from preaching against sin if he thinks doing so might cause members to leave. Full-time missionaries and evangelists might be driven to preach a gospel of simple faith that does not count the cost of true discipleship. Then people believe they are walking the Christian life; but they are not.

Luke 14:26-33 "If anyone comes to me, and doesn't hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can't be my disciple. (27) Whoever doesn't bear his own cross, and come after me, can't be my disciple. (28) For which of you, desiring to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and count the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? (29) Or perhaps, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, everyone who sees begins to mock him, (30) saying, 'This man began to build, and wasn't able to finish.' (31) Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? (32) Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an envoy, and asks for conditions of peace. (33) So therefore whoever of you who doesn't renounce all that he has, he can't be my disciple.

Full-time pastors should consider finding a consuming-fire ministry that is unrelated to their own church. Then, they would be able to set the example and preach the need to do likewise. Thus, they can preach against sin, but at the same

time put their emphasis on doing the works of the Father as a means of changing lives and overcoming sin. This in turn leads the church to Christian perfection.

(1) **Revelation 2:2-5** "I know your works, and your toil and perseverance, and that you can't tolerate evil men, and have tested those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and found them false. (3) You have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake, and have not grown weary. (4) But I have this against you, that you left your first love. (5) Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I am coming to you swiftly, and will move your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.

(2) **Revelation 2:9** "I know your works, oppression, and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

(3) **Revelation 2:13** "I know your works and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. You hold firmly to my name, and didn't deny my faith in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

(4) **Revelation 2:19** "I know your works, your love, faith, service, patient endurance, and that your last works are more than the first.

(5) **Revelation 3:2-3** Wake up, and keep the things that remain, which you were about to throw away, for I have found no works of yours perfected before my God. (3) Remember therefore how you have received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If therefore you won't watch, I will come as a thief, and you won't know what hour I will come upon you.

(6) **Revelation 3:8** "I know your works (behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one can shut), that you have a little power, and kept my word, and didn't deny my name.

(7) **Revelation 3:15-17** "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. (16) So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth. (17) Because you say, 'I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing,' and don't know that you are the wretched one, miserable, poor, blind, and naked;

Each of the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation have three things in common. (1) They all start out speaking about works. The churches are judged by their works. (2) They all end with speaking about overcoming sin. (3) They all end with something like, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." What is the Spirit saying to the churches? It's to do the works of the Father. As we do the works of the Father we overcome all our sinful habits because we are filled by the Holy Spirit.

A consuming-fire ministry is the best way to grow in Christ, and to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to enable us to do the "good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we may walk in them." Each of us have different talents. Each of us have different gifts. So each of us needs to be involved in a different consuming-fire ministry.

Small groups have become more and more popular in many churches. Small groups provide the opportunity to interact with other Christians. Small groups can hold prayer and Bible studies. Sometimes, they get involved in a ministry as a joint project. But usually, these are short-lived efforts. The problem is that not everyone in the group is going to be drawn to the same ministry. The ministry does not become a consuming fire.

A better approach would be to have small groups that put emphasis on supporting each other's consuming-fire ministries. The group could help each member find the ministry that is right for them. And until they find God's purpose for their lives with their own consuming-fire ministry, the members of the group can help out in the consuming-fire ministries of others in the group.

The small group can pray for each other's ministries. This will get the group prayer focused on our neighbors, instead of just about our own problems. The group can give testimonies about what God is doing in their lives by being involved in a consuming-fire ministry. This will tie the group together in one common purpose, which is to serve God. As the group gets closer and matures in this way, they can really begin to confess their sins one to another, and to overcome all sinful habits.

Small groups might or might not be associated with a larger church. After all, the early churches were probably just house churches networked together in the city. The primary function of a church should be to facilitate the work that God has prepared beforehand for each member. Consuming-fire small groups would grow quickly, because God is a consuming fire.

Chapter 7

Christian Perfection in the Sabbath

In the Sermon on the Mount, the sermon on holiness, Jesus said:

Matthew 5:19 Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus takes the Ten Commandments deeper. Anger is murder. Lust is adultery. He summarizes the first four commandments with, "Love God." He summarizes the last five with, "Love your neighbor." Understanding the commandments is the secret of the kingdom, and the key to holiness.

Romans 13:9-10 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (10) Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Love is the fulfillment of the law. Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (Mat 5:17). So does love remove the fourth commandment? Or does love and the quest for holiness find a deeper meaning for the fourth commandment? Is resting on the Sabbath God's provision for finding Christian perfection?

Before answering this question, let's explore some of the Scriptural issues regarding whether or not the Sabbath has been abolished or changed. If you are a Sabbath keeper, you may be surprised at my conclusions. If you believe the Sabbath is on Sunday, you may be surprised at my conclusions. If you believe the Sabbath was abolished, you may still be surprised at my conclusions. The truth hides in the middle.

7.1) Was the Sabbath Fulfilled?

The first common approach to the Sabbath issue is to say that all Ten Commandments were a part of the Law of Moses, and were thus fulfilled in Christ. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

This approach is to interpret “fulfill” in very much the same way as you would interpret “abolish.” In effect, the approach is to say that the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ, and therefore we can now work any day of the week.

People who take this approach would say that all Ten Commandments were fulfilled and thus done away with when we went from the old covenant to the new. Under the new covenant, God writes his law on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:8-12). We still know that we should not murder or covet, but it’s not because these are listed in the Ten Commandments.

The problem with this approach is that there is no clear verse of Scripture that says we can now work on the Sabbath. There is, however, Scripture that clearly says we no longer need to be physically circumcised (Romans 2:25-29, 3:1, 1 Corinthians 7:19, Galatians 5:6, 5:11-12, 6:15, Colossians 2:11). The Scriptural evidence for this change is overwhelming. Likewise, there is strong Scriptural evidence for abolishing the eating or dietary regulations (Acts 10:9-16, 11:4-9, Romans 14:20-21, 1 Corinthians 10:27-30). But there is no similar weight of Scripture for no longer observing the Sabbath.

Sabbath observance was considered much more important in the Old Testament than circumcision or the dietary regulations. Some quote Galatians 4:10 as meaning we no longer need to observe the Sabbath. This verse, however, does not specifically mention the Sabbath.

Colossians 2:16 does mention the Sabbath. For those who take this approach, this verse is reasonable. Nevertheless, the Sabbath in Colossians 2:16 can be viewed as associated with various religious festivals, since the context of rest of the sentence is focused on religious festivals. It’s not clear that Paul is referring to the weekly Sabbath. Hence, there is no clear verse of Scripture that removes the command to observe the weekly Sabbath.

The dietary regulations and the religious festivals were “nailed to the cross” (Colossians 2:16-17), because they were shadows of Christ. Likewise, circumcision was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:11). These were shadows because they represented atonement for sin, whereas Christ is the only true atonement. Were the Ten Commandments shadows of atonement for sin, or were they commandments against sin? The Ten Commandments can be viewed as shadows of Christ in the sense that we are to obey all that Christ commands. How then, would the fourth commandment not also today be an example of what Christ commands?

Jesus often spoke of the Sabbath in the sense of correcting the overly strict interpretation of the Sabbath. Jesus never simply abolished the command even though he didn't hesitate to make enemies by what he said.

One often-overlooked problem with no longer observing the Sabbath is Matthew 24:20. Some people interpret Matthew 24 as happening in 70 AD. Others believe Matthew 24 is still unfulfilled prophecy. If the Sabbath no longer needs to be observed, this change would have been made at the cross. In either case, Jesus, in Matthew 24:20, is speaking about a Sabbath that is still strongly in effect either in 70 AD or thereafter.

Therefore, I do not believe the Sabbath was abolished.

7.2) Was the Sabbath Changed To Sunday?

The second common approach to the Sabbath issue is to say that the fourth commandment is still in effect, but that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday. Some people have said the commandment can be read as "one day in seven," basically leaving it open as to which day is the Sabbath. But this view is inconsistent with Scripture.

In Exodus 16, before the Israelites came to Mount Sinai, and before the Ten Commandments were written, God sent manna from heaven six days a week. The seventh day was the Sabbath and they were told to rest (verse 23). In other words, God picked the day when the manna did not fall. In verse 23 God said, "Tomorrow is to be a day of rest." He thus confirmed the weekly cycle.

Since then, there have been changes in the various ancient calendars. However, there has never been a change in the weekly cycle. We cannot interpret the fourth commandment as "one day in seven" arbitrarily because the day is a specific day that God made holy. The commandment tells us to keep that specific day holy. We can't pick the day to keep holy, because we can't make days holy. We can only keep the day that God made holy. And God made the seventh day of the creation holy before sin came into the world (Genesis 2:2-3).

Everyone is taught that the crucifixion was right before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54-56, John 19:31-42), and then Christ arose on Sunday, the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2, 16:9, Luke 24:1, John 21:1). How can anyone with a straight face then say that the Sabbath is on Sunday and it was never changed? But some have made this claim. A more arguable view is that the Sabbath

was changed from Saturday to Sunday. This is done using several verses that may indicate the early church worshiped on Sunday.

Acts 20:7 is the primary verse used as evidence that they routinely worshiped on the first day of the week. Thus, it's inferred that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday. However, there is no indication that this was a weekly custom. This verse is simply in the context of a narrative about some events that were happening at that time. Even if it was a weekly custom, there is no mention of the Sabbath.

A counter-argument to this verse is Acts 16:13-16. This verse specifically mentions the Sabbath. Verse 16 indicates that it was a routine event. They would routinely and privately gather for prayer on the Sabbath. So what about Acts 20:7? There is nothing wrong with the "breaking of bread" on any day of the week. It doesn't even say this "breaking of bread" was in observance of the Lord's Supper. It was probably simply the evening meal. Moreover, they kept talking until midnight because they planned on leaving the next day.

The issue here is whether or not they stopped working on the first day of the week, or on the Sabbath. Remember that the fourth commandment says nothing about assembly for worship. It's a command to cease work for a day. We can routinely worship God in assembly any day of the week. However, it would seem that Paul and his companions preferred to do this routinely on the Sabbath.

Another verse that is used to argue a Sunday Sabbath is 1 Corinthians 16:2. Paul asked each of them to set aside some of their earnings on the first day of the week. Nothing is said about a gathering. The verse doesn't even indicate that the money was collected on this day. Paul was simply asking them to individually, each week, set aside some of their earnings so that when he came there would be money available. Paul is asking each person individually to do this. It's not a gathering event. Each person was to set aside the money and keep it so that it could be collected at a later date when Paul arrived.

The first day of the week was probably mentioned because Paul wanted them to set aside some of the money that they had earned the previous week. Even if this verse were to indicate a routine gathering for worship on the first, this verse still says nothing about ceasing work on the Sabbath.

The other verse that is often mentioned when arguing a Sunday Sabbath is Revelation 1:10. This verse mentions the Lord's Day. It's the only verse in the Bible that mentions the Lord's Day, and this verse gives us no information about the Lord's Day.

Early church history indicates that the Lord's Day is the first day and was a day of worship. We should never use anything except Scripture to obsolete or alter Scriptural commandments. Even if the early church established a weekly worship on the first, that says nothing about whether they ceased work on Saturday or Sunday. I see nothing wrong with assembling for worship on the Lord's Day. The fourth commandment says nothing about assembly for worship. It's a command to cease work for a day. We can routinely worship in assembly any day of the week.

There is no verse of Scripture that specifically changes the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. If Jesus had wanted to change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, surely he would have told us to do so.

7.3) Is the Sabbath the Day for Going to Church?

The fourth commandment says nothing about assembling for worship on the Sabbath. In Old Testament times, Leviticus 23:3 made assembly required on the Sabbath. However, this verse is right in the middle of talk about appointed feasts, which we know were nailed to the cross.

There are Old Testament verses that show us that during the millennium, there is worship on the Sabbath (Isaiah 66:23, Ezekiel 46:1,4,12). For those who believe in a millennium, these verses should show that the Sabbath has not been abolished. However, they are not conclusive as to the purpose or the nature of the Sabbath in this present age.

Basically, there is nothing in Scripture that requires us to have church on the Sabbath. It's simply a matter of custom. Customs during the millennium may be different than the customs of this present age. We should feel free, therefore, to have church on any day of the week.

The day we attend church should not confuse the issue. Instead, we should focus on the question of whether or not we should cease work on Saturday. Just as Jesus said that anger is murder, and lust is adultery, we should focus on finding the deeper meaning of the Sabbath.

7.4) Entering God's Rest

Many commentaries take the position that the Sabbath has been abolished. Three little verses in Hebrews 4:9-11 would seem to argue against this point. Some of these commentaries gloss over these three verses by saying that these verses are only speaking about God's rest, which is the rest that we can enter. These

commentaries seem to pretend that the phrase “rests from his own work” is simply not in the verse.

Hebrews 4:9-11 NIV There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; (10) for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. (11) Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

Hebrews was written to Christian Jews who had grown up religiously practicing the command to rest on the seventh day. In the Jewish culture of that time, the phrase “rest from his own work” would not have been words you just jump over and equate with “God’s rest.” Combine this with the fact that the writer had just a few verses prior mentioned the six days of the Creation, and God’s rest on the seventh. The clear meaning of the verse is that those who are able to enter God’s rest also rests from their own works by keeping the Sabbath.

These three verses should also present a problem for those who believe the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday. The weekly Sabbath in verse 10 is being compared with God’s rest on the seventh day in verse 4. The Sunday Sabbath, on the other hand, puts emphasis on the worship service, and on the Resurrection, while taking away emphasis on the Creation. It would have taken quite a bit of Scriptural explaining to convince Christian Jews of that time that the Sabbath had changed from the seventh day to the first. It’s unlikely that these Christian Jews were considering the first day to be the Sabbath. And it would be even more difficult to argue, using Scripture, that the Sabbath was changed for some Christians but not for others.

Some commentaries have said that we rest from good works, which are really bad works, because they were not given to us by God to do. But such a concept does not flow from the context. And it says we rest from these works “just as God did from his.” What would be the bad works from which God rested?

Let’s take a closer look at the context of these three verses. Hebrews 3 and 4 teach us about God’s rest. Verses 3:16-19 teaches us that those who are obedient to God will enter God’s rest. Verses 4:1-2 teaches that this message must be combined with faith, or it’s of no value. Verses 3b-5 show a relationship between God’s rest and the rest God took on the seventh day of Creation. Verses 6-8 (and prior verses) teach us that Israel wandered in the wilderness forty years and did not enter God’s rest. However, God said there would be another day when his people would enter His rest. These verses are talking about resting in victory after the

struggle of overcoming sin. And verse 10 gives a requirement for entering God's rest. That is, "anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."

Verse 11 shows us that breaking the Sabbath is simply an example of disobedience. In other words, those who enter God's rest are obedient to all of God's moral commands, including all the Ten Commandments. The overall context of the passage is God's rest that we enter into with victory when we overcome sin. But that doesn't take away the fact that the writer is using rest on the Sabbath as an example of obedience. Since the context is God's rest, it seems only fitting that the author would pick the fourth commandment as his example.

7.5) The Deeper Meaning of the Sabbath

Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments as the two greatest commandments: The first is to love the Lord. The second is to love our neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). The first four commandments are all about loving God. The last five are about loving our neighbor (Romans 13:9-10). The fifth commandment relates to both and is the bridge between the two sets.

The first commandment is simple, and can have no deeper meaning. We must not love any other God. There can be only one God.

On the surface, the second command is very similar. We are not to make idols. Considering this command more thoroughly, we need to understand that God is the Creator. We can create things, but our love of those things cannot become more important to us than our love for our Creator. We make money with our work. Nevertheless, the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10, Matthew 6:24). Money is the idol of the world today.

The third command is also about the love of God. If we love God, we would never use his name in any way that could be disrespectful. If we truly love God, we would never use "Jesus", "Christ", or "God" in any way that is not expressing our love for Him. Looking at it another way, we don't exclude "Jesus," "Christ," or "God" from our conversations. We always seek opportunities to unashamedly speak the name of our Lord.

The first three commandments are about loving God. The fourth commandment, to keep the Sabbath holy, is no exception. We spend time with those we love. The Sabbath is not some ritual whereby we stop working just in order to obey what God commands. The commandment is to "Remember the

Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Then, the text of the commandments proceeds into all the issues of not working. The purpose of the Sabbath is not about work. The purpose is stated in the first sentence of the command. The purpose of the Sabbath is all about holiness.

The purpose of the Sabbath is to spend a quiet day with our Lord. It's a day for prayer and meditation. It's a day to reflect on our obedience at the end of the week and ask God to help us in the coming week. It's a time to humble ourselves before the Lord, and to ask for holiness. This is also a time of joy and worship, to spend with our Father.

We remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy. We stop working in order to avoid the distractions of our work and the world. We have six days to work for our needs. The seventh is spent with God, and without the distractions of the six.

Some will say that they have a quiet time with the Lord first thing in the morning. Or perhaps it's the last thing in the evening before bed. However, the things of the world seem to press in on these quiet times. I believe that it's better to follow God's design and spend a whole day with God. The pressures of the week tend to crowd in on a daily quiet time. I find that a whole day, spent with the Lord, is easier to manage.

It's nice to spend the end of the week with God, and then start out the new week on Sunday by going to church. At church we praise God, and we spend time with other Christians. We hear sermons and teachings from other Christians. The Sabbath, however, should be just for God alone.

Many people have to work on Saturday. Our culture does not allow for everyone to spend time with God on the same day. Compromises must be made. If, however, we just understand the purpose of the Sabbath, then we can do our best to find the right day to spend with God. The Sabbath was made for us. We were not made for the Sabbath. So for right now, we do the best we can to find God's holiness. When Christ's kingdom fully comes, Old Testament Scripture indicates the Sabbath will be fully integrated into the worldwide culture.

So is breaking the Sabbath a sin? No, I believe we have a freedom under the New Covenant that was not present with the Old Covenant of law. Paul says:

1 Corinthians 6:12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are expedient. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be brought under the power of anything.

Romans 14:4-6 Who are you who judge another's servant? To his own lord he stands or falls. Yes, he will be made to stand, for God has power to make him stand. (5) One man esteems one day as more important. Another esteems every day alike. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind. (6) He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks. He who doesn't eat, to the Lord he doesn't eat, and gives God thanks.

The Old Covenant was for a theocracy. In other words, it was part of the law of the land. To break the Sabbath when it's the law of the land would be a sin. And that law of the land will return in the age to come, during Christ's millennial reign (Isaiah 66:23, Ezekiel 46: 1,4,12). In the present age, strictly speaking, working on Saturday is not a sin. But we must remember the Sabbath was given to us for the purpose of overcoming sin. If we simply neglect this gift then we are not doing everything that God has for us to overcome sin. And that in itself could be a sin.

The New Covenant includes the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In this present age, the filling of the Holy Spirit is God's primary way for us to overcome sin. Paul had to face cultural differences. And when the Sabbath is not the law of the land there must be more flexibility. With the filling of the Holy Spirit we have this flexibility. But at the same time, we must understand the purpose of the Sabbath as being a tool that God has given us to overcome sin. We must work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). To this end, we should be using everything God has given us in order to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect at the coming of the Lord.

For example, if you have an exciting consuming-fire ministry that does not earn money, it's sometimes more important than keeping the Sabbath. Working in a consuming-fire ministry is not the same as working for money. The purpose of both is to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to overcome sin. But if at all possible, avoid doing work that earns money or a living on the Sabbath. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. That was part of his ministry.

So, it's between you and the Father. The Sabbath was made for man. And each of us needs to overcome sin by whatever means the Father has provided.

The Sabbath was not abolished. The Sabbath was not changed to Sunday. And breaking the Sabbath is no longer a sin. But it would be a sin to neglect spending a day each week with the Lord if that's His way of helping you completely

overcome all sinful habits. We need to use all that the Lord has given us in order to finish the race and reach the goal of Christian perfection.

As we do God's work, we get closer to God. Imitating God makes us more like God. It makes us more holy. We overcome sin much more easily as we do the Father's work. As we do God's work six days, we personally become more like God. As we build the kingdom of heaven, God builds us up. As we do God's work, God also works in us. We must "work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in [us] to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12b-13). God does the greater work as we do God's work.

Overcome Sin, for the Kingdom Of Jesus Christ is Coming Soon.

Epilogue

I think right now relatively few have really found the narrow gate of holiness. As Jesus said, “Those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:14). But during the great tribulation, there will be a countless number, from every nation, tribe, people, and language who will come out of the great tribulation (Revelation 7:14) and stand before the throne. For those who realize the pre-tribulation rapture is a false doctrine, but are wrestling with a fear of going through the great tribulation, I would emphasize seeking God's holiness.

If you have found this book useful, please visit my web site for additional supporting articles about eschatology. Also, it would be very helpful if you could send an email to your family and friends and tell them about this book. Please include my website address. Thank you very much.

The truth hides in the middle.

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