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*Collected Bible
Studies For
Christians
Like You*



CHRISTIANS LIKE ME

United States English Version

by Dr. Derek P. Blake

Edited by Pastor Rolf Anderson

Collected Bible Studies for Christians Like You

**Cover background image from a painting,
'The Empty Tomb'
by Steve Zomok
(Used with permission and thanks)**

The 'Christians Like Me', Bible Studies resulted from an idea from Pastor Rolf Anderson, who is also the Administrator of the CLM web-site, and to whom this book is dedicated for all his hard work, dedication and help to me and the members of the Christians Like Me community,

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Foreword

Thank you for downloading this collection of Bible Studies, all of which have been posted on the Christian web-site: www.christianslikeme.net/ over the past year. They appear in chronological order, but a linked index is available by subject.

Bible Translations:

The Bible translation, or version, used in these studies is primarily the English Standard version (ESV), however two other translations are used for certain studies, those are; the Young's Literal Translation (YLT) and the King James Bible (KJV). It is recommended that the studies are used as a guide and that the reader uses their own Bible to understand the context of the verses used. All verses and references to scripture are printed in red, for clarity. If the reader has access to the internet all these Bible versions, as well as many more, are available at www.biblegateway.com/ a fully searchable site.

All of these Bible Studies have appeared on a weekly basis on the CLM website linked above and are the result of prayerful searching. Sometimes, one study seems to follow on from the previous one when the Spirit points something out to me that inspires the next study. Generally, however, they start with many of my 'Arrow Prayers' asking for guidance and asking what the Spirit wants me to focus upon. Sometimes, He gives me something early on in the week and when this happens many more 'Arrow Prayers' follow and I write down thoughts that come into my mind, from the Spirit. On other occasions He holds back until Saturday morning before He inspires me with a thought. Whatever God wishes, the studies themselves are written and constructed on Saturday, and they are posted after sunset on Saturday night. Why is this important, you may ask? Well my wife and I both believe that the Lord's Day is the seventh day of the week, sunset Friday to sunset on Saturday, and we do our best to observe the Sabbath as God instructed us. We do no arduous work,

other than what is necessary, getting food and drinks for instance, and writing the Bible Study is my way of dedicating this day to my God and honouring His day. Jesus seems to have approved of doing this on the Sabbath, when he asked who would not go out to find/rescue a lost lamb. Of course, Jesus used this example to justify His healing of someone on the Sabbath, but it also applies to our spiritual rescue. So, I pray that what I write in each Bible Study starts every brother and sister thinking of the true meaning of God's word.

Like anyone I am not immune to making mistakes, and if you think that I have said something wrong or incorrect, I would ask that you respond and tell me, I will not feel hurt by it, I am not precious, I promise. We are, after all, charged to check out (test) everything we hear or read, and hold on to what is good.

I hope that the studies bless you.

In God's love,

Derek



From a painting by Steve Zomok -used with permission.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2The 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. 3And God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light. 4And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.” [Genesis 1:1-5]

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If I Speak in the Tongues of Men and of Angels . . .

In **Acts 2:4** (YLT) we find what is possibly the first mention of ‘Tongues’ in the Bible, this was at Pentecost, what we used to call Whitson, a holiday that has mostly been forgotten, certainly here in the UK. But what is Whitson, Pentecost and Tongues?



- ⁴ • *"and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, according as the Spirit was giving them to declare."*

Whitsun, or Whit-Sunday (meaning White Sunday) is a Christian feast celebrated mainly in Britain and among Anglicans across the world which commemorates Pentecost on the seventh Sunday after Easter Sunday. This is another feast invented by man, although in this case there seems to be little evidence that it had previous pagan roots. There seems to be no date of origin but it was mentioned by Berno of Reichenau around 1048, but was well established by the 1300s. Indeed there some evidence that it was originally a Jewish feast. In the UK the feast continues to be observed, mainly in the northern towns and cities, with Whit Walks, walks of witness by people of local churches. However in 1978 the British government decided to abandon this Christian holiday and ordered an alternative about a week later called Spring Bank Holiday. This was the first obvious move by the British government to move away from state sponsored Christianity.

But what about Tongues, what are they? Tongues are split into two basic types those of man and those of angels, called ‘glossolalia’, which Webster’s Dictionary defines as:

“prayer characterized chiefly by incomprehensible speech, originating in primitive Christianity and now practised by Pentecostal groups in ecstatic forms of worship.”

In verse six of chapter two of Acts we are told:

“And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.”

So it seems that in this case the tongues that were heard were earthly tongues, or at least that is how they were heard. The premise that the disciples were actually speaking in foreign tongues is supported by the Greek grammar. The written phrase in **Acts 2:6** “in their native language” modifies the verb “speaking” and not the verb “hearing.” So we can gather that they were speaking in foreign tongues, rather than the crowd just hearing what was being said in their own language. Tongues were unknown during Old Testament times, the first ever mention is in **Mark 16:17** when Jesus tells His disciples:

“And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues;”

There are few subjects that have generated greater conflict and discussion in the church than the manifestation of tongues. Many of the mainstream denominations still deny them and frown on their use. But here in **Mark 16:17** Jesus states quite clearly that tongues are a gift for those who believe. Tongues are not a natural occurrence, they only come as a gift for believers who would wish to use such a gift. Tongues are not forced on any believer; whoever

uses this gift does so by submitting themselves to the Holy Spirit. They are not there to edify unbelievers, in truth they are more likely to frighten an unbeliever off, rather than to attract them to Christ's church. **1 Corinthians 14:6-11** warns us of this:

“Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷ If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? ⁸ And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? ⁹ So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without ¹¹ meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.

However, tongues have a purpose; and because of that there are different kinds of tongues. Made clear in **1 Corinthians 12:10**:

“to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various (or diverse) kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.”



So, what are these diverse tongues? I guess that many of them will be human languages; however there are several types of glossolalia tongues, the tongues of angels.

I believe those tongues to be, a tongue of praise and worship, a prayer tongue (which is divided into ordinary tongues and intercessory tongue), a tongue of prophesy, and a tongue of warfare. Those who have regularly heard tongues being given will have recognised several different sounds, each has its place. I have heard some beautiful singing in worship using a tongue, a truly angelic sound, I have both used and heard the harsh tongue of spiritual warfare and the commanding tongue of deliverance. I have also heard the total cacophony that comes when the Spirit is not in it. Many place the importance tongues higher than they should, they are useful, just as speech is useful, they are also an audible manifestation of the presence of the Spirit. The apostle Paul puts tongues in the context of their importance in **1 Corinthians 12:28**, where he lists the gifts in order of importance:

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.”

So in the list of gifts, Paul says it is the least, nevertheless according to Jesus and to Paul, all followers should have this gift and like all gifts it should be exercised.

So why have tongues if they are of least important? Paul also has the answer to that question, **1 Corinthians 14:5** tells us:

“Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who

speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. ” (My emphasis added)

So tongues are generally to build up the Church but only through interpretation, if there is no interpretation then it only builds up the one who speaks the tongue, Paul says in verse four:

“The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.”

So often church members will stand and speak a tongue, but there is no interpretation, that person may as well stand and beat his or her chest while hollering like Tarzan

Do not worry about tongues, as Paul says, look more to the other gifts listed

- Become an apostle.
- A prophet.
- A teacher.
- A miracle worker.
- A healer
- A helper of people, or
- An administrator of the church

So how do you feel about tongues, important or not?

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My Faith's a Knockout?

Back in the late seventies, we started to attend missions and celebration evenings around the region where we lived. These were great faith builders, not only hearing the word from some great speakers and



evangelists that were a joy to listen to, but there was also the great Praise and Worship times when people just worshipped in total freedom. These times also attracted some of the best Christian musicians in this country, we so enjoyed those meetings. I remember one meeting we attended at a Pentecostal Church in our town, the singing was wonderful, and a speaker shared the word in a wonderful way that enthused us all. Then after the sharing of the word, people were invited to come forward for prayer, or searchers to receive the Holy Spirit. We were watching what was going on, when suddenly someone fell down on the ground; I thought that someone had collapsed with some sickness or something. It was only minutes before another also collapsed onto the floor, and was surrounded by people attending them. It crossed my mind that there was some sort of gas leak or the like.

My vicar must have seen the expression on my face and came across and asked if what was going on was worrying me. I replied that I was certainly wondering. He explained that the people were being 'slain in the Spirit', when the Holy Spirit overcomes the person and renders them into a state where the Spirit can minister. During his explanation another person crashed to the floor and we all heard

their head hit the floor, and believe me it was a large hall containing around two-thousand people. I felt for sure the person had fractured their skull, ‘don’t worry’, I was told, they will not be injured. Sure enough they were fine, not even having a bruise or a lump on their head. I spoke to one of the people who had been ‘slain’ afterwards and they told me that they had had a wonderful experience, and now had faith, whereas they had had virtually none previously, and they had been ‘dragged’ along by a friend. Converted on the spot!

Me, being me, I wanted to know more about this phenomena, so I thought that I would share here what I found out. Is this being slain in the Spirit Biblical? Personally, I have never experienced this phenomenon myself, however I know many who have and I have seen it and heard of their experiences. Again this is a subject that generates much discussion in the various denominations, and people are even of different minds within the major ones. Many point to verses in **Ezekiel 1:28** (ESV)

“Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.”

Or **Daniel 8:17–18** (ESV)

“So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, “Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end.” ¹⁸ And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground.”

However these are Old Testament verses which may or may not be associated with the present day being slain in the Spirit, and are more

associated with prophesy. The phenomenon has many supporters, but there are many good Christians who regard it as demonic, where demons masquerade as the Holy Spirit. There are arguments both for and against being slain. Going back to the OT we find the verse **2 Chronicles 5:14** which speaks about priests not being able to stand in the presence of the Lord:

“so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.”

We also have a verse in **John 18:6** that says: *“When Jesus said to them, “I am he”, they drew back and fell to the ground.”* The same event is recorded in **Matthew 17:6**. Also cited is the conversion of Saul to Paul on the road to Damascus in **Acts 9:3-6**, when a bright light came on him and he fell to the ground.

In majority of the instances cited in the Bible (9 verses), the people in question always fell on their faces (5 of those verses), not backward. In most all cases that I have witnessed people fell backwards or collapsed vertically, ending up usually on their sides. In the remaining four, the verse simply says that they fell to the ground. Is this significant? I could find no instance where Jesus laid hands on anyone who then fell on their faces or otherwise. It also seemed that the reason for being knocked down by God’s Spirit was some kind of judgement, as with Saul. It is however obvious that when this phenomenon occurs it is connected with a manifestation of God by His Spirit, and there are plenty of examples where God’s presence had dramatic effects on humans. For example, when Moses came down from the mountain, after talking to God and getting the replacement Ten Commandments [**Exodus 34:29-35**]. When there is healing taking place in someone, there is obviously a great power involved and often the need to immobilise someone for this healing

to take place. I have again seen several people healed whilst or during the time on the ground. There is of course a precedent for this in **Genesis 2:21** when God makes Adam fall into a deep sleep while He takes the rib from which He created Eve, almost the first anaesthetic. I have also seen people being slain who had a demon attachment, sometimes being unconscious for an extended period whilst others prayed or laid on hands. Here there is some New Testament support for, in **Mark 3:11** (ESV)

“And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.””

As we have been given the authority over demons by Jesus Himself it is no wonder that this happens in these cases. In **Genesis 15:12** we see God putting Abraham into a deep sleep and in **Matt. 28:2-4** the soldiers guarding the tomb “*became like dead men.*”

So there is *some* support from the Bible but it seems to me that being ‘slain in the Spirit’ is very much a New Covenant phenomena. Although there are some that regard being slain as an occult practice there is little evidence of that. My own experience has been a very positive one, having spoken to many people who have experienced it; I have found most have reported everything from healing to conversion and from no faith to a full measure. However I must admit that I have seen some very doubtful practices from certain evangelists. One experience happened whilst I was producing a video for one local church’s mission. After the great Praise & Worship session and an over dramatic talk, unusually I decided to switch to the camera that was covering the congregation from the back and to the side of the dais. The camera recorded several people seemingly being slain in the Spirit, and the camera continued to roll throughout.

The day after I started to do the edit and assembly of the material we had recorded. In the afternoon we came to the shots we were using for the closing of the video and we started to review all the shots of the closing. We started to view the tape from the front and of the people being slain. One of the trainees (who had been there the night before) drew my attention to the tape. What I saw astounded me and made me feel sick, the high profile preacher was actually pushing people's foreheads real hard. It was obvious that he was actually pushing them over, backwards; the stewards behind each person had obviously been prepared. The stewards stood poised, obviously ready to catch people. One man was pushed but regained his balance, the preacher straight way pushed him again with greater force and he went down. I showed the video to the church pastor, that preacher was never invited back. Fortunately, most slayings I have experienced have been genuine and positive, but we must look out and be on our guard for forgeries and false teaching.

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The Gift of Prophecy

Did you know that there are in fact eighteen gifts of the Spirit actually listed in the Bible, and I am sure that the Spirit provides infinitely more, as is required?

<i>Apostleship</i>	<i>Eph 4:11</i>	<i>1 Cor 12:28</i>
<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>Romans 12:6</i>	<i>1 Cor 12:10</i>
<i>Miracles</i>	<i>1 Cor 12:28</i>	
<i>Healing</i>	<i>1 Cor 12:9</i>	<i>28, 30</i>
<i>Tongues</i>		<i>1 Cor 12:10</i>
<i>Interpretation of tongues</i>	<i>1 Cor 12:10</i>	
<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>1 Cor 12:8</i>	
<i>Wisdom</i>	<i>1 Cor 12:8</i>	
<i>Discerning of spirits</i>	<i>1 Cor 12:10</i>	
<i>Giving</i>	<i>Rom 12:8</i>	
<i>Ministering</i>	<i>Rom 12:7</i>	<i>1 Cor 12:28</i>
<i>Exhortation</i>	<i>Romans 12:8</i>	<i>see also</i> <i>Proverbs 25:11</i>
<i>Showing of Mercy</i>	<i>Romans 12:8</i>	
<i>Ruling / Administration</i>	<i>Romans 12:8</i>	
<i>Faith</i>	<i>Romans 12:3</i>	
<i>Teaching</i>	<i>Romans 12:7</i>	
<i>Evangelism</i>	<i>2 Tim 4:5</i>	<i>Acts 8:26-40; 21:8</i>
<i>Pastoring-teaching</i>	<i>1 Pet 5:1-4</i>	



There are nine major gifts of the Spirit and nine minor ones. The nine major gifts fall into three headings; gifts of revelation, gifts of power and gifts of inspiration.

Three gifts of inspiration are:

Prophecy

Tongues

Interpretation of tongues.

The three gifts of revelation are:

Words of wisdom

Words of knowledge

Discerning of spirits

The three gifts of power are:

Gift of faith

Working of miracles

Gift of healing

Following on from my posts on gifts of tongues previously and being 'slain' in the Spirit I now want to deal with 'Prophecy'. Prophecy is possibly one the most important gifts of them all, at least that is what Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 12:28**, who certainly places prophets second on the list, but you do not need to be an ordained prophet to prophesy.

"And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues."

I know this sounds like fortune telling but it's not. It's not prediction of the future fortunes of a single person, it's a

glimpse of God's plan through someone who has been identified by the Holy Spirit as being open to that which God / Holy Spirit wishes to say. It can also be an idea of a righteous person of vision, based upon God's word. Certainly, having the gift of Prophecy does not make one a Prophet, not everyone that prophesies is a prophet although a Prophet would, of course have the gift of prophecy. All books have certain knowledge within their pages but that does not make every book an encyclopaedia. A prophet has a constancy of the gift, an almost direct line to the Father. In **Acts 21**, Luke describes a visit to Caesarea and a visit to an evangelist by the name of Philip who had four daughters who prophesied. Luke does not call the daughters prophetesses. The Bible tells us that Prophecy is the greatest of the gifts of the Spirit [**1 Cor 14:5**].

“Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.”

God wants all his children to seek after the gifts but especially prophecy.

Why has God given us prophecy? Prophecy is given to the Church in order to edify: *“He that speaks in a unknown tongue edifies himself; but he who prophesies edifies (or builds up) the church”* [**1 Cor. 14:4**]. I have read that ‘Edify’ is not a good translation from the original Greek, it would seem that a better word would be ‘charge’, in the context of ‘charging a battery’. That sounds good to me, the charged up feeling when we first accept the gift of the Holy Spirit is incredible, so to charge up

the church on a regular basis would be amazing. So, prophecy is given to charge the church, or to build it up spiritually, to charge it up with spiritual power like a battery.

Prophecy is also given to the Church to ‘exhort’ the church. Here the Greek word for ‘exhort’ means ‘a calling near’. So, the gift of prophecy is there to call the church together, to unite the Body of Christ in one mission, one objective, one vision. Another reason for prophecy is to ‘comfort’. God wants to comfort us, after all ‘God is Love’ [1 John 4:8]

“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love!”

I believe that God wants the very best for His people, to keep us well and joyous in spirit. If we want to know what God is like we should look at Jesus **John 14:9**

“Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

Christ comforted people with words and physical healing in body and spirit. When we are upset or bereaved, discouraged or frustrated; often God has a word for us directly and he will comfort us through a brother or sister who has been given the gift of prophecy. So, prophecy edifies or charges the church’s batteries, exhorts or unifies, comforts and lastly convicts **1 Corinthians 14:24** confirms this:

“But if all prophecy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all,”.

What can be more convicting than going into a church or fellowship and having a stranger reveal what is in your heart? I have seen this in action and it really does convict, in this case two strangers on a train, one a Spirit filled Christian the other a member of a fellowship who had fallen into sin. The first man, I will call him Jim, was given a prophecy that if the other did not close an affair with a woman called Linda, his marriage would end. Jim wrestled with this for half of the three-hour journey, but at last Jim gave in to God's command and gave the prophecy to the stranger. The effect was instantaneous, and the stranger broke down there and then. We learned some weeks later that the man has finished the affair, confessed his sin to his wife and to God and the couple were planning to have a re-dedication of their vows service at their own church. Although this involved another gift of the Spirit, a 'Word of Knowledge' it was a prophecy because there was warning; if you do not stop doing *this*, the result will be *this*.

We should not be afraid of this gift, or any of the gifts of the Spirit, the Spirit does not take us over so that we lose control. It is not like Satan or an evil spirit possessing us, the Holy Spirit always respects our freedom of choice that God gave us. In **1 Corinthians 14:32** we are told; "*and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophet.*", in other words we maintain control. We can decide to utter a prophecy or not, the decision is ours, however if we decide not to we deny others and ourselves a real blessing.

So what happens if we reject a prophesy that the Spirit is giving us to share? As we have seen the Spirit does not force us to do anything. If we refuse to share a prophesy that we are sure is of the Spirit, certainly we are rejecting a blessing, but it also may suggest the sin of pride or doubt. Pride

because we are more afraid of looking foolish than we are of the Lord. No doubt because we may wonder if the word is of the Spirit, however, both of these can be counted as sins, and so need to be repented of. In **1 Corinthians 4:10** Paul tells us:

“We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute.”

Being fools for Christ is something we may all aspire to, which takes away our fear of being embarrassed when we stand for Him, doing something that is outside of our personal box. Paul, in **2 Corinthians 9:6-8** explains why we should put self aside, if we wish to be blessed:

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

Basically, my friends if we hold back, so will God. The more we give of ourselves the more God will bless us. ‘Look at my servant Job’ as God said to Satan, Job held nothing back and stood firm as a man of God, and Job was rewarded with many times what he had lost.

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Prophecy – The Coming of the Messiah



Much has been written in so many books about ‘prophecy’ and it is a subject that people, mainly Christians, never seem to tire of reading about. Maybe that’s because it holds a certain mystery to us, however it is really no mystery at all, especially when you realize that God does not ‘see the future’, He exists in the future; as well as in the past and present. So, when we read true prophecies, given by God, they are facts.

As we are approaching Christmas, I thought it may be interesting to look at the prophecies that concern Jesus’ birth, even though the 25th of December isn’t the actual date of His birth. We are not here concerned with the anniversary of His birth, just that it actually did happen exactly as prophesied. For this study we will obviously be using mainly the Old Testament.

Over fifteen-hundred years before Jesus' birth the first prophesy was given by God to Abraham, it said:

“Now the LORD said to Abram; “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” [**Genesis 12:1-3** ESV]

God promised here, that from Abraham, He would create a great nation, and from that nation the whole world would be blessed. That blessing turned out to be Jesus, God's only Son, light from light, God from God. As the whole Hebrew nation was to spring from Abraham, it followed that Jesus would be of Abraham's line, or 'seed' as the Bible often calls it. Indeed, a genealogy of Jesus is given to us at the start of Matthew's Gospel. Later in Genesis comes another prophesy that surely refers to Jesus:

“The sceptre turneth not aside from Judah, And a lawgiver from between his feet, Till his Seed come; And his [is] the obedience of peoples.” [**Genesis 49:10** YLT]

Here the 'sceptre' is a symbol of a king who will come from inside Judah, a king who will stand on the laws that He has given, demanding the obedience of all peoples. The genealogy in Matthew also shows that Jesus will be of the line of King David, and around 800 years before the event, that very fact was prophesied in **2 Samuel 7:12-16**, where Samuel tells David that his line will be established for ever through 'The Son'. The question at the time must have been; who is that Son, this king whom the prophets are telling us about? **Isaiah 9:6** tells us exactly who this Son-king will be

*“For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;*

*and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called!*

*Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

Now that we have established Jesus’ blood-line and His credentials, we need to know where the Son will be born. Around a hundred years later Isaiah, one of the major prophets of Israel told the nation that a baby boy would be born of a virgin, and even told them that His name would be Immanuel, a very specific prophesy and an unusual one.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. [Isaiah 7:14 ESV]

Matthew actually quotes this prophesy in **Matthew 1:21-23**.

In around 760 BC the lesser prophet Micah was given some more specific information from the Lord, of exactly where the Saviour will be born:

*“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.”*

In our schedule of information about the coming Messiah, we know Jesus’ blood-line and royal line of King David, that He will be a law giver and ruler who will have authority. We know He will be born of a virgin and what He will be named, we also know that He will be born in that little town of Bethlehem, but when will all of this take place? Do you know that the prophet Daniel told Israel when the Messiah would be revealed? This information is given in four verses in the Book of **Daniel, chapter 9 and verses 24 to 27**:

“²⁴“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone

for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. ²⁵Know 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. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶And 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. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. ²⁷And 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.”

In many Biblical prophecies the word ‘week’ is taken to mean ‘seven’ rather than seven days, Strong’s Dictionary says “*sabua or ‘shabuan’ literal ‘sevens’ i.e. a week (specifically of years)*” So in verse 25 infers a specific time for the birth of Messiah. The stated seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks combine to make 69 weeks of years equalling 483 years until the arrival of Messiah. The 483 years starting with the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. This is a reference to the decree given in the time of Nehemiah in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes in 445 B.C. [**Neh. 2:1-8**]. After this, Messiah would appear on the scene. Based on a 360-day year, used in ancient Babylonia, Daniel determined the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and crucifixion occurred in 33 A.D. This was exactly the date prophesied by Daniel of when the Messiah would reveal Himself, which was actually the arrival of the Messiah, rather than His birth.

The prophet Hosea, eight centuries before Christ, also prophesied that the Messiah would come out of Egypt. In **Hosea 11:1** he says

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”

As we know, Jesus with His parents fled to Egypt and God brought Him back out of Egypt when He was a child. We even find that King Herod’s killing of the infants was also prophesied:

“Thus says the LORD:

“A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children,

because they are no more.” [**Jeremiah 31:15**]

This plainly warns about the massacre of the children, a terrible act of a mad king, in a fit of jealousy over a challenge for his earthly throne. It was the Magi that alerted Herod to Christ’s existence, although the Magi themselves are not prophesied, the Star of Bethlehem certainly is. For this we need to go back to the Torah and the Book of **Numbers, chapter 24 and verse 17** which tells about this star:

“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near:

a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of

Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the

sons of Sheth. ¹⁸ Edom shall be dispossessed; Seir also, his

enemies, shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly. ¹⁹ And one

from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of

cities!” ²⁰ Then he looked on Amalek and took up his discourse and

said, “Amalek was the first among the nations, but its end is utter destruction.”

This prophesy says that the writer sees Jesus, but He is not yet here and that Israel's (Jacob's) star would rise. The Magi certainly knew about this prophesy, which is how they were able to interpret the message of the star. No doubt they were conscious of all the other prophesies also, even though they were undoubtedly pagans, prophesies that the Jews of the first century had not recognised. The incident demonstrates clearly how God will use anyone to achieve His divine plan, which of course is actually future-history.

When we consider that there are around two-thousand five-hundred prophesies in the Bible and around two-thousand of them (80%) can be shown to have been fulfilled is incredible. Then when we consider that the remaining five-hundred refer to the end times and are being fulfilled in front of our very eyes, from this we can see that God's prophesies are 100% accurate. I have said before that 'hindsight is a marvellous thing' and when it comes to prophesy, it is true, because it is only in 'hindsight' that we can come to the belief that prophesy is accurate to the point of being factual. They are factual because to God it has already happened. God's time is not our time, and our time is not God's, [**Psalm 90:4. 2 Peter 3:8**] the Lord is omnipresent, He exists everywhere and in every time concurrently. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, all seeing, all knowing, and all things are held together by Him. You were known before the Earth was created, and your name written in the Book of Life, a prophesy that you can rely upon.

“and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.” [**Revelation 13:8**]

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The Most Wonderful Time of the Year?

Well that's what the song says anyway, it's a time of celebration, feasting and joy, and good will to all men. But doesn't all of that seem rather hollow? It was supposed to be a day that commemorated the birth of our Lord Yeshua (Jesus).



In my last Bible Study we looked at the prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, today being December 25th. I thought we would take a look at what the Bible actually says about the birth of Yeshua. For this study we will take the account from Luke chapter one, verses one to fifty [**Luke 1:1-50**] and I am using the English Standard Version [ESV].

Verse 1 - 4

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

Here we have a very personal statement from Luke, the physician, possibly the one disciple who had a good education and was used to writing and doing research. Luke states that others have written about Jesus, he states that he has interviewed those who were eyewitnesses and others that have also preached the word. It is entirely possible that Luke obtained the majority of this account from

Yeshua's Mother Mary, or Miriam as she would have been called. What a wonderful thought, that this information may have come from Mary herself.

“v5 - In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.”
[**Luke 1:5-7**]

Verse five is important because it gives us the date of this event. Zacharias was a descendant of Aaron, meaning, he was a Levite. Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Zacharias had to be a Levite as well as be married to a Levite to be able to serve as a priest. Priests took turns to serve in the temple, on a strict schedule, as we find in **I Chronicles 24:10**, each shift starting on the Sabbath [**1Chronicles 9:25** and **2 Chronicles 23:8**]. All priests served together three times a year; Passover, Pentecost and Feast of Tabernacles [**Deuteronomy 16:16**] after which they resume the schedule. If we look at the roster we find that this event occurred in the month of Sivan or our June 13-19. They were longing for a son to follow in the family tradition of priesthood, but we find that Elizabeth was barren.

¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.

In verses **10, 11 & 12** we find **Zechariah** went to the temple and burnt some incense on his own, when to his astonishment an angel appeared to him. As usual the first words of the angel were, “Fear not,” [**v13**], which I do not think is a particularly helpful thing to say when an angel appears before you. Also in verse thirteen the angel

gives this priest the news that Elizabeth was to have a child, a boy who they should name John.

V18 - And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”

Verse eighteen is an interesting one because it tells us that both Zechariah and Elizabeth are over child-bearing age. Can you think of another instance where God has given a child to an older couple? [**Genesis 17:17**], Because Zechariah didn't believe Gabriel, he was struck dumb until the boy's birth (v20).

After his turn ministering was over, he returned home, Zacharias's service lasted until the 19th of June [v23] he may have left on the 20th; his home was some 30 miles from Jerusalem, as he was quite old it may have taken him two days to make the journey. He would have rested from the journey for at least a day, and as this was not an immaculate conception, John could have been conceived on or around the 23rd or 24th of June. After Elizabeth conceived she hid herself away for five months [v24] bringing us to around November 24th. In the sixth month God again sent Gabriel out with a message, this time to Mary.

“²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,”

So, we arrive to a date somewhere in December, when Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy, possibly even the 25th of December. At that very moment Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit. I find it astonishing to find that the date we have traditionally celebrated Jesus' birth, may in reality have been the day of Jesus' conception. Here again is Gabriel appearing to Mary and telling her, a virgin and betrothed, that she was to conceive by the Holy Spirit, and telling her, “Fear Not.”

³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

In verses 31 to 33 Gabriel gives Mary instructions as to what the baby shall be called:

1. He says His name shall be ‘Jesus’ which means Savior or salvation. (Matthew gives a genealogy right back to David and Abraham.
2. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: "Behold your God!" From Isaiah 40:9 The Lord is presented as God Himself and Divine in John.
3. He shall take the throne of his ancestor, King David.
4. He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end. "Behold thy King" From **Zechariah 9:9**.
5. Isaiah 7:14 prophesies that a virgin will bear the Messiah, Isaiah uses the Hebrew word "almah," which means ‘young maiden’ generally understood as a virgin.

In verse 35 it is made clear to Mary that her baby will be God’s Son. If there was ever any doubt about who His Father was that doubt is taken away in this verse:

“ . . . therefore the child to be born will be called Holy—the Son of God.” Fulfilling the prophesy in **Psalm 2:7**.

Then in the following verse [36] Mary is informed that her cousin Elizabeth is also with child and again confirms that Elizabeth is in her sixth month. What a great statement verse 37 is: the angel states *“For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

Then, on hearing this news about her cousin, she immediately packs a bag and goes off to visit Elizabeth. [v39 & 40] and in verse 41

another thing happens that puts a seal on everything. When Mary meets Elizabeth:

“And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,”

Elizabeth knew that Mary was pregnant with God’s Son, as did the yet to be born John. Elizabeth verbalised what the Holy Spirit had told her:

“⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

So how does this help us to estimate the real birthday of Jesus, if December 25th was actually the approximate date of His conception? Using the information given to us in Luke 1, we can test the theory that Jesus was born during the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths. The evidence also in Luke, but in the second chapter, we found that the census was not taken in just one day, so neither Jerusalem nor Bethlehem would have been crowded because of the census. We also find that if the area was crowded, it would have been for a festival, the most likely was the autumn festival of Booths, when tents were erected on roofs and in gardens. This would account for Jesus being born in an outside shelter (Sukkahs), the translation of the word and meaning that was translated as ‘Manger’.

All we need to do then is to work out what the date would be forty weeks (normal gestation period) to December 25th. If we do the calculation here we actually come up with a result of October 1st. Feast of Tabernacles period starts on 15th day of Tishri (or Tishrei), which falls exactly in the period of Sukkot (Feast of Booths, which commemorates the time the Jews spent wandering in the wilderness of Sinai. The prophet Zechariah gives God’s command in chapter 14 and verse 16, that all shall go up to Jerusalem once a year to worship the Lord of Hosts.

Of course, all of this is theory; the Bible gives no specific dates for anything. In fact, that may have been on purpose, because God didn't wish us to celebrate anything other than the feasts and festivals that He Himself ordained. However, when a theory fits together so perfectly as this, it must be concluded that there is a strong possibility of it being the truth. We have one more piece to fit into this particular puzzle, one that comes, unexpectedly, from John's Gospel. I refer to John 1:14, a verse that we all know so well, and yet another verse that has been mistranslated. The verse in most versions reads:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

I was reading this verse in the Hebrew Orthodox Bible and I noticed a different word used where the translation used the word 'dwelt', instead it used the word 'sukkah'. This word rang a bell with me, so I went back to John's Gospel in the ESV Bible, one that had Strong's dictionary embedded. I tapped on the word 'dwelt' and the meaning of the original word popped up. The word was 'Skenoo' of which the original meaning is "to tent or encamp". So, after finding that Jesus may have been born during the Feast of Booths- that were in reality tents, we actually find that John confirms this in his first chapter of the Gospel.

So, we must be grateful to the Doctor Luke for providing us with so much information, all of which slots together like a jigsaw puzzle, just the way God's word is supposed to fit together.

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The Power and the Authority

When I was growing up I learned about authority. I had a very happy childhood, which was happy because, mostly, I recognised my parent's authority. My father was a military man, being a marine officer and I respected him, possibly more than anyone else I knew. When I did wrong I would get a good sharp clip around the ear, and then it was all over, forgiven and forgotten. My mother ruled the house and I respected her for that, but like so many mothers, her idea of punishment was to not speak for days on end. Which one did I prefer? Without a doubt, it was my father's version of discipline, because it was all over quickly, and I learned my lesson, and I also learned how to accept authority and I learned to apologize (confess). This made my relationship with my father much closer than the relationship with my mum. My father and I used to do many things together, we used to go on country walks and he would point out all sorts of things, the names of trees, birds and wildlife. He knew so much about history and I learned so much from him about the world we lived in.



As an apprentice and student, I learned to take orders and follow instructions, but because I had a wide knowledge base, thanks to my father, I could also use my initiative. I quickly

learned that it's not about having the knowledge; it is more about knowing what to do with it. I became a manager (team leader) at twenty-two and I realized that now I had to both accept orders and give orders. However, I also quickly found out that orders are useless without authority and authority is useless without respect. A boss of mine once told me that it was better to get subordinates to do something because you have asked them, and they want to do it, than to order them to do something. To be able to do that requires respect, and respect has to be earned by doing the right thing.

So when I became a Christian and I came under the authority of God, I was more able to accept His authority. God is the ultimate authority; He gave us the law under His authority. Someone once said that power is little use without authority, and authority is little use without power. Imagine a police officer who has the authority without the power to administer the law. A police officer without authority is just a vigilante. The two need to go together, it's a symbiotic relationship, and the one depends on the other. Needless to say, God has both the power and the authority, but these days few recognise that authority or even believe in His power or His existence. That authority has inspired the law of almost every kingdom on Earth, and that power holds this universe together even to giving us life. What then is the difference between power and authority?

"Authority is the right to do something. For example, parents have the right to set rules in their home for their family. I have the right to cut down a tree in my yard but not in yours. Power is the ability to accomplish one's mission or objective, the ability to get things done."

Human power is limited by three factors, like a triangular enclosure, those factors of limitation are: Strength, Endurance, and Focus. We start with limited strength, what strength we have does not last. Our focus on a particular mission also has its limit as we quickly lose focus.

Amazingly, we have been given that authority through Jesus, as Jehovah (God) gave that authority to His disciples in **Matthew 10:1**. He said:

“And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.”

Again Jesus, as God, gave us the Great Commission in **Matthew 28:18-20**.

*“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and
¹⁹
on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the
²⁰
Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”*

Here Jesus tells us directly that He has all authority in heaven and Earth. We do not have ‘all authority’ just some, but does say that we are under His authority. We need to submit to that authority before we can utilize any of that authority that God has bestowed to us. We need to be able to take orders before we can give them. Jesus also says here that He is with us always, so when we need to use that authority, He is there with us

So, what does that mean? It means that we need to recognize the authority of God by obeying the law, and by Christ's authority admit and repent of the times we break the law. We are given authority over demons and sickness, but we lose that authority if we do not fully accept God's law and clean ourselves from every kind of sin through Jesus Christ as it is said in **2 Corinthians 7:1**

“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body¹ and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

If we cannot take God's orders (The Law) how can we give orders to demons, bad spirits and disease? Before we enter into any kind of ministry we must cleanse ourselves by repenting of any sin. Brothers and sisters, we remain under the law when we sin, but through Jesus we are fulfilled in the law through confession and repentance before God, and only God. Only He has the authority and the power to forgive us our sin.

But what of the power? We have said previously that the authority is of no use without the power, just as a police officer is ineffective without both authority and the power to exert it. Where does our power come from then, to enable us to use the authority given to us by Jesus? **In Luke 4:36** we have a clue:

“And they were all amazed and said to one another, “What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!”

Jesus had the power, given to Him by His Father; the inheritance. Through Jesus, God dispenses His power. In

Luke 8 we have an example of Jesus' power, He delivers a man from evil spirits, not just one or two but hundreds, He cast the spirits out into two-thousand pigs. Jesus then re-boarded the boat, because the people there wanted Him to go, and sailed back to Israel's side of the lake. Waiting for Him on the other shore were crowds of people waiting for Him, and He obviously walked through the crowd, as He walked a lady touched His robe, believing that, just that touch, would heal her. Amazingly, in all that jostling of the crowd, He felt the power leave Him. So, we take it that Jesus was totally aware and in control of the power that the Father had given Him. We then are also heirs to the Father through Christ. **Romans 8:17** tells us:

“and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.”

We then, are in Christ, are His body on Earth, and as such have access to the power that Jesus used when healing and casting out demons and bad spirits, being in Him, **Romans 12:5**, which says:

“so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

I am not speaking of the amazing power that created the universe; this also was achieved through the Jesus, the Word made flesh, only God has that kind of power. I am also not speaking of some emotional power that never exceeds some feeling or emotion, such as the power to love. What I am writing about is the power to do God's will, to act as a conduit for physical changes, healing, raising from the dead or miracles.

The very next question is, how do I obtain this power? This power, as with the authority, comes only with the Holy Spirit, the gift that Jesus promised His followers, it cannot be obtained in any other way [**Acts 8:18-21**]. As Peter tells a man called Simon,

“May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!”

It only comes under the control of the Spirit, so in reality it is not 'our' power, but that of the Holy Spirit. When we accept Jesus as our personal Saviour, we receive a sort of 'package', a 'bundle' as they like to say today, and besides our salvation we get an in-dwelling portion of the Holy Spirit. Many say that this initial in-filling is insufficient for one who is called to a ministry, although God gives us what we need to do His will, I have felt the greater filling of the Spirit, but I did not need to ask for it. In **2 Kings 2**, Elijah did prophesy a double portion of the Spirit God to Elijah:

*“When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.” And Elisha said, “Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.” 10 And he said, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so.” [**2 Kings 2:9-10**]*

This is the only instance of this happening in the entire Bible, so it seems that it is not something that common. **Ephesians 4:7** tells us that we are given in proportion:

“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.”

Christ's gift being the Holy Spirit, whilst **1 John 2:20** declares:

“But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.”

A few verses later (**v27**) this is confirmed:

“But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in Him.”

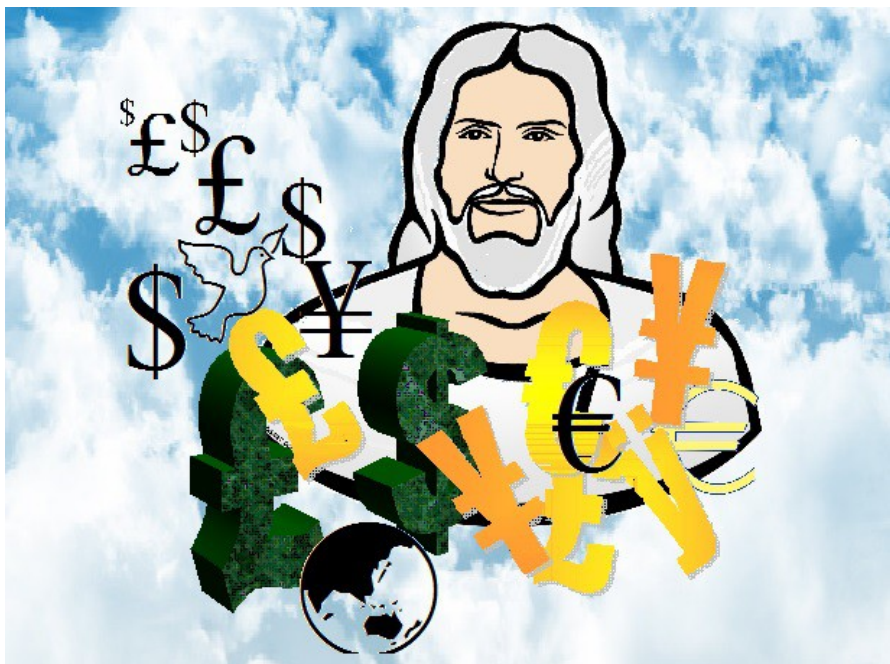
From these verses, it would seem that what we are given at the time we dedicate our lives to Jesus remains sufficient, that God will indeed provide what we need when it is needed, both in power and in knowledge. Interestingly, in verse 20 the word translated as 'knowledge' is the Greek word 'oida' (Strong's G3608a) meaning as 'used as a present, to have seen, to know or to understand', so a more direct thought may be that we are given understanding. In this modern world, I have often heard it say that, 'information is power' and when it comes to those things we have authority over; bad spirits, healing, etc. it is certainly right. Like all prayer, the most effective approach is to be as specific as possible, knowing someone's name, what they are suffering from, or having the evil spirit's name. Having the name of the bad spirit gives us power over them, just as Jesus did in the story of the deliverance of the possessed man. In **Luke 8:30**, Jesus addresses the tormenting spirits, asking its name, the spirit answers, “*Legion*”, for many demons had entered him.” The name of the demon gave Jesus the power over them, and although the Gospel account does not state this, I am sure that

Jesus used their name; '*Legion*' when He commanded them to enter the pigs. Similarly, when we enter healing, or praying for someone's healing, it is always more effective to pray in as full a knowledge as possible. In **Luke 18:35-41** we find the account of Jesus healing the blind beggar, when the man is brought to Him, even though Jesus knows what is wrong with the man, and it was obvious to any what the problem was, Jesus asks him what he wants Him to do. In verse 41 Jesus asks and the man replies,

“What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” Then Jesus just says: *“Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.”*

On occasion the Spirit can give 'words of knowledge' that will tell what to pray for, or even what is wrong with someone. This can on occasion also include the cause, some sin or other, or action that the sick person is doing. We are so used to praying for general things that sometimes this principle escapes us. Prayers like “Please bless, Bill,” or please help someone, are often ineffective. We must all remember that knowledge is power and through the Holy Spirit we have the knowledge and the power and through Jesus we have the authority, in His name. Being specific in prayer requests enables us to wait for specific answers and to more clearly identify them when they come, so that we can praise and thank God for the answers and give Him all of the glory.

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Money

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. [Matt. 6:24]

This is a well known verse. I've heard several people preach on this subject over my time, but every one of those preaches mostly majors on the evils of money, saying that “Money is the root of all evil.” Rarely have I heard anything about what the Bible says about money and riches. In the Old Testament, being rich indicated a great blessing from God, so we can't have it both ways, either it's a great evil or a blessing. In this study I want to search out exactly what the Bible says about having money, or the lack of it; it's up to you to make up your mind.

Today we live in a culture where money is king, where our TV screens entice us to buy now and save money, millionaires are either worshipped or despised by the have-nots, and governments get elected for their tax reliefs more than their morals. Debt is the largest slave-master in the western world, and yet loan companies continue to entice us to borrow more. So those of us in debt become the slaves of the slaves to our creditors, which is not a new thing, Solomon the wise, the author of the Book of Proverbs, even though he was a king knew just this, when he wrote:

“The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.” [**Proverbs 22:7**]

When we realise that the whole world in in debt, every country, except for a handful, is seriously in debt to the World Bank, we can understand much of the strange behaviour of our governments. Some time back, when we were back in Greece, we rescued a sweet little dog that had been abandoned on our doorstep in a violent thunder-storm. Sadly we could not bring Sally back to the UK with us for several reasons, so we endeavored to find her a good home. We found that home but forgot to take her favourite toys with us, so we took them to her new home about two weeks later. When we arrived we called out to her, as did her new master, to stop her getting out through the gate. With both of us calling her, the result was total confusion, Sally just didn't know which call to obey. And it struck me how this illustrated Jesus' remark about two masters.

So often we start something, some vision that we think we have had, either on a personal basis or even for our church, believing it is of God we take the plunge and go ahead without all the appropriate checks and balances. In **Luke 14**, Jesus warns against this type of action, He says:

“²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”

Although Jesus is talking about discipleship there is an obvious principle involved that reflects the practice of overextending ones finances. We have, most of us, been in debt at sometime in our lives, whether that owing on a bank loan, paying off a student loan, or a mortgage on our house. When we enter into these situations we must all be sure that we can comply with the conditions and repayments. **Psalm 37:21** tells us that renegeing on a loan is evil, a sin:

“The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives;”

So we must be careful when we borrow, because borrowing causes more issues for people than many other things, as **Romans 13:8** says:

“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

How wonderful is that, 'the one who loves another has fulfilled the law'. So, loving one another also puts constraints on us. There is a saying, from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, [1602] that says: 'Neither a lender nor a borrower be,' good advice. I am sure that many of us have seen the results of loaning someone something, maybe money or maybe an item, lawn mower or a tool, and not getting it back. How many friendships have been ruined through borrowing and lending? Is it not better to give in love than to make a loan and risk the bad feeling? As

Shakespeare's line continues, "*For loan oft loses both itself and friend*".

Both the rich and the poor take out loans but what does the Bible say about the rich and the poor? It is not a sin to be rich? In fact, as I said above, it seems that in the Old Testament it was looked upon as God blessing a person. We look at the story of Job, who was seeming a rich man. Job seemed to have everything for a good life, material riches, a wife and children, seven sons and three daughters. He owned seven-thousand sheep, three-thousand camels, five-hundred yoke of oxen (1000) five hundred donkeys and a host of servants; he was very rich indeed. [**Job 1:2-3**]. Job was a righteous man and God loved and blessed him. He was obviously pleased with Job because He used him as an example to Satan. Satan basically accused God of buying Job's worship, and said that if God withdrew His blessing, Job would curse God. So, God allows Satan to attack Job and Satan took away everything he had. Job never cursed God as Satan predicted, but continued to worship God instead. In the end when Satan admitted defeat, God restored Job's wealth by giving him twice as much as Job had possessed originally, with seven sons and three daughters [**Job 42:12-14**]. So, it seems that God does bless people with wealth, but there are a number of warnings in the Old Testament.

"Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it." [**Proverbs 13:11**].

This then be a warning about people gaining riches suddenly, as happens today with lottery winners, many of which quickly lose their fortunes. This may say more about managing riches rather than anything else. People who are not used to having money often go on never-ending spending sprees. However

there seems to be a limit about being rich. In **Matthew 6:19-21**, Jesus gives us more advice about being rich:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

So, this is what your life should be like, not concentrating on building up fortunes or treasures on Earth, but rather we should focus on things of heaven. The word 'treasure' here is translated from the Greek word '*thēsauros*' which generally means the place where you keep precious things, a coffer. So, this is just about our love of material things rather than the spiritual. Then we have the often quoted verse in **Luke 18:25** that tells us:

“For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

The eye of a needle mentioned here is a reference to the pedestrian door in the main gates of the larger cities in Jesus' time. The city gates were generally closed at sunset so anyone wishing access to the city after sundown could get into the city by this door, that was designed to allow just one person at a time into the city. We can still see these today often in the main gates of prisons. So it was quite clear that rich people may not be acceptable in the Kingdom. This may be seen in conjunction with being good stewards of God's money, if God allows you riches, then He expects us to use them for the Kingdom. Peter states in **1 Peter 4:10**

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:”

In **Proverbs 19:17** the Old Testament view is the same:

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.”

Here then is another principle being demonstrated, that if we are generous and give to the poor or anyone who needs help we will be rewarded. If we give \$10, God will see to it that we get that \$10 back, or even more, so that we can give more next time. As long as our motive is pure and we do not give in order to get more back.

Because if God blesses us with riches that is a gift of God, then it too should be used to serve one another. In other words, not storing up treasures but using those riches to further the kingdom. Let's now look at a few other statements of Jesus with regard to rich people:

Luke 6:24 *“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.”*

Luke 12:33 *“Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.”*

And of course the rich man who wanted to join Jesus' ministry in **Matthew 19:21**:

“Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

So, the rich were, it seems, none too popular with Jesus, but what of the poor, is it a blessing to be poor?

Jesus never seems to have had any possessions or money, so is that our role model? Lets look at what Jesus says.

Luke 6:20 *“And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”*

So indeed the poor do seem to be blessed and here the Kingdom of God is theirs. It does not seem like a blessing to be poor, not knowing where your next meal is coming from or how you will buy food or pay the rent. Is that what God really wants for you? The point is well made in **Matthew 6:31-33**:

“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

This is the point of being poor, we need to rely on God for all things, whereas the rich have the wherewithal to provide for themselves, they do not need God to supply their needs. Back in the late eighties and early nineties I came down with a disease called M.E (don't ask me to spell the full medical word), which meant I could not work, and because I was self-employed, I could not claim full sickness benefit. Our income was just £36 a week for over six months, when I could claim a disability allowance; this was about a tenth of what I was used to earning. We had nowhere to turn other than God and we turned to Him, we just said “It's over to you Lord, we have reached the end of our self-sufficiency. My friends, during that time we lacked for nothing, we would go to the food cupboard and move something and find something that we could not remember buying. All of our bills got paid, telephone, mortgage, power, everything; we never fell into debt once. Afterwards, I sat down several times and added up our income and our out goings, they never balanced, our expenditure exceeded our income by about three-thousand pounds. We were forced to rely on God and I learned such a valuable

lesson over that time, one that I have never forgotten. I genuinely never worry about what will happen these days; I have learned to hand everything over to God.

If you are rich and do not use your wealth to further the kingdom or to provide for the poor, you are on shaky ground. If you are making your money from God's word, then:

Proverbs 22:16 *“Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.”*

2 Corinthians 2:17 *“For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.”*

If you are desperately poor, have faith because God will provide your every need. **Philippians 4:19** confirms this:

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

To conclude, being rich is not a sin, and indeed it may be a rich blessing from our God, unless we are bad stewards and keep our riches for ourselves and our rich friends. God gives riches for a reason, His reason is not ours. If we have been blessed then we bless others, if we are generous toward the poor we will be repaid. If you are poor, rejoice, because you are blessed in Jesus' sight, for you are reliant on Him to provide for your needs. You will be first in the kingdom.

Mark 10:23 (ESV)

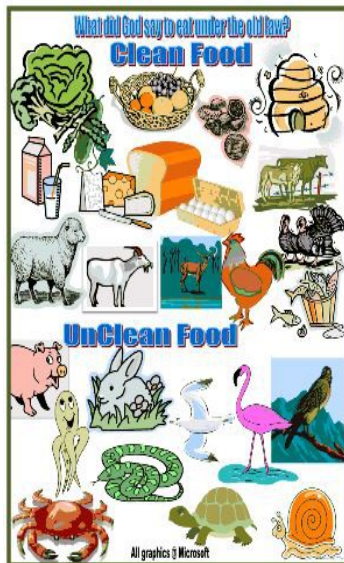
“And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”

Clean and Unclean Foods

The Jewish law is full of instructions about food, many of them very sensible for the time and climate of Israel. *Kashrut* is the Jewish law that deals with what foods can and can't be eaten, and how those foods must be prepared. The word "*Kashrut*" is the Hebrew word meaning 'fit, proper or correct', what is "*kosher*". The *Kashrut* dictates which animals may or may not be eaten, and specified how those animals that can be eaten are killed. All meat must have the blood drained from it or broiled out of it before it is consumed. Further to that,

not all parts of a permitted animal may be eaten. Eating kosher meat with dairy is forbidden, as is eggs, fish, fruits, vegetables or grain, neither can these be eaten with dairy products. Kitchen utensils that are used with meat cannot be used with dairy products and conversely, nor can they be used if they have been in contact with non-kosher foods.

Many of these laws, we realise today, are about food hygiene, we are taught today to use different cutting boards for raw meat, cooked meats, or vegetables, for exactly these same reasons. We, today, acknowledge the importance of washing our hands when we touch any of the above, this hygiene precaution became ritual to the Jews. There were also actual reasons why certain organs were outlawed by God, because He created everything, He knew what was good or bad for us to eat. Our hygiene rules are quite similar to the rules that God



gave His people, and they certainly would have ensured the survival of the Jewish race in the desert and beyond. However, many of those laws became ritual, and enforced for no apparent reason, mostly laws that were written by man, as a defense for the core law. So, what did Jesus have to say about food, did He change anything or did He reinforce the old law?

If we look at Mark chapter seven (7) we find a debate going on between the Pharisees and Jesus about Jesus' instructions and their breaking of the hygiene laws, i.e. not washing their hands before they ate. They asked Jesus, why did His disciples not obey tradition, when they did not wash their hands before eating and said that their hands were 'defiled'. Jesus answered them by quoting Isaiah:

“This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;

7 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

But Jesus wasn't finished; He accused them of abandoning the laws of God in favor of obeying the 'traditions' of men. [v8] Later [v15] after calling the people back to Him, Jesus states that there is nothing that a person can put into themselves that can defile a person. Jesus further states:

“but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”

Mark 7:18-23, gives us Jesus' answer when the Disciples questioned Him about His words:

“Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach,

and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

This seems to turn the laws of God on their head, are these not the laws given to Man by God? Nowhere in the Torah, or the Bible for that matter does God specifically decree the washing of hands before eating. This was another case of ring-fencing God's law. Because God made the law that people should not use implements on other foods that had come into contact with raw meat, the 'fence laws' were put in place to defend the central law. Of course the central point here is that 'what defiles us comes from within' but Jesus does make the point that all food is clean, that which is edible that is. Of course because it is in brackets, the statement: “***Thus he declared all foods clean***” is a later editorial comment, possibly added by Gentile Christians. Young's Literal Translation (YLT) which is a literal translation directly from the earliest Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, does not include this bracketed statement, suggesting that indeed it was a later addition.

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Conditional Healing and Salvation?

So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. [2

Kings 5:14]

Naaman was sent to the King of Israel by the King of Syria, he was sent on to the prophet Elisha for the healing of Naaman's leprosy. Elisha told Naaman in a message to go and bathe in the Jordan river seven times. Naaman was angry that Elisha had not come to him, looking at it as an insult. Then a servant, a slave from Israel persuaded Naaman to do as the prophet had instructed and God healed him, giving him the flesh as a child would have. What was all this about? It was about obedience to God, God's word to Elisha was to do something humbling, Naaman may have thought that the Jordan River was inferior to the rivers of Syria. He may have not wanted to bathe in a muddy old river, but a simple servant taught him different, and he obeyed. Many times, healing is dependent upon doing something to show obedience to God. There are many instances where conditions have been placed on healing, like the one above, many involve not sinning, others involve keeping commands. **Exodus 15:26** is one of these that demands keeping God's commands:

“saying, “If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the



diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer.”

This promise was made before the Ten Commandments and before the Jewish law was laid down. In Genesis 20, in Abimelech’s household, the womb of all the women had been shut because he had brought Abraham’s wife into his home. The Lord God intervened and told Abimelech:

“Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”
[Genesis 20:7]

Of course, in the Old Covenant salvation was dependent upon keeping the law of Moses, obeying that law was the only way, and if we broke the law we had to suffer. We suffered by giving up something valuable, a perfect lamb, ox, or paying for a dove to be sacrificed, that was the way people paid the price for sin. There was also the 'scapegoat', the sins of a group of people, say a village, were prayed onto a goat, which was then driven out of the village. There was also the curse of the law, as suggested above, was suffering through disease.

The New Covenant changed things, cases of healing in the Old Testament are rare, just Elijah raising a widow’s son from the dead [**1 Kings 17:17-23**], Elisha raising the Shunammite’s son from the dead [**2 Kings 4:19-37**] and the cleansing of Namaan of leprosy [**2 Kings 5:10-15**]. So, Jesus' ministry was a dramatic departure, which seemed to be more about blessing than about judgement. While in the Old Testament healing seemed to be conditional, in the New Testament there seems to be no conditions involved. In reality, it often did not involve any pre-existing faith, indeed the purpose of the healing was often to bring faith where none existed before. If we look at **Luke 7:11-19** we find the story of a funeral party that Jesus

seems to have happened upon, a mother with a dead son. Jesus immediately seems to have had mercy upon the weeping mother and raised her son from the dead. There was no faith involved in this act, and there was no recorded condition, the raising was purely to glorify God and to spread the Word. The pallbearers certainly recognised who Jesus was and said, "God has visited his people!" Strangely not Luke 7 but in **Luke 17:11-19**, we find another encounter that happens when Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, His attention is drawn by ten lepers shouting to Him from away off, as they were not allowed to approach anyone. "*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us,*" they shouted. Jesus asked no questions of them, not even their religion or names, He just said, "*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*" They needed to be certified as 'clean' by the priests in order to resume their lives. The point of the story is that out of the ten only one returned to praise God for their healing, however all ten were healed. Their healing was not conditional on their believing or faith.

We also have the case of the Centurion's Servant, [**Matthew 8:5-13**] the Centurion was doubtless a Roman citizen, so probably not a Jew, although the servant probably was. The Centurion had heard about Jesus and came to him saying, "*Lord, my servant is lying paralysed at home, suffering terribly.*" Jesus said He would go to heal the servant, but the Centurion said "*Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.*" "*Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.*" Jesus also commented on the Centurion's faith, even though he was possibly not a Jew, so there seems to have been no conditions of religion in this case. Looking at Jesus' record of healing in the Gospels then, there seems to be no imposed conditions for healing, no requirement for strong faith, or even none. A dead person can have no faith at all, and the lepers could mostly have been 'chancers', who'd heard of Jesus' reputation. In most cases the healing was to instigate faith, not because of it.

Our God makes no promises that healing will be affected in our lifetime, there is not one verse of scripture that generally promises immediate physical healing will definitely be granted, and there is nothing we can do to change that. Paul himself was ill, which he confirms in **Galatians 4:13** *“You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first”* Surely if it were possible to claim instant healing Paul, above many others, would have been able to claim it. Not just Paul but there were others indicated in the fellowship that were ill [**Philippians 2:27**], [**1 Timothy 5:23**]. If healing was a matter of claiming healing through Jesus' name in faith, would not the Disciples and the Apostles, who had a real faith, due to their knowing Jesus, not have lived for ever? Obviously Paul, the Disciples and the whole of the very early church passed on. If healing were conditional on faith, then surely every one of the founders of the Christian church, from Peter to Paul, all lacked faith. Not only that but if we believe that healing is conditional faith, surely Paul then misled Timothy when he told him to, 'take a little wine for his stomach' [**1 Timothy 5:23**] instead of telling him to have more faith?

On then, to the issue of there being conditions for salvation. Now it very much depends on what we mean by 'conditions', there are no conditions that need to be met for us to be accepted by Jesus into His body. We do not need to be rich, or 'good' people, we do not need to have obeyed God's law; Jesus is more interested in those that go astray. Jesus said, 'Come all who are heavily laden', the emphasis being on 'all' who are laden down with sin. And coming to Christ is a decision rather than a condition, when we accept Jesus we start a process.

In three of the four Gospels we can read about what is called 'The Great Commission'. This instructs us as disciples to go out across the world and preach the good news (Gospel) [**Matthew 28:18-20**;

Mark 16:15-16; and **Luke 24:47**]. There are two words here in the Great Commission, '*teach*' and '*baptising*'. We are to teach, that is share the Gospel, once a person has heard the Gospel it is down to the Holy Spirit to convict that person to believe. But believing is not necessarily having faith; does not faith come after that? Even the devil believes in God, but does Satan have faith? So, can faith be a precondition of salvation? Secondly when the Holy Spirit convicts there is a decision, to accept Jesus or not. If that decision is yes the person may go ahead and be baptised, but is there a requirement to be immediately baptised? There seems to me to be two baptisms, with water (often called full immersion) and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which comes with accepting Jesus as your Saviour. [**Matthew 3:11**] says Jesus will baptise in the Spirit. When this happens, we are told that the Spirit will teach us all things [**John 14:26**], but that also does not bring faith, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*" [**Romans 10:17**]. So we get our faith as we mature in Christ through hearing of Christ and through the word. How then can faith be a condition of receiving salvation?

Repenting (the Greek word is 'metanoëō' meaning 'to think differently' or 'reconsider') is a decision that we must make. So, we may not be able to grow in Christ, it does not seem to be a condition of Salvation, but a decision that the Spirit prompts us to make. Once we have salvation, the Gospel tells us that no one can take it away, **John 10:27-29** tells us that

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

Our salvation is neither dependent upon good works nor strictly keeping the law, for it is because of our inability to keep the law that

the Father sent His Son, Jesus. Make no mistake, the law remains in force, Jesus was very specific about this [**Matthew 5:17-19**]. Jesus said that he had come to 'fulfil' the law, not to abolish it, and that not one 'dot' would pass away before everything was accomplished, meaning His second coming. He also warned against those who preached that the law was abolished and warned that they would be the least in His Kingdom. Not that they still had salvation, but their status would be the lowest in the New Earth. So, if the law remains, then what do we do about it? As Christians and children of God, certainly we should do our best to obey the law, not for salvation's sake, but because we love God and wish to do no more than to please Him. When we consider the Mosaic law we need to use discernment, many of the laws were for those people in that time, as they travelled through the desert. Other laws were ceremonial, that we have no need to observe other than if we wish to. There are many laws that God made for the whole of His people and not just for the Jews, but observing these is down to the individual's choice or conviction by the Spirit.

Healing and Salvation then is unconditional, a matter of choice or conviction; there is no test or interview, just an application that has already been approved [**Ephesians 1:4**] *“even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love“*.

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Faith; What is it About?

Faith is a word we hear bandied about, on this site, in church and in most religious circles, but what are we talking about when we use the word?

First, I want to look at what the word faith actually means. The Bible itself gives us a definition of what faith is in **Hebrews 11:1**. *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*

Strong's (G4102) gives us the Greek word 'pistis' defines the word to mean, *“persuasion, moral conviction of a religious truth (assurance, belief)”*

Merriam Webster defines the word as *“belief and trust in and loyalty to God (2) : belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion.”*

Out of all these definitions I prefer the one given in **Hebrews 11:1**, because that is the one given to Paul by the Spirit; a sure belief in something hoped for but not seen. Is faith something we need to have to become a Christian, accept Jesus as our Saviour, or do we get faith as a part of the gift package at the point of commitment? Alternatively, is faith a seed that is planted when we first get salvation, and then is watered and fed, for it to grow over time? These are the questions we intend to answer in this study. It does seem that accepting Jesus as your Savior needs a trigger, a push, and some people have said that it 'takes a leap of faith'. That is not having faith, but about taking a chance, sometimes a leap into the



MATTHEW 17:20

unknown, or an attitude of 'anything is better than this.' Which is how many come to the Lord, in moments of desperation, some not knowing what Christianity is all about. **2 Thessalonians 3:5** sheds some light on this issue and says:

“May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.”

So, when we were far off, not knowing Christ, the love of God is with us still, He, the Spirit, can direct our hearts.

“For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”
[**Acts 2:39**]

These verses suggest that it is the conviction of the Spirit that is required rather than any faith, He just calls them to Himself. This is in fact repeating what Jesus tells us:

“For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”
[**John 6:44**]

We can see quite plainly then, that God calls us, just as we are, when we are far away from God, without faith, other than a feeling that the Spirit implants into our very soul.

Our second question then, does faith come with the gift of the Spirit when we accept God's call? The first thing that happens when we answer the Spirit's call is that He convicts us of our sin. We realise that we are sinners and fallen as a person, if someone has been on hand to lead you, they may get you to make a prayer of confession, which clears the way to Christ. At that moment we are given the free gift of the Holy Spirit, that indwelling part of God that inspires and further convicts us, guides and informs us, empowers and comforts us. With that free gift, do we also get the seed of faith planted into our being? **Hebrews 12:2** may give us an answer: ***“looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that***

was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

And also in **Romans 12:3** we read:

“For by the grace given to me I say to every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

Faith is listed in **1 Corinthians 12:4–11** as one of the gifts of the Spirit, and the passage explains that these gifts are given by the God through His Holy Spirit, The passage reads:

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.”

So, we are not dependent upon having or acquiring faith ourselves, it is given to us in measure by God. These two verses clearly suggest that faith is not something that we do or a state of mind that we develop, but that faith is a gift from God. Romans **10:17** says *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* So faith is a gift from God that increases by hearing from the word of Christ, which in this case we get from the Bible. In 2 Corinthians 10:15 *“We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged,”*

We see then that faith can grow, so as we study the Bible God can add to our faith. In **Romans 12:3** we read:

“For by the grace given to me I say to every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think,”

It would seem then that the answers to both question two and three are yes, we are given faith by the measure God decides, and that our faith is increased by God as we read His Word. How then does faith work and what does it mean for us to have faith?

Faith can often be substituted by the word 'trust', if we have faith in God we are trusting Him, which is exactly what our Father wants of us. Because there is another definition in the Bible, **Romans 4:5** tells us that:

“And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”

Faith counted as righteousness; so that those who have faith are righteous, not by the keeping the laws, or by good works, but by our faith, the faith that was given to us by grace by the measure given by God Himself. No one then can boast in having more faith than another, as we read in **Romans 12:3**

“For by the grace given to me I say to every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think,. . .”

This verse actually says why we should not boast about our faith when it says, *“by the grace given to me”*. Once we have grasped this, that faith comes from God, we cannot say to anyone that they, “do not have enough faith,” either when troubles strike, when we pray for someone to be healed or when needing healing ourselves.

What does faith do? Many people, who do not profess to follow any denomination say that they believe there is a God, faith changes that from believing in God, to believing God. The difference is, we will get to know God, through developing a real personal relationship with Him.

To *believe* God and to have that relationship, is to have faith that God *can and will* do for us everything He has promised to do. The Bible tells us that the ancient patriarch Abraham “believed God” and explains that “he did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to [and would] perform” [**Romans 4:3-4**].

“For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” ⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.”

The point is that God will give us faith in direct proportion to our trust in Him, that is why we cannot separate trust from faith. The whole of chapter eleven of Hebrews is known as 'The Faith Chapter', and besides defining what faith is it gives examples of how faith works and the Bible characters who had faith. This chapter is well worth reading a few times, **verse 4** tells us:

“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous,”

Verse 5 *“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him.”*

Verse 7 *“By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen,”*

Noah believed God when He told him that a great flood was coming, despite being in a desert and hundreds of miles from an ocean, and despite the ridicule of the general population.

Verse 8 *“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.”*

Abraham obeyed though he had little reason to go other than believing what God had told him. Abraham trusted God.

Verse 11: *“By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.”*

Sarah was well aware that she was well past the age to bare children, yet she trusted in God and was blessed by His promise. Even when Abraham was tested by God demanding his son, he was obedient and trusted God. Verse 17:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,”

The chapter then goes on to describe the many examples in Moses' life.

To summarise, we do not come to Christ through faith but we are called by His Spirit [**John 6:44**]. Faith is a gift of God, given in a measure that God decides, [**Romans 12:3**] it grows through reading and learning about God's Word [**Romans 10:17**]. It is not about believing in God but believing God [**Romans 4:3-4**]. It is trusting God to do what He says He will do, to keep His promises. Faith is counted as righteousness [**Romans 4:5**]. Our part is to develop the gift that God gives us through reading and listening to His word, and hearing about His works (witnesses) [**Hebrews 11**].

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

© 25/03/2017

The Gift of Mercy



Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. [Psalm 23:6]

The next gift I want to study is Mercy, some regard this as one of the minor gifts, many commentaries and articles do not even list it as one of the gifts. Where mercy is listed as a gift it rarely is listed with the so called, 'Power Gifts'.

“And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” [Matthew 18:33]

This was the answer to Peter's question about how many times he should forgive someone who sinned against him. Jesus told one of His, by this time famous parables, and Jesus made the point that as He was forgiving people's sins (Peter), that Peter should forgive anyone in mercy. This, just as God is rich in mercy toward us [Ephesians 2:4-6].

However, as humans 'mercy' is not a part of our human make-up, if someone wrongs us, our instinct is to get even with them, pile retribution upon them. It is not unbelievers that this happens to, we Christians can all be victims of anger and capable of being hurt or offended, and when that happens we have a 'need' to do something about it. We react, many times, automatically, without thinking and we revert to our old selves. I remember many years ago when we went into town shopping, we always parked the car in the same

place, a piece of derelict land close to the town centre. One day we drove into town to find that this piece of land had been fenced off by builders who were clearing the plot for development. We needed to find another place to park, and eventually found a parking space at another location, and we went off shopping. When we had finished our shopping we returned to our usual parking place by mistake, we had not thought about it, it was just automatic. We then had to 'think' where we had left the car and make our way back to the new parking space.

2 Corinthians 5:17, tells us that we are a new creation, a verse that many use to justify their belief that the law has passed away. But when we put this verse back into context, we find that what the passage is saying is that we should act as a new person. Check out **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**:

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

So how do we react as a new man or woman, a new creation in Christ? Once more it is firstly a gift that we should seek from the Holy Spirit, but is it a gift, like faith or prophesy? Straight away we can turn to **Romans 12:6-8**, which answers this question:

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy; with cheerfulness.”

The gift of mercy seems to be a two-pronged gift and double barreled gift, one that God shows to us, so that we may show mercy to others. Because we have received mercy from God through Jesus' full redemption from our past and future sin, we must choose to use the gift to others. To be merciful is of the greatest import to the church, and to our evangelical ministry. Jesus said “***Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.***” [Matthew 5:7], but what exactly is 'Mercy'?

We get a flavor of what mercy is in **Acts 9:36** where one of the female followers called Dorcas is described by Paul as being, “full of good works and acts of charity.” A person with the gift of mercy demonstrates empathy with others, compassion in words and actions. Do not confuse empathy with sympathy. Sympathy contains an element of pity, which is an emotional response, empathy on the other hand loses the pity and focuses on objective action. Empathy is the ability to be able to walk in their shoes for a time, understanding their plight more ably without the emotion of pity. That does not mean that we are unable to comfort others in times of distress, when a person need a hug or a caring smile. The Holy Spirit gives the gift of mercy to certain people in a church to show God's love and help those who suffer, just as God's mercy lifts and supports us all with grace and compassion. Those special people who “weep with those who weep, ”[**Romans 12:15**] and “bear one another's burdens,” [Galatians 6:2].” The gift of mercy couples with discernment to sense when things are not right, or someone is experiencing

problems; they are always good listeners and are always there for others. Check out: **Matthew 5:7, Luke 10:30-37, Romans 12:8, James 3:17 and Jude 22-23.**

I am sure that many will recognise themselves in the descriptions above, but many will be doing these things without realising that what they have is a gift of the Spirit. If you can answer 'Yes' to the following questions, you may indeed be gifted with mercy. Are you drawn to people who are suffering or unhappy? Does helping people, the sick, needy, elderly, etc. give you satisfaction and a warm glow inside? Are you attracted to external church ministries, such as hospital visiting, soup kitchens, food banks, homeless shelters and the like? Do people seek you to share their stories? Do you 'give' to those less fortunate, rather than giving to the church? Are you the first to volunteer or to suggest a helping-hands scheme? If you have answered 'Yes' to these questions, it is likely that God has given you a spirit of mercy, and you are truly the hands and feet of God to those afflicted by problems. You are the face of God to those who do not know Him, His shop window, through which people will see the Father and His compassion, grace and mercy.

Jesus surely wants us all to have the gift of mercy, more than He wants sacrifice [**Matthew 9:13**], because that is what Jesus did, He helped people through mercy, because that is what He saw His Father do. So many cried out to Jesus to 'have mercy' and Jesus responded with mercy, He healed in mercy, and forgave by grace. Maybe those two words, 'Mercy' and 'Grace' are interchangeable, for when God dispenses grace He does so in mercy towards us. So to have mercy is to be God-like and to emulate Jesus, our role-model.

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Words of Knowledge

We concluded that series last week with examining what 'Faith' was about, continuing this week we will look at another gift; 'Words of Knowledge', some call this the 'Gift of Revelation'. This is one of the 'power' gifts, that when used can be devastating and hard hitting. We will look at what it is and how it is used, with some examples of the results it can have. It also seems to me that

Words of Knowledge are closely partnered with Words of Wisdom, so we will also examine this gift in tandem.



The Gift can come in a number of forms, some have an ongoing gift of knowledge about God's Word, they are able to recall chapter and verse of scripture and can instantly distinguish between what teaching is biblical and what is not. Something that most of us rely on the Spirit for, I think, but these people, and I have known several, seem to be able to quote the scripture word-for-word and give the reference, an amazing gift. However most mature Christians regard Words of Knowledge as the gift where the Spirit tells them something that they could not possibly know. The first example of this gift is in **Genesis 6:14-22**; God commanded Noah to build an enormous ship, so large that it has been calculated that it could hold 17,000 creatures. Noah may have been a carpenter, but even so he had no idea how to build a boat, let alone a ship, Noah lived in the desert of the Middle-east. God told Noah and gave him a word of knowledge about the flood coming and continued to provide the

knowledge on how to build a ship, the like of which would not be seen again until way into the nineteenth century AD.

My next biblical example is **Joshua 7:10-11**:

“The Lord said to Joshua, “Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? 11 Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings.”

The events leading up to this was this, some of the Israelites had taken some of the 'devoted things' and hidden them; these are items, possibly valuable objects, that had been due for destruction out of the spoils of war. Most likely to be pagan religious objects in gold. God had decreed that these items be destroyed but Joshua evidently did not know about this. The Israel army had suffered a defeat at Ai and Joshua was distraught as to why, God then gave him a word of knowledge about the 'devoted things' to explain why they had lost the battle. **2 Kings 5:20-27** gives us another example where it has Elisha 'knowing' that Gehazi lied to Naaman.

Now that we have seen some Old Testament examples, let's just take a quick look at the definition of 'Words of Knowledge':

“A word of knowledge is a definite conviction, impression, or knowing that comes to you in a similitude (a mental picture), a dream, through a vision, or by a Scripture that is quickened to you. It is supernatural insight or understanding of circumstances, situations, problems, or a body of facts by revelation; that is, without assistance by any human resource but solely by divine aid. . . The gifts of the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge function together; knowledge is raw material and wisdom builds on it.”

Jesus used 'Words of Knowledge' all of the time, but as He was God, He had a direct link to the Spirit (the font of all knowledge [**John 14:26**]) because it was a part of Him. Jesus could look into people's hearts by the Spirit and know what the cause of sickness was or why someone was sinning, even those secret sins. In **John 4:17-18** Jesus reached out to a Samaritan woman that the Jews hated, He told the woman to go and fetch her husband, she answered that she did not have one. Jesus replied, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." Jesus knew everything about her, but this stands as a good example of a 'Word of Knowledge', and one that we can have today, because Jesus relied upon the self-same Spirit that we have access to. We have to recognise that Jesus, as well as being fully God, was also fully human, He did not have the mind of the Father, the reason Jesus prayed to His Father, He did not pray to Himself. Like us He relied upon God's Spirit, but with a trust few of can achieve.

One anecdote I can give as an example is something I was an observer to, and if I have shared this before, please bear with me. A friend and I were travelling down to London for a Christian conference. We joined the train at Runcorn on the River Mersey, because it was closer than joining the train in Liverpool. The train was only half full, but the passengers had spread themselves out, and we found a seat opposite a lone male passenger. My friend was a more mature Christian than I, he was our church organist and led several ministry groups, but nothing prepared me for what was to happen. The journey to London took just over two and a half hours, and after about one-half hour my friend, I will call him Geoff (not his real name), went very quiet, leaned back and closed his eyes. After a few minutes Geoff leaned forward in his seat and asked the man opposite us, "Does the name Lydia mean anything to you?" The man

visibly stiffened and the blood drained from his face, he could have denied it, but instead he asked, "How do you know about Lydia?" Geoff said that he didn't actually know about her, but that God had told him that the man was married and was having an 'affair' with someone called Lydia. The man was astonished, and at first insisted that we were private detectives, after about an hour Geoff convinced him that we were not. He shared that he was not a believer, although he had been brought up in a Christian family. He seemed more concerned about his wife finding out at first, but as it sunk in that there was no other way Geoff could have known other than through God, he started to listen to what we were talking about.

G Geoff told him that God wanted him to break it off with Lydia that very day, or his marriage would break down very soon. That he should confess to God that he had done wrong and also to confess to his wife. Geoff told him that his wife would forgive him, if he did what God wanted of him. This then was the second stage, the 'Words of Wisdom', given by the Spirit to guide what should happen next. In my experience words of wisdom always follow words of knowledge. Geoff spoke to the man, who now shared his name, so I will call him Dave, almost all if the remainder of the journey into London. We attended the conference (on church leadership) and after it broke up at around five in the afternoon made our way back to Euston Station for our seven-ten train back to Liverpool. We got into our seats early, at about ten minutes before seven and sat discussing the conference. Suddenly, Dave appeared at the window and waved energetically at us, then boarded the train at the closest door, then came and sat with us. He told us that he had finished the affair with Lydia and had been waiting to talk to us on the return journey, and we did talk, all the way back to Runcorn, where we left the train to drive home. During that time Geoff led Dave in a prayer of acceptance and he asked Jesus into his life.

A few months later, Geoff and I were attending a Celebration Night in a town on the border of Liverpool called Prescott. Geoff was a part of the ministry team and I was playing in the worship band. At the end, when the fellowship time started, someone tapped me on the shoulder as I was packing up, I turned to see a couple, who I did not immediately recognise, then it hit me, it was Dave. He introduced his wife and asked where Geoff was, Geoff was ministering to someone, so we chatted while we waited. Dave and his wife told me they had joined a Liverpool church and his wife had made a commitment to Jesus. They said that they had never been happier, and that Jesus had really come into their marriage and sorted it out. They had two boys of school age, who had also seen the change and started attending church. We found Geoff and had a lovely conversation over tea and biscuits (cookies).

So this is how Words of Knowledge and Wisdom work, but let's look at what the Bible says about these words of wisdom.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸she is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” [James 1:5-8]

Wisdom comes in generous amounts from God through His Holy Spirit, so it must be something that God wants us to have in great portion. There seems to be two versions of this gift, the one that God's Spirit gives us as a one-time word for a specific occasion or for a specific person, and one of general wisdom. The way that this gift is sometimes described as the “word” of wisdom may indicate that it is one of the 'speaking gifts'. This version of the gift describes someone who can understand and speak out Biblical truth in such a

way as to apply it to real life situations with the gift of discernment. That is not to say that the wisdom is not Spirit inspired, as the Spirit will prompt you with whatever scripture to apply. It also does not mean that we need to start quoting Bible verses to people, generally unbelievers do not react positively to Bible-punchers. But we must know the principles of scripture, this is what equips us [**2 Timothy 3:17**]. It is scripture that teaches us knowledge of God [**2 Peter 1:3**].

Nevertheless, the Bible tells us that 'Words of Knowledge' are a gift of the Spirit, **1 Corinthians 12:8** says:

“For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,”

In the above verse we see again the coupling of the two gifts of the Spirit, knowledge and wisdom, that come according to the Spirit, not something we need to strive for, but something that the Spirit gives us as we need. The word "wisdom" comes from the Greek word "sophia" or "sofia" and means:

6. "cleverness, skill; a right application of knowledge" (Bullinger's);
7. "the ability or result of an ability to think and act utilizing knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, and insight" (Collins).

So 'wisdom' is applying 'knowledge' with skill, and therefore has ramifications far beyond knowing what to do with a word of knowledge. We need wisdom to enable us to apply the other gifts that the Spirit brings to us. If we receive a prophesy, we are inspired to pray for healing, given the gift of teaching, how can we use these gifts without the wisdom to allow it to have its fullest impact?

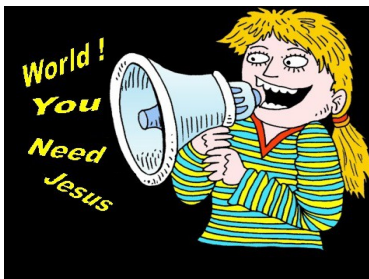
So then let us all be conscious of the leading of the Holy Spirit, open to Him and ready to apply His wisdom, knowledge, revelation and understanding, so that we may bless those that the Lord wishes to draw to Himself, and to truly bless God.

Amen?

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The Gift of Talking

This week we will look at three gifts of the Spirit that are closely related, like Words of Knowledge and Wisdom were; gifts that go hand in hand with each other. Those Gifts are: Teaching, Evangelism and Pastoring and they all involve speaking.



6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; [Romans 12:6-7].

“As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.” [2 Tim 4:5].

“And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,” [Ephesians 4:11].

“So, I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” [1 Pet 5:1-4].

Can we imagine what our Christian life would be like without teachers, evangelists or our pastors? Have we met those people who are so obviously gifted as speakers? I am sure we have also encountered those who are so obviously not gifted speakers, those

speakers that drone on, and on with the most uninspiring monologues. When the snoring from the back row becomes deafening and watching other members of the congregation becomes more interesting than the preach. These are possibly the most obvious gifting, or lack of it. Many years ago, a friend of mine was one of two official evangelists of the Church of England; he was the most gifted speaker I have heard, he would keep his congregation enthralled for as long as he kept speaking. His versions of Bible stories were legendary, he brought them to life, and the one thing I learned from him was the use of humor in preaches. He told me long ago that people remember things that shock them or things they laugh at, and I have found that so true.

So what does the Bible say about 'teachers'?

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2”For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body” [James 3:1-2].

So, for those who would ask for the gift of teaching, they should first read the health warning in this verse. Those who teach will be judged with greater strictness, I wonder how many of those who teach come out in a cold sweat when they read this? It is really about being a hypocrite, about teaching, or preaching to others when their lives do not stand up to scrutiny. Jesus had a lot to say about hypocrites, He called them out on more than one occasion including this time in **Matthew 15:7-9**:

”You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

*8“This people honours me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;*

***in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”***

Would we not, every one of us, point the finger at a preacher who preached against something they themselves were doing? How effective would that be? I have heard it so many times, non-believers calling Christians or the church hypocritical. It is for this very reason that teachers and preachers will be judged more harshly.

“Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us”. [Titus 2:7-8]

So here in Titus is the standard for a teacher, a life model with integrity, dignity and they should be sure of what they are saying (sound speech that cannot be condemned) in a way that cannot be criticized. So, the one thing that we should have is a good knowledge of the Bible, not being able to quote chapter and verse, necessarily, but knowing what the Scripture says. Here also they can rely upon the Spirit to remind them of Scripture, indeed a true gift of the Spirit for teaching will include the ability to listen to what the Spirit is saying. To be obedient to the Spirit is paramount, a teacher or preacher can go to a great deal of effort to construct a sermon, sometime demanding many hours of work, only to be told at the very last second, that is not what God wants you to talk about.

The Oxford Dictionary defines the word 'evangelism' as:

“the spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness.”

Wikipedia defines it as “the preaching of the gospel or the practice of proselytizing a particular doctrine or set of beliefs to others with the intention of converting others to the Christian faith. This makes it

sound really difficult, and very learned, but it is NOT. Sure, I have seen and heard evangelists who speak to thousands of people at a time, and no one denies these people have some gifting in the Spirit. However, a housewife meeting with a friend over coffee may also be evangelizing that friend. The person who blogs on the internet or posts on discussion forums is also evangelising. The word evangelist cannot be found in the Old Testament, it was a new Greek word that came into being after the time of Jesus' Earthly ministry, εὐαγγέλιον (transliterated as 'euangelion') then Latinised into 'evangelium', which we would recognise today. It was a word that was needed when Jesus gave us the Great Commission [**Matthew 28:19-20**] because He told us to evangelise, and that includes all of us. The Spirit gives us an indwelling need to share our faith with as many people as we can, the Spirit inspires us and encourages us all to do that.

¹¹”And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,”

So we, by His Spirit, are all equipped to build up the church a ministry that we all have been given. [**Matthew 16:15**]. We are the workers in the vineyard [**Matthew 9:37-38**] and you are His witnesses in the world [**Acts 1:8**]. So many of us pray for a ministry, saying, “why isn't God using me?” You have a ministry and an important one, YOU are an evangelist for Jesus. Evangelism is telling and explaining the Gospel of Christ, and we my friends have been appointed evangelists, called as Christ's witnesses.

“And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” [**Isaiah 6:8**].

No matter who you are or what your abilities, the Spirit can use you to speak, talk or witness for Jesus, because it takes all sorts of people to speak in different ways to a variety of people.

Paul writes: *“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”* [1 Corinthians 9:22].

Whether we know it or not we can all be, and most Christians have been, pastors. Pastoring is another under rated gift of the Spirit and often relates to last weeks study of 'Mercy'. In the Scriptures the word 'Shepherd' is mostly interchangeable with 'Pastor' and I think that is a really good interpretation of the word. When we look at how a shepherd looks after his sheep we can see how the two words are interchangeable, Jesus used the example of a shepherd [John 10:11] where Jesus compares Himself to a good Shepherd. In John 10:14 Jesus says how He knows His flock and how His sheep know His voice. In John 21:15-17 Jesus tells His disciples to "*Feed my lambs.*", "*Look after my sheep*" and "Feed My sheep" indeed John chapter 10 has a great deal to say about shepherds and sheep. And in Matthew 18:12-35 Jesus tells the parable about a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep safe in their pen while he goes off in search of the one who was lost. This is a wonderful picture of how important the lost are to Jesus, and a picture of how we should look after His sheep. Obviously when Jesus talks about feeding His sheep He is meaning to feed with the Word, the Gospel of Christ, but we are also to care for them.

Coincidentally this parable is followed in verse 21 by The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, which is about mercy, that we studied last week. So, we can see that mercy is very much a part of pastoring, something we should all be practising. The principle of the shepherd goes back to the Old Testament [Jeremiah 3:15],

where shepherds were plentiful; almost everyone knew a shepherd. David started life as a shepherd and God made him a King. Jesus was a King who became a shepherd.

“So, I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” [1 Peter 5:1-5].

We, then, are all evangelists, if we talk about the Gospel to anyone, out neighbour, our unsaved friend or members of our own family. That is our mission, ordained by Jesus and inspired by the Spirit through love. We don't evangelise because that's what God ordered us to do it, most Spirit led Christians do it because they are also pastors and want to share what Jesus has given us, share the Good News. We care (pastor) people because we love, we are given a heart for people, and love is another gift of the Spirit. We love because God first loved us [John 4:11]. In those three statements above “Look after my sheep” and “Feed My sheep” Jesus seems to be saying that we should care physically as well as spiritually for His sheep. If you look after someone, care about their problems, help them in either way, you are a pastor, and you do one of the greatest services that you can do. Jesus was the servant king, what higher calling is there than to serve others?

If you have explained the Gospel to someone, YOU are a teacher.

If you have spoken to an unbeliever about Jesus and the Gospel, YOU are an evangelist.

If you cared for someone, in God's name, YOU are a pastor.

If you have felt compelled to do any of the above by the conviction of your indwelling Spirit, then you my friend have this treasured gift, and where would the body of Christ be without you?

You have been given this valuable gift by Jesus, through His Holy Spirit, "*Feed my lambs.*", "*Look after my sheep*" and "*Feed My sheep*" [**John 21:15-17**].

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Knowing God

A Sunday School teacher began her lesson with a question for her young Christians, “Boys and girls, what do you know about God?”

A hand went up immediately, “He’s an artist,” said a small boy.

What makes you say that David,” asked the teacher.

“I heard in church,” David explained, “you know, Our Father, who does art in Heaven. . .”



Well perhaps not, but what do Christians want, above all else? Above riches, above wanting to do God's will, above modelling ourselves on Jesus. My guess would be that we want to 'know' God, above all else, to know our creator as He knows us. How then can we know God better, because knowing Him better is to understand Him more and to understand Him is to love Him more. First thing, let's look at the story of Job, a righteous man who has a whole book devoted to his steadfast faith in God.

Over the course of the Book of Job he goes from someone who had faith in God and therefore obviously knew about Him, but by the end of the book Job came to know God in very personal way. The Book of Job is certainly one of my favorite books of the Bible, mainly because it reveals God for who He is, through the amazing scientific facts that are revealed in the book. There is another side to the book because for a great deal of the book Job discusses what he knows about God with his friends, and it is very revealing. Job and his friend's knowledge is not up to scratch though. Then God talks to

Job and gives him a major revelation in his understanding of God. Job himself says:

***“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.”*** [Job 42:5-6]

Job thought he knew God but was ashamed and despised himself. We also feel that because we believe in God that we know God. Knowing of God is not knowing God, I might know that atomic reaction engines exist, but that does not mean that I know how they work, or could build one. Job came to realise that whatever happens, He always does what is best for us in the long run. We must always trust Him, that is what faith is.

To know someone, we really need to see them; these days many people make friends over the internet, they may or may not see a picture of that person, but we do not even know if that picture is of that person, or what that person looks like now. So, can we know God without seeing Him? God, we are told, is 'Spirit' so invisible to us humans; immortal, invisible, in the words of that great old hymn [Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:27]. In fact, the disciple John said, ***“No one has ever seen God; [John 1:18]***, John was obviously referring to God the Father, but can we apply that statement to Jesus? We are told that Jesus was fully God and fully human, did John believe that he just 'saw' the human part of Jesus, but 'knew' the God side. We can look at one of Jesus' statements that ***“not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.”***[John 6:46] Jesus obviously has seen Father God (what some translations call the 'God-head'), but He did not include people seeing Himself. So here we have several statements saying that no one has ever seen God, even one from

Jesus Himself, so how then do we account for statements in the Old Testament where God physically appears to various people?

Could it be that those appearances of God in the Old Testament were in fact previous appearances of Jesus? John's Gospel starts off with a now famous statement, one that has been discussed many times:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” [John 1:1] a little later he writes *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* [John 1:14]

However, Jesus the Son is indivisible from God the Father. They are one and the same, so the best guide we have to knowing God is to not only read the Bible, but to look at what Jesus was like, and we have four eyewitnesses to help us know Jesus. Indeed, Jesus is recorded as stating, in prayer to His Father, that the Father and He were one, [John 17:11] *“even as we are one”* [John 17:22]. So through the witness statements of the four Gospels let us get to know God a little better.

How many times have we heard that 'God is love' [1 John 4:8] and indeed Jesus instructed us about love, to love God and to love our neighbour as yourself [Matthew 22:37-39]. If there is a word that defines God it is 'love', the word appears 235 times in the New Testament (ESV), it is a word that actually defines Christians. I am reminded of that old song from the seventies & eighties. “They will know we are Christians by Our Love” [John 13:35] John sums the situation up when he says that if we do not love we do not know God [1 John 4:8]. Jesus' ministry was not just about bringing people back to God through His teaching and climactic sacrifice for our sins.

His ministry was also about people. Jesus showed God's love to the world by how He cares and showed mercy to those He healed and helped. One of the passages where we can learn much about God's nature is the text of what we call The Beatitudes in **Matthew 5:1-12**. This passage starts with blessings for “**those who recognize they are spiritually helpless**” (the poor in spirit). The reward is God’s kingdom of heaven for those who are downtrodden and have little influence in their world [v3].

Next Jesus speaks to “**those who mourn,**” those who are suffering a difficult time in their lives or are experiencing loss. God just wants to hug you and comfort you. This world is not without its difficulties, and He wants to comfort those who mourn (v4).

In the next verse [v5] Jesus/God expresses His love for the meek, those unassuming souls who are gentle and do not push themselves forward, or tread on others to achieve their own goals. Jesus tells us that they “shall inherit the earth”, obviously not this Earth, but the New Earth after glory.

The next verse tells us that He will bless those who fervently wish for righteousness. Those who strive to do what God wants them to do and want to obey His laws do good, and not evil [V6].

In **Genesis 1:3** we see that God is light; here we have a situation where God says, “Let light be,” (the literal Hebrew of the phrase), but what could God mean? At this point the Sun had not started to emit its light as this started on the fourth day, so God Himself must have provided the light. There are other instances in the Scripture where the phrase 'God is light' are found: “***God is light***” [1 **John 1:5**], Jesus says “***I am the light of the world***” [John 8:12], “***I will turn the darkness before them into light,***” [Isaiah 42:16], “***The light is among you for a little while longer***” [John 12:35], “***the Lord will be your everlasting light,***” [Isaiah 60:20]. Light is a form of energy. Miriam Webster defines spirit as “*a force within a human*

being thought to give the body life, energy, and power: soul” and also defines spirit as: “*a supernatural being or essence: such as a capitalized Holy Spirit*”. Here we have a definite connection between God and energy in the form of light. We also have another reference to energy in Acts, when the Holy Spirit, the promised 'Comforter' [Acts 1] manifested as tongues of flame above each of the disciple's heads, the first showing of the Holy Spirit [Acts 2:3] and the commencement of the New Covenant. Flames are of course light and therefore a form of energy, and we already know that God is spirit, and therefore a being of the purest energy. “*God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*” [John 4:24].

God is omnipotent (all-powerful) [Psalm 91:1-2, Ephesians 1:19-20] and God is also omniscient (all-knowing and all-wise) [Psalm 139:1-4, Psalm 33:13-15 & Luke 12:6-7] as well as omnipresent (ubiquitous, present everywhere at once) [Psalm 139:7-10, Psalm 23:4 & 2 Chronicles 16:9]. Three incredible attributes of our God, all powerful, knowing all and seeing all, not only in every place at this one time but being in every time, being outside of time itself.

Following on from the creation of light we can also say that through God's limitless power, He is our Creator and the Creator of the Universe. This amazing act defines Yahweh in the terms of power. As a spiritual being, we can easily understand that God exists in a different realm to us mortals, a realm where there is neither space nor time and it is into this realm that the universe was created. Scripture indeed tells us that God's time is rather different than ours, Psalm 90:4, tells us: “*For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night*”. Other verses of Scripture confirm this, “*one day is as thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*” [2 Peter 3:8]. Today science actually

confirms that what they call the 'Big Bang' occurred in a state where no time or space previously existed, the only condition that would have allowed the expansion of the universe, that the Bible also speaks of seven times [**Isaiah 40:22**]. Once God had created matter, He then proceeded to manipulate that matter to create all things from the basic building blocks of matter, as He did when He created Adam from the dust of the ground -matter [**Genesis 2:7**].

God is also the Ruler, King and giver of laws. The first laws were given at the end of the creation week. He ordained that the seventh day was to be kept as His day and a day of rest for man, and man was to keep that day holy [**Genesis 2:3**] and that a man and a woman should marry [**Genesis 2:24**].

Any ruler or king must be just and merciful, or he does not succeed as a king for long, our God is just that, both just and merciful, “*He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.*” [**Psalm 33:5**].

Jehovah is also dependable and consistent as **Deuteronomy 10:17-18** tells us:

“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. 18 He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. “

We live in an unjust and corrupt world, just read the news on any day of the year, but there is one thing that we can rely upon, our God is completely dependable. He is just and fair, so fair that He gives us chance after chance to exchange our sin for righteousness, even to the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, to pay the penalty for our sin.

Lastly for this study, and certainly not least is that God has ALL authority and Kingship in heaven and Earth. In **Exodus 20:3** God

declares that we shall have no other gods before (over) Him, and tells us that He is a jealous God who wants all of our worship. In the Torah, the law states that “*You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him*”[**Deuteronomy 13:4**]. Again, in the Psalm, 47: the psalmist declares that He is the Most High King over all the Earth [**Psalm 47:2**].

Our God is the ultimate power in this immense universe, that He Himself created through the Word that was made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He demands our obedience to His law. He tolerates no other god, in spirit or in any physical form, no rival. He is just, and His mercy sees no end for those who obey Him, He forgives our sin in multitudes and loves us beyond measure; even though, so many reject Him. He is dependable and is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and favors the weak and poor because they rely on Him rather than their own effort. It is He who places the stars and planets in their courses and sustains the universe, and my friends, **YOU** have a personal relationship with **HIM**.

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The 'Word' (Jesus) in the Old Testament



'Abraham and the Two Messengers' from a painting by Steve Zomok (reproduced by permission)

Many people claim that God's incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth, was the last in a series of appearances and incarnations through much of the Old Testament. In this study we will examine the evidence and maybe come to some conclusions.

One statement from Jesus certainly forces us to think that this is possibly correct.

“Jesus said to them, *Verily, verily, I say to you, Before Abraham's coming -- I am*; “[**John 8:58**]

This is a curious statement, because why 'before Abraham'? Why did Jesus not say, “before the foundation of the universe/world” as has been said of God? Was Jesus speaking of His previous incarnations? As we have seen, John's Gospel starts off with the statement about Jesus when he writes:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” [John 1:1-3]

John understood quite well that Jesus was involved in the creation as later he writes:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Jesus was the 'Word' made flesh. So it seem that maybe we have two facets of the Godhead; one, the Holy Spirit that can dwell within us and inspires and guide us. The other, that we call the Son who is able to take on human form and interact with this physical realm. The act of creation was indeed a very physical interaction within a physical universe. Could it be that when in Genesis 1 we read,

“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” *it was the first appearance of the Son?”*[Genesis 1:2].

This description actually gives us our first clue for when we are looking for the appearances of the Son in the remainder of the Old Testament, the Son goes by the name 'The Spirit of God'. This name is distinct from 'The Holy Spirit', which does make an appearance in the Old Testament [Psalm 51:10–12]&[Isaiah 63:11] but is not the same as God's Spirit or the Spirit of God. A little time later, the Scripture does not tell us how long after, we find Adam walking with God [Genesis 3:8], so, this could have been the second appearance of Jesus, but the first incarnation in human form? The context here is very physical, God was actually walking and later Adam says that he 'heard' God speaking, with a voice, God called Adam [v9].

One of the greatest mysteries in the Bible has been the identity of Melchizedek [Genesis 14:17-20]. In the New Testament it tells us that Jesus is “become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek”[Hebrews 6:19-20] inferring that Jesus is equal

Melchizedek. Genesis tells us that Melchizedek was priest of God Most High. Notice also in verse 18 it says that Melchizedek was the King of Salem, that is the city of Jerusalem. "Salem" comes from the Hebrew word meaning "peace" making Melchizedek the "King of Peace" yet another of Jesus' titles (or Prince of Peace)[**Hebrews 7:2**]. Also in the same verse Melchizedek brings bread and wine, a direct reference to the communion of the Last Supper. He then blesses Abraham in the way of the God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth. If we turn back to **Hebrews 7:2** we can also see that Abraham 'tithes' a tenth of everything to Melchizedek and then declares that, "He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace." So, the New Testament confirms to some extent that this could be yet another occurrence of the post Jesus incarnation of God's Son, interacting with the material world.

The next possible appearance comes later in the Book of Genesis [**Gen 16:7-13**]. In this passage we encounter one of the names by which Jesus (The Son) was possibly described in the Old Testament, "Angel of the LORD". No other appearance of an angel is named as 'of the Lord'. In this passage, The 'Angel of the Lord' physically meets Hagar at a spring and again spoke to her with a voice she could hear. He tells her that she is pregnant and that she would have a son called Ishmael who would cause trouble against all his kinsmen. That was certainly true as Ishmael started Islam, as God. He knew the future as well as the past, which places another seal on this appearance being 'The Son'. In verse 13 Hagar says "So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "***You are a God of seeing***", for she said, "***Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.***" So, Hagar recognizes who this Angel actually was and names Him 'God of seeing'.

Again in Genesis, Abraham goes to the door of his tent and sees three strangers. He ran to meet them and immediately recognized one of them as the Lord God [**Genesis 18:3**]. Abraham fetches water to wash their feet and some food, and Sarah is told that she will have a son. Sarah is amazed by this and says she is past child-bearing age, but one of the strangers tells her “Is *anything too hard for the Lord?*” [**Genesis 18:14**]. When the Lord left Abraham, He went off to Sodom and Gomorrah to see if the reports of their sin were true [**Genesis 18:20-21**], then later we read that the “Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the Lord out of heaven” [Gen 19:24]. The context in the Hebrew of this verse suggests that the Lord was standing on the earth and 'brought down' the fire and brimstone upon the twin cities, which fits snugly with what was said in His meeting with Abraham in **Genesis 18**.

Another interesting passage comes later in Genesis, when Jacob is off travelling. The Bible says Jacob was wrestling with someone referred to as “a Man”. The Man touches Jacob’s hip in answer to his struggle against the Man. Jacob then presents a strange request to the Man – to bless him! The Man does so, and Jacob pronounces he has ‘seen God face to face’ [**Gen 32: 24-30**]. Although it could be a dream, the writer does not state this and it is written as if it was a physical wrestling match, and Jacob does state the he has seen God face to face.

“Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.” [**Exodus 3:1-2**]

This is a very famous story, of the burning bush that placed Moses on the road to saving the Hebrew nation from slavery in Egypt. As we saw in last weeks study, light and heat/flame are all connected with God as Spirit. Here then we have another instance of flame, but a flame that does not consume. It is worth noting here that again the scripture uses the term Angel of the Lord and that He appeared 'IN' the flame, so Moses was not talking about a flame but a person in the flame. Moses obviously realized who He was and said he would avert his eyes, but He said “*Moses, Moses!*” *And he said, “Here I am.”* meaning that He was indeed there. As the God-head is omnipresent He cannot be in one location, so again this could be The Son, the previous appearance of Jesus.

We now come to one of the most famous stories in the Bible, one that every school-child used to learn at school, which probably is not the case now; the story of the Daniel and the Fiery Furnace [**Daniel 3:23-28**]. The story is about three believers Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego who refused to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar's giant golden idol, under pain of death, by furnace. The furnace was possibly a brick kiln or an ore smelter, but it needed to be something already in use as Nebuchadnezzar ordered it to be made seven times hotter than 'usual'. So, the furnace was not a usual means of execution, but a whim of the king. So, the three believers refused to bow down and were condemned to death. The three were bound and thrown into the over-heated furnace, but when Nebuchadnezzar looked he saw four men, unbound and walking around in the flames unharmed. The account declares that Nebuchadnezzar stated that “the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”.

What makes us think that this may be another appearance of The Son? Firstly the fourth person seems to be a physical being walking like the other three and protecting those that are His from harm.

Secondly the “fourth man” is referred to by the king as “one like the Son of God” (or a son of the gods). This is an unlikely expression if this was merely an angel. Jesus often is referred to as 'the Son of God' in NT passages [Hebrews 7:3]. Thirdly, the fourth man performs a miracle, and shields the other three from the fiery furnace; and only the three exit the furnace, not the fourth. Lastly the king acknowledges that this “person” was indeed an Angel “sent from the Most High God to protect His servants”.

In **Judges 6**, we find 'The Angel of the Lord' again, in conversation with Gideon, under an Oak Tree. Gideon was chosen to liberate Israel from the Midianites who had been oppressing them. Gideon did not recognise who he was talking to, then realises who it is and thinks he is about to die. However, the Lord assures him “*Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die.*” **24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord Is Peace.**” [**Judges. 6:23-24**].

In Joshua, chapter five we learn how Jesus appeared to Joshua. When he was close to Jericho he met a man brandishing a sword, Joshua challenged the man, asking him who he was. The man answered that “No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.” When Joshua heard this he fell on his face and worshipped him, and the man allowed this. Now logically any angel or other messenger of the Lord would have stopped Joshua from worshipping [**Acts 10:26**] [**Acts 14:15**]. Joshua asked what message He had for him and the 'Commander' answered, “*Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy,*” which was the same thing said to Moses when he encountered the burning bush. The fact that the ground was holy because Jesus was standing on it and the allowed worship point to the fact that this may have been Jesus once again.

There are many other supposed appearances of the pre-incarnate Jesus in the Old testament, there are over fifty occasions of the 'Angel of the Lord' and another ten of 'The Angel of God' where there is less evidence. Quite a number in any case, many maintain that these events were merely angels and just strangers. Some point to the visit of the three men to Abraham, where they seem to have eaten cakes and drunk milk with their host, which they say points to them being human, However we must remember that Jesus, in His risen body, ate with His disciples. Many of the appearances point the way to the Messiah, which the whole of the Old Testament does. It is no surprise then that there have been no incidents of Jesus in the New Covenant period, since Jesus' assertion. Which does not mean that God has abandoned us by any means. Jesus did the job He was supposed to do, to make a way clear for us sinners to attain glory, to be accepted into the presence of God. The New Covenant is a period of choice, not a time for God to interfere physically in order to bring His people back to Himself. Jesus is with us now in the form of the Holy Spirit, who constantly guides us, lives within us and we in Him.

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The Women Who Lead Us to Jesus

The role of women in the Bible and consequently in our faith has been marked, from saving the nation of Israel to bearing out Lord Jesus Christ, God has used women dynamically and dramatically. From the first woman, Eve, from who sprang the whole human race to leaders of the first churches, women have played a pivotal role in God's plan. In this study we will look at just some of the ways women have formed our faith.

If one reads Genesis one cannot be blamed for thinking that the creation of Eve was an



afterthought [**Genesis 2:18-25**] because this comes at the end of the second chapter of Genesis. However, if we turn to the account of creation in chapter one we find that Eve, woman, was in God's plan from the start [**Genesis 1:27**], in God's image – male and female. Although it was Eve that first fell for Satan's lies and then convinced Adam to disobey God, we have to remember that Eve was the mother of the human race, and a part of the gene pool for every race under the Sun [**Genesis 3:20**]. Adam was created from the dust of the ground, I have heard it said that Adam was refined dirt, [**Genesis 2:7**] but as Eve was created from man's side, she was refined man.

Generally speaking most women in Genesis are anonymous. The next woman we encounter is Cain's wife. [**Genesis 4:17**] Other than Cain had a wife, scripture tells us nothing about her, not her name or where she came from. We are left to assume that she was Cain's sister, however at this time incest was not yet forbidden by the law of Moses, and we need to remember that, as just the second generation,

their gene-banks were still very rich. Both Cain and his wife were involved in the murder of their brother Able, because God regards a man and his wife as one [**Genesis 2:24**]. Cain was subsequently banished and went to live in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden [**Genesis 4:16**] His wife obviously went with him because they subsequently had a son, Enoch, in that land [**Genesis 4:17**], so here was Cain's wife's purpose.

The next woman comes into the story some seventeen-hundred years later, again Noah's wife is anonymous other than we know she existed. The Bible does not give us her name. She is not mentioned until God tells Noah that he is to build an Ark and take his wife and family into it, and even then she is only referred to as his "... wife..." [**Genesis 6:18**]. The next women are mentioned as the wives of Noah's sons [**Genesis 6:18**]. Scripture records that they were faithful to fulfil their duties as wives, and that they were spared because they faithfully followed their husbands [**Genesis 7:7 & 13**]. The first named woman after Eve is Sarah (Sarai) [**Genesis 11:29**]. Sarai means "Princess" and Sarah means "noblewoman" which indicates she was the daughter of a leader or king, and the beautiful half-sister of Abraham [**Gen 20:12**]. Sarah is significant in Scripture in that she was unable to have children, but God blessed her in her old age and gave her a son, Isaac [**Gen 21:5**] in fulfilment to His promise. Isaac would father Esau and Jacob. Jacob would father 12 sons who would become heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah would come David, and finally Jesus of Nazareth, God's promised Savior. From this we can see how significant Sarah was in God's plan. Abraham's servant Hagar also deserves a mention in Scripture, as the name 'Hagar' means "flight," it is unclear as to whether this was her actual name or one given to her after Sarah dealt harshly with her and she fled to the wilderness [**Genesis 16:6**] where she gave birth to Ishmael, but then returned. The significance here is that

it was Hagar's son Ishmael who became the father of Islam. Later when Ishmael was thirteen, she was banished.

Next, we encounter Rebekah (Rebecca), the daughter of Bethuel who was the nephew of Abraham. Rebecca colluded in Jacob's deception to obtain Isaac blessing over Esau [**Genesis 27:12-13**]. She knew that Esau would not make a good leader for the family. Her deception of her husband was wrong, even though Rebecca was a good woman she did wrong, but for the right reasons. God's plan will come to pass in spite of our misplaced attempts to help Him. We also read about Rachel and Leah who were both in the line to the twelve tribes of the Israeli nation. Dinah the daughter of Jacob. [**Genesis 30:21; 34:1**] who was kidnapped and raped by Hamor the Hivite.

The beginning of the Book of Exodus finds us in a male dominated world, where Jacob and his clan of seventy men and their families descend on Egypt, all the men are named but the wives and daughters remain anonymous. Then there is a new Pharaoh on the throne who feels threatened by all these foreigners around him, and is unaware of Joseph. Pharaoh enslaves the Israelites and decrees a 'cull' on all male Israelite babies, to Pharaoh the women are insignificant. However Pharaoh reckoned without God's plan and a Israelite woman called 'Jochebed', she was a Hebrew woman living in slavery in Egypt, she was the daughter of a Levite, and she married Amram, another Levite [**Exodus 2:1**]. It seems that Jochebed married her nephew, so she was Amram's aunt as well as being his wife [**Exodus 6:20**]. Jochebed also had a daughter Miriam before Moses was born [**Exodus 6:20 & Exodus 15:20**] who was a prophetess. To save Moses his mother kept him safe for three months and then made a basket from reeds and pitch [**Exodus 2:3**] to be found by Pharaoh's daughter [**Exodus 2:5-10**]. God even arranged it that through

Moses' sister, his own mother became the child's nursemaid [**Exodus 2:7-9**]. Here then are two women who figured greatly in God's plan and seemingly were guided by Him to ensure the survival of one of the few people to come face to face with God.

Both the Gospel of Matthew and Luke's Gospel have the genealogies of Jesus, showing His lineage from King David ('of David's line') according to the prophesy [**2 Sam 7**]. There is a difference between the two genealogies, Luke's Gospel [**Luke 3:23-38**] is the standard type listing Jewish males, however Matthew's Gospel [**Matthew 1:1-16**] includes both Gentiles and women that were brought into the people of God. In fact, there were several women that were significant in God's plan. There are five women in that genealogy of Jesus in Matthew's genealogy, and in a time when genealogies didn't usually contain a single female name, why are these women included, and what is their significance?

Tamar is the first of these women, a strange woman to include in Jesus' genealogy, this is a woman who solicited sex from her father-in-law, by whom her son Perez was conceived. We do not know where Tamar came from, some think she was a Canaanite. She had been widowed twice, both times by sons of Judah, and she had been promised to the third son Shelah. Judah suspected something was wrong, having had two sons struck dead, and so delayed the marriage. Tamar was in a difficult situation, back in her father's house, no status and no inheritance and not eligible to remarry since she was 'waiting' for Shelah. Her future lay in having a child of the house of Judah. In desperation she posed as a prostitute and went to the widower Judah hoping for a child from the head of the house [**Genesis 38:1-25**]. Judah propositions Tamar not knowing who she is, and then condemns her when she announces she is pregnant. He is so outraged that Judah tries to condemn Tamar to death. Tamar

protects herself and her son by obtaining Judah's personal belongings, including his seal and staff. Eventually Judah acknowledges Tamar and her son and announces that Tamar is more righteous than he [**Genesis 38:26**], and provides for Perez.

Next is the prostitute Rahab, another gentile woman who lived in Jericho [**Joshua 2:1**]. Possibly using that profession in order to provide for her parents and siblings. She is best known for hiding the Israeli spies who are on a reconnaissance mission prior to Joshua's attack. Rahab is looking for a way to get out of prostitution and she is sure that God's people will take her city anyway and she seems to fear God. It is already common knowledge how the Israelites came out of Egypt and how they crossed the Red Sea [**Joshua 2:10**], she has also heard of the defeat of other cities across the Jordan, Kings Sihon and Og. Jericho being the gateway to Canaan and wants herself and her family to survive. She also has 'cords' to signify 'belonging', so the spies, as a reward for hiding them tell her “when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. “ [**Joshua 2:19**]. As was the plan Rahab and her family were saved during the total rout of Jericho. But that was not the end of Rahab, because she goes on to marry Salmon, a Jew whom tradition says was one of the spies she hid, and they have a son, Boaz. Boaz eventually grows up to be a righteous and godly man [**Ruth 2:1**].

Which brings us neatly to Ruth, another Gentile, and like Tamar, a widow, but unlike either Tamar and Raab, Ruth is a woman of virtue, a woman of noble character [**Ruth 3:11**]. Ever since hearing God's name Ruth had been a true follower of the one true God, due to the instruction by her mother-in-law Naomi. In the way of the Israelites

Ruth persuades Boaz to marry her in order to provide for her mother-in-law in their old age, which comes in the form of a son, Obed. Ruth had supplied a son, who would grow up to be the grandfather of, none other than King David [**Ruth 4:16-22**] and created the lineage of Jesus.

Next is one of those anonymous women that are simply recorded as ‘. . . the wife of’ and this is the wife of Uriah. Although she married David, she was not really his in any real sense. David the womaniser, coveted Uriah's wife and was complicit in her subduction by him. David, although probably Israel's greatest king, did commit adultery. Her husband was possibly Israel's greatest general of the time, so to solve the problem of her being married, David sent Uriah to the most dangerous battle front where he would be killed. It is not only Uriah who dies but child of that union with David dies also.

Later David repents of the adultery and God in His mercy allows David to have a son by David's wife Bathsheba, that son was Solomon the Wise, who continued the line to Joseph and Jesus. Which allows us to arrive in the fifth woman in Matthew's genealogy, Mary who was the wife of Joseph and the parent of our Saviour [**Matthew 1:16**]. Mary was not a gentile, she was as Jewish as they come and she was a virgin, who, unlike the other four women, was untainted and had found favor with her Lord. Mary was devout and trusted God with her very life, her reputation and her future hope. An angel appears to Mary and tells her that she will be pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit and that she must call him Jesus, and she believes him. This shows a complete and utter trust in her God, for a young girl of Mary's age this was and is a remarkable thing, and her answer shows this when she responds, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” [**Luke 1:35-38**]. Mary seemed to have an in-depth understanding of

scripture, another remarkable thing for a woman and a woman of her age, although like the rest of us, as a fallen person she was not sinless, she was a godly, virtuous, and young good Jewish girl.

Here then are the women who contributed considerable to the culmination of God's plan in Jesus Christ, women who were variously godly, slaves, miss-fits, of loose morals, scheming, brave, unimportant, unknown, widows and all sinful; but all were used in God's plan. Each of these women changed the course of Earth history by obedience to God. Some helped to form the very nation of Israel, others contributed to the line that resulted in the birth of Jesus, so one would assume that these were fine upstanding women of great virtue, not so. They were ordinary people, some not even Jewish and many except Miriam Ruth and Mary had less than virtuous backgrounds. They struggled with life, fighting for their futures, like Rahab just wanted to survive. One thing that strikes me, just how much like modern people they were, and like Moses, they encourage me certainly, and I pray they encourage you. They were all the sort of people that Jesus came to save; a sinless God/human being in the lineage of sinners. One thing we must not forget; Jesus was fully God; but He was also fully human, which means that Jesus had to deal with all the issues of a human life, yet He never gave in to sin. If Jesus did it as a human, why can't we?

© 14/05/2017

The Lord's Prayer



“Lord,
teach us to
pray...”

One day Jesus was praying and one of the twelve asked, “*Lord, teach us to pray, as John (the Baptist) taught his disciples.*” 2 And he said to them, “*When you pray, say:*” [Luke 11:1-2]

What followed has been copied into every language verbatim, most churches use an authorised version of what Jesus taught, some church denominations say

a longer version and some stick with the version recorded in the Gospels. Some, very few, believe that Jesus gave the prayer as a pro-former, a pattern, rather than a ready-made prayer for us to repeat over and over, parrot-fashion. So, what was Jesus teaching us through His disciples?

In most protestant churches in the UK the prayer starts, 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name'. Which differs from the ESV Gospel version:

“Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.” [v3]

However the literal translation from the Greek reads (YLT) “***Our Father who art in the heavens; hallowed be Thy name: Thy reign come; Thy will come to pass, as in heaven also on earth;***” [v3].

It seems then that the modern translations, like the ESV, truncate or edit Jesus' words for some reason, so please excuse me if I use for my texts the Young's Literal Translation (YLT) for this study.

The prayer format begins,

Our Father who art in the heavens; In this first phrase of the prayer we acknowledge exactly who God is, our Heavenly Father, the one who created us and looks after us, that assumes the duties of the perfect father. It also acknowledges where He is, but here we find a strange anomaly, the word used is the plural, “***heavens***”. In Greek the word heaven means several different things; the sky, space (universe) or paradise/heaven (God's realm), so one possibility here may be that Jesus is indicating the Father is everywhere, sky, universe and heaven. The Hebrew word for heavens, as used in the first verse of the Genesis, is "*shamayim*", which means literally 'heights' or 'elevations', note that both of these are in the plural tense. Some believe that there are several heavens, as in levels of the place where the angels exist, however the plural heavens in Genesis clearly mean sky, space and paradise/heaven. There is no record in the whole of scripture of God creating any other heavens. This principle was continued into Greek, the word may be different, but the principle remains.

“ . . . ***hallowed be Thy name:***” or Holy is your name, this acknowledges that God is holy. It is about keeping His name holy, honoring Him and respecting Him, seeing Him for who He really is and what He has done for us. The Greek word use here is '*hagiazō*' meaning “to make holy” to venerate, purify or consecrate, note all of these words are adjectives, doing words. So Hallowed is something we should actually do, when we worship or praise Him, we hallow Him. Jesus was actually saying that we should start our prayers with worship, because He is worthy of our praise.

“***Thy reign come*** “ or Your kingdom come. Jesus spoke so much about The Kingdom, so it was natural that He would have included it, it was what His ministry was all about. Jesus was, *is* King so must

God be King and you can't have a king without a kingdom. By praying Thy kingdom reign or come, we are inviting God to be our king we are asking for help to act, talk and think the way God wants us to, and for the advancement of that kingdom.

“Thy will come to pass, as in heaven also on earth;” or Your will be done on Earth as in Heaven. We here acknowledge that Heaven falls under His total rule, or will; and we are asking for God's rule here on Earth. This means really surrendering to God's will or rule and His plans for us, which are always perfect and the best for us and His kingdom. It is also a reminder that we are to pray for God's plan for us in our lives and not what we want or our own ambitions.

“our appointed bread be giving us daily;” or Give us each day our daily bread. The meaning here is obvious, our 'Daily Bread' symbolizes both our spiritual and our physical needs, everything we need to sustain our lives. It is not a demand, but is an acknowledgement that He is the one who supplies our needs, that we depend on Him for everything. It is interesting that in the original literal Greek it uses the word, 'appointed' bread. Matthew's version differs here, whereas he asks for the continuance of supplying our needs, Luke here seems to imply that Jesus was talking about an allotment, an amount that is our appointed amount of daily bread.

“and forgive us our sins, for also we ourselves forgive every one indebted to us;” or, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. By asking forgiveness for our sins we acknowledge that we have sinned, otherwise we would not be asking for forgiveness. The 'Catch 22' is in the second part of the verse, as we forgive others, who have sinned against us. Some versions use trespasses, or here indebtedness. There are three main principles in action here; firstly, saying this prayer presupposes that we have forgiven any and all

people who have offended us. If we have not forgiven someone who has offended us, then we are hypocrites. Secondly the prayer, and therefore Jesus, seems to link our forgiveness with our forgiveness of others, so the question remains; does our confession and repentance of our sin over-ride any unforgiving of others? And thirdly that we can only forgive those who have sinned, or offended, against us, that is God's prerogative, so forgiving someone for sinning against a third person is useless. This also includes confession of your sin to another person, although this can be helpful, that person cannot give forgiveness where you have sinned against another person. Some translations, like this YLT, use the phrase '*those who are indebted to us*', this then refers to people who owe us debts, and indeed Jesus preached several times about forgiving, or writing off debt [Matthew 18:13-30]. Indeed, the Torah deals with this in some detail, that debts should be cancelled after a specific time.

Luke differs from Matthew's version slightly here. Luke uses the verb "forgive" 'αφιημι'= '*aphieemi*' meaning we are asking for forgiveness here and now, but 'forgive in in the present aorist tense suggesting an on-going action from us. Matthew phrases his version as if forgiveness is a one-time action, whereas Luke's suggests the need of humans to forgive again and again, not simply once.

In most of the translations of Luke's Gospel he seems to use the word 'sin' but in Matthew's Gospel he seems to keep the word debt, which makes it unclear as to what Jesus was referring to. Was 'debt' just a euphemism for sin or was Jesus actually speaking about debt, which may have been a problem in His day. Certainly the Greek word ὀφειλήματα may well be metaphorical, but the verb ἄφεξ has more to do with debt relief than moral forgiveness.

“and mayest Thou not bring us into temptation; but do Thou deliver us from the evil.” or lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. On the face of things this verse seems to be asking God for protection from temptation, but if there is no temptation how do

we demonstrate our love for God or our commitment? However, it seems more logical that what the prayer is actually asking for is the Lord to give us strength to resist temptation, or bad influences. Some version use the word 'time of trial' here, which again is something that God often allows in order to test us or encourage growth. There is a principle involved here that I have heard many times which reads, "It's not what you have to deal with, but how you deal with it". One commentator has this to say about this part of the Lord's prayer:

"Accurately translated, this line deals with love of the Father rather than fear of the devil. The final phrase, τοῦ πονηροῦ, does not translate as "evil" or as "the evil one". The problem is that πονηροῦ only means "evil" in the ecclesiastical semantics for classical Greek that was developed after the prayer was written. In any case, making this term more specific (i.e., replacing "grievous" with "evil" or "the Evil One") causes the request made in this line to be less general, that is to say, weaker."

So it seems that the original is less about the devil, or evil, and more about grieving God. The line should read *"but draw us to you, away from that which is grievous."*

Luke's Gospel ends at this point, but Matthew's Gospel add one more line:

"Thine is the reign, and the power, and the glory -- to the ages. Amen." or For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory. Many scholars believe that this line was a later addition to the Gospel. This powerful statement may have been falsely characterized as a late addition because it is not found in the two earliest Greek witnesses of Matthew 6:13 - Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, both of these from the 4th century. Yet it is found in the third earliest Greek witness of Matthew 6:13, the codex Washingtonensis from the 4th to 5th century. It is such a powerful statement that maybe it does not

matter that it may have been added later, is it something Jesus would have said? I would think it is because it echoes the statement at the start of the prayer. It says that God is the King, reign/Regina/royal/monarch, it states that all power comes from God and to Him is all glory throughout the ages.

“*Amen*” simply, this word started its life in Old Testament Hebrew. It was pronounced as “*ei men*” and it literally meant “*so be it, verily, true,*” or “*truly*” (literally “*truth*”) and was used as a declaration of the truth of what you had just said. Rather like us finishing an astounding statement by saying, “Honest!” This was likely continued or carried over into Greek as “*ἀμήν*” with approximately the same meaning, but with an extra use of ‘*so be it*’. As it came into more common use the word was repeated by those listening who repeated “so be it” and over time it came to mean “I agree.”

The principles of the sections of the Lord's Prayer are excellent ones, but in my view should not be said without some thought as to what we are saying, and certainly not read out of a book as part of a tradition. We need to consider what we are saying, and if we have any issues at all, we should not say the prayer. This is the problem, we so often say it without thinking, like a traditional poem learned at our mother's knee. I still believe that Jesus never meant His prayer to be repeated word for word for two-thousand years, I believe that it was an example, a 'form' around which we should craft our own prayers. We can take the various sections and just make a bullet list of the shape of our prayer:

8. Acknowledge who God is and where His domain is.
9. To declare He is holy.
10. That we wish to further His Kingdom.
11. To say we will do His will, just as Heaven does.

12. Ask for Him to provide for our needs (including what we are petitioning for).
13. Ask for forgiveness for our sin.
14. Declare that we have/will forgive those that sin/offend against us.
15. Give us strength to resist temptation and to resist offending God.
16. Declare again how great is our God.

And bearing in mind **Matthew 6:14-15**, that follows on from the prayer, Jesus states:

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

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All Of Us

The following obituary appeared in our church magazine recently:

Our church was saddened to learn this week of the death of one of our most valued members, Someone Else. Someone's passing creates a vacancy that will be difficult to fill. Else has been with us for many years and for every one of those years, Someone did far more than a normal person's share of the work. Whenever there was a job to do, a class to teach, or a meeting to attend, one name was on everyone's list, "Let Someone Else do it." Whenever leadership was mentioned, this wonderful person was looked to for inspiration as well as results; "Someone Else can work with that group."



It was common knowledge that Someone Else was among the most liberal givers in our church. Whenever there was a financial need, everyone just assumed Someone Else would make up the difference.

Someone Else was a wonderful person; sometimes appearing superhuman. Were the truth known, everybody expected too much of Someone Else. Now Someone Else is gone! We wonder what we are going to do.

Someone Else left a wonderful example to follow, but who is going to follow it? Who is going to do the things Someone Else did?

When you are asked to help this year, remember -- we can't depend on Someone Else anymore.

OK, the above is a spoof, as I am sure you have realized, but it does say a lot about most churches. Not only are many jobs accepted by a very few of the number, but often the majority of the congregation

just assume that some other member will do that job. Rarely have I seen a situation where, when the pastor asks for a volunteer to take on a responsibility, the air is filled with raised hands. The usual situation is that members start to look in any direction other than at the pastor, never have feet been so studied in such detail. Peter instructs us:

“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” [1 Peter 4:9-11]

When I read the Book of Acts one thing comes across very clearly, those early Christians shared, and served each other.

“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” [Acts 4:32] (YLT)

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common.” [Acts 2:44]

These two verses have one word in common, and that is the same word that I have just used, '**common**'. Certainly that was their possessions, material things, as **Acts 4:32** suggests, but that same verse says that their hearts and souls were one, they were of one mind. In verse **2:44** we learn that they had 'all things in common', now in my book (a Dictionary) the word 'all' includes everything. Not just the material things but the spiritual, the responsibilities, the

issues, the financial, problems, failures and the successes. They ate together in the mornings and worshipped God together, dedicated themselves to Him and they then went to their work. Some had jobs, like Paul himself, who was a tent maker, others worked within the church. In the evenings they came back together and gave thanks, worshipped and ate their meal together. Those who had a good day rejoiced and lifted those who had not had such a good day. They were all equal and shared in the responsibilities of the fellowship.

We are one body in Christ, His body on Earth, and as such each person has been given a gift, a practical gift, with which we use to serve each other [**1 Peter 4:10**]. Because God called us, called us into freedom to serve one another in love [**Galatians 5:13**]. Jesus told us not to think ourselves greater than any other brother or sister, but whoever was to be the greatest must be the servant just as Jesus was the Servant King [**Matthew 20:26-28**]. **Romans 12:4 & 5** says: *“For as in one body we have many members, [for parts]and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”*

So not only are we given those wonderful spiritual gifts we are given practical gifts. In addition, Jesus knew that if His church was to flourish and operate in the way He had instructed the disciples, that His followers would need these gifts of organisation. The original apostles had a clear view of this; one example is a passage in **Acts 6**. The passage tells about complaints from the Greek members of the church, against the Hebrews, the Jews, that their widows were being neglected when food was being distributed. It seems that the problem was about staffing rather than about racial issues. So, a meeting was called for all of the disciples in order to right the injustice. Someone said that it was not right to give up preaching to serve at the table. So, they chose men full of the Spirit of wisdom and gave them the job of looking after the dining arrangements so

that the apostles could concentrate on their ministry. Those seven men could have looked upon their jobs as unimportant and lowly, but without them the ministry of the word would have been compromised. Their jobs in service were of equal importance to ministering the word. [**Acts 6:1-7**]

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” [Mark **10:45**]

These are important words from Jesus, they tell us something of God’s character; if Jesus, being God, can come to serve, and serve to the point where He gave up His life for us as a sacrifice for our eternal lives, then how much more should we serve each other? Does not works accompany faith, a practical demonstration of faith through works [James 2:18]. Jesus demonstrated this very point when at the Last Supper He washed the feet of His disciples [**John 13:12-17**],

Jesus told His disciples that He had done this as an example for them to follow. The washing of feet was a custom hospitality in those days, and we don’t need to wonder why too much. People generally wore open sandals and in first century Israel and the streets were full of the detritus of the time. We have the exhausts from motor vehicles to cope with, but the vehicles of the day were mostly donkeys, and other animals also wandered the streets producing their own exhausts. Feet get pretty stinky, so a host’s washing of a guest’s feet was more an essential than a curtesy, more like self-protection. It was more than that, it was an accepted custom that showed service, acceptance and welcome.

Jesus turned everything on its head, He said that the first must be last and everyone’s servant [**Mark 9:35**], but how many of us can say this about ourselves? How many Christians put others first,

above themselves and above their own needs? Isn't this what Jesus is saying? In verse 37 Jesus says:

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

This verse is centred around one word, translated here as ‘receives’, the Greek word ‘*dechomai*’, which in this context is about hospitality. Strong’s dictionary tells us its meaning is to “receive hospitality” or to “receive into one’s family”, and note that the one who receives that child(-like) person (in My name) also receives (accepts) the Son and the Father.

We often, I am sure, try to do good works, but how far do we go? How long does our help last before we lose patience and stop helping? Does that help involve thrusting a few dollars or pounds into someone’s hand and pat them on the shoulder? How much do we think that helps with someone with emotional issues? Not all problems can be solved with monetary help, a helping hand does not always have bills in it. So often the cash we drop into the collection plate is more to ease our conscience rather than to help anyone, and we also need to ask how much of that money directly helps the needy, rather than the salaries of church workers or upkeep of the church fabric. Jesus says that the measure we use in our giving and helping others is the same measure that will be used when blessing us [**Luke 6:38**], the more we give the more blessings we will receive. So, when our patience runs out with that seemingly hopeless case, so will God’s patience with us run out. That adage comes to mind, ‘give a man a fish and he can eat for one day, give a man a fishing rod and he can feed himself for life’. I am not sure I would want to live on just fish all my life, but I am sure you get the principle, and teaching someone to fish takes time.

Although we are all different and have different skills and gifting behaviour, we all have a place and a function within the body. Just as losing a hand or a leg makes the function of the body difficult, when members of the body refuse to do their bit, it makes the functioning of our fellowship difficult. The more members who refuse their responsibility, the more difficult it becomes to carry out the purpose of the church. Every part of our bodies was designed with a purpose, and each of us who were called by God to be a part of the body has a purpose in God's plan [**Jeremiah 29:11**].

Let us also be wise; do not assume that someone else will do it, but let us not also take on duties that are beyond our skill set or gifting. We cannot all be great evangelists, or administrators, finance experts or group leaders, but we all have a purpose and a duty to perform. We cannot do without the one who cleans the church, or maintains the electrical equipment, or the individuals of the prayer group, or the member who just puts an arm around the shoulder of someone who is hurting. Every task is of equal importance and each person of equal value, both in the fellowship and in God's sight. Let us not shrink from our duties, but accept them with good grace and enthusiasm.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’
[**Matthew 25:35-40**]

Healing

When many people think about prayer they immediately think of healing, praying for someone who is sick or in some difficulty. Most people,



**PRAY &
BELIEVE**

including non-Christians on the periphery of faith, only pray when they are in need, money problems, sickness, relationship difficulties, etc. So, I wanted to look at one of these, healing the sick, and see what the Bible tells us about divine intervention into illness. A subject that is close to all our hearts, is there anyone who has not suffered some sort of illness at some time in their lives?

Firstly, if we start way back in the Old Testament, where it seems that God used sickness as a weapon, or at least a deterrent, against sin. God seems to tell His people that if they serve Him they will be spared from sickness [**Exodus 23:25**]. Later God again uses sickness as a weapon, when He promises to visit all of the nasty illnesses, which it seems His people knew full well, upon those that hate His people [**Deuteronomy 7:15**]. This theme develops as the Law is given to Moses and here it starts to be used as a deterrent against those who break the law of God, God threatens the law breakers with “*extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting*” [**Deuteronomy 28:59**]. This in addition to the lists that appear through Deuteronomy 28, and the list in v25-28 [**Deuteronomy 28:25-28**]. So, it is no wonder that the Jews became paranoid about breaking the law. It seems then that sicknesses were dependent upon keeping the law, which establishes a link between sin and sickness, and as we

realize, all sin has a consequence. One of these consequences is that it separates us from God.

Isaiah 53:5 Gives us the first hint about healing that was to eventually develop, this famous prophesy states:

“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”

Isaiah prophesies that the coming messiah will be crushed (killed) for our sin and will be wounded to give us healing. This is confirmed in the Gospel of Matthew [**Matthew 8:17**]. If this is a gift from Jesus that is given along with the Holy Spirit when we accept Christ as our personal Saviour, why are so many Christians suffering from sickness? Jesus gave His disciples the authority over sickness as well as bad spirits, healing every sickness and affliction [**Matthew 10:1**]. Today we are His disciples and therefore do we not have that authority, in Jesus' name? So why then are our prayers so often ineffective, and brothers and sisters we pray for are not healed when we pray so fervently? I am sure most of us have been disappointed when someone we have been praying for has not been healed or even dies, despite maybe hundreds of people praying. John's gospel suggests that if we believe in Christ, they will do the works that Jesus did, and even greater works [**John 14:12**]. Is this about our faith, which is itself a gift of the Spirit, or about believing, or is there a difference between faith and believing? In the Greek the two are almost the same, '*pisteuo*' meaning to believe – a faith in something or someone; and '*pistis*' meaning to have faith – a moral conviction of spiritual truth. These two words seem virtually the same but there is a slight difference, one is a belief in something, whereas faith is a conviction of truth. In Mark 9, there is the story of a Boy with an Unclean Spirit that was making him mute, the father brought his son

to Jesus to be healed. The boy's father showed his unbelief when he asked Jesus to heal his son said, “*If you can,*”, Jesus picks up on this and says, “*If you can!* *All things are possible for one who believes.*” [Mark 9:23]. The father, on hearing Jesus' words, replies “*I believe; help my unbelief!*” [v24]. Jesus relieved the boy of the bad spirit and his disciples were amazed, because they had tried, and failed to heal the boy, they asked Jesus, “*Why could we not cast it out?*” And Jesus told them, “*This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.*” One is left asking what sort of prayer did Jesus refer to? Should we refer back to the way Jesus taught His disciples to pray, and use that format that we call the Lord's prayer?

Another facet of healing seems to be forgiveness. Jesus says that when we pray, if we have not forgiven someone, the Father will not forgive you [Mark 11:25]. This then may be a barrier to prayer, as, like unforgiven sin, it separates us from the Father, and God may not hear our prayer. Surely the whole purpose of Jesus' sacrifice is to bring us back into communion with the Father. Back to the condition where Adam walked in the Garden with God [Genesis 3:8]. Into the condition man was in before the fall, when we (Adam) could come into God's presence. Between the fall and the crucifixion no one had been able to come into His presence because of our sin. God is light, and darkness cannot exist where there is light [John 3:19]. When we sin, we are law-breakers, and we become the 'Lawless' [1 John 3:4]. This then brings us back to the Old Testament laws; if we sin we break that law given to Moses and we are again under the law, until that is we confess our sin. Then we are wiped clean. The point I am making here is this; if God cannot hear us when we are in sin and under the law, should we not confess and repent of our sin BEFORE we pray for someone? In this way our prayer may be heard by God, the barrier of lawlessness having been taken away. In Christ we are freed from the 'curse' of the law

[**Galatians 3:13**], but that does not mean we do not sin [**1 John 1:8**]. Then, before we pray for someone, maybe we should always remember to confess and repent.

James has some advice and instruction on this subject. Words that we should maybe take to heart, he says:

“And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” [**James 5:15-16**]

It is thought that this James is Jesus' brother and, as such, likely knew Jesus better than anyone other than their mother Mary. Here James is saying that a prayer said in faith will cure anyone who is sick, but what James is talking about seems to be praying with an unbeliever, because there is the link to sin. He then goes on to tell us to confess to each other and then pray, because: “*the prayer of a righteous person has great power*”, and we are only righteous when we are free of sin, and so have repented our sin. We also see here that the healing of the unbeliever may depend upon their repentance in their '*prayer of faith*'. Note in both cases, believer and unbeliever, sin needs to be dealt with first as a prerequisite to healing.

Jesus is never recorded as praying for those He healed, the simple explanation for this is that the Father had given His Son all authority in heaven and Earth. Using that authority, He had dominion over sickness and bad spirits [**Matthew 28:18**], but Jesus needed to pray to His Father on other occasions, He did however, give that authority over demons and sickness to His disciples [**Luke 9:1**], which is, as I said above; us. We do not have all authority in heaven and Earth however, so we need to work through prayer, James again gives us

some instruction for healing the sick in our fellowships. He says that what we should do is to call the elders of the church to pray, if we have elders, and if we do, do we know who they are? They are to 'pray over' the sick person and anoint the person with oil [**James 5:14**]. That, James says will *'make the sick person well'*. It is worth noting that James tells us to both 'pray for' and 'pray over', the sick person, which may indicate that these are different. Praying for someone is something we can all do as 'righteous' people, but praying over seems to suggest that the person should be present when the elders pray, one cannot anoint with oil at a distance.

The Bible then gives us several pieces of advice, or instruction, about praying for healing, which may account for the failure of our prayers. Of course, God will not do anything that is outside of His plan, and we must remember this, and seek His will in prayer also. The Spirit will instruct us how to pray in any given circumstance. Scripture and prophesy tell us that healing is a gift given to us by Jesus' suffering and wounds, so we need to claim that gift for ourselves. We also need to 'believe', something that gets harder the more our prayers fail, something that Satan will remind you of often enough. Having faith in God or Jesus, may not necessary give you 'belief' in what you are praying for, but 'belief' is not listed as a gift, so maybe it needs to be built up by success. If we have doubt that our healing prayer will be effective, does that actually affect the power of that prayer? Then we have the issue of being a 'righteous' person, which we were told has prayer power, and the way to be righteous is to clean ourselves by confession and repentance. Do we always remember to repent before we pray for someone? I am not sure I remember very often to do this. We tend to get straight to the point of our prayer, which is useless if God cannot hear us because of the barrier of sin. It is encouraging then to read the way James states this as a definite when he says: “*And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.*”[**James 5:15**].

There is no doubt here in James' mind, no 'maybe', no 'could be', just 'will', which demonstrates the strong belief that was evident in the early church.

Once again, we need to look at the early church in the years of the first century after Jesus' return to heaven, to provide us with a guide to the way we should live and pray.

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The Resurrection



'The Empty Tomb' from a painting by Steve Zomok (reproduced by permission)

I am not sure why, but I feel led today to look at the Resurrection of Jesus, one of the most contested parts of the Gospel and the Book of Acts. At times, even the church has cast doubt on the resurrection; despite the fact that they accept that Jesus resurrected several people during His ministry.

We start, as usual with the Old Testament. In what is possibly the oldest book of the Bible, In Job, written between fifteen hundred and two-thousand years before Christ' birth, we find the first prophesy about Jesus' resurrection. In **Job 14:14** it simply asks about a man living again who will wait until his renewal. Later the same writer makes a statement that can only be about Jesus as it refers to 'my Redeemer', he says that his redeemer lives and will stand upon the

Earth, after he has been destroyed [**Job 19:25-27**]. Isaiah is given such detailed prophesies, he first talks about the general resurrection of the faithful, that the dead shall rise, [**Isaiah 26:19**] obviously this is only possible through the risen Christ. Although it does not later specifically mention the resurrection, **Isaiah 53** is amazing in the detail it gives about the events some seven-hundred years before Jesus' birth. Isaiah starts by making it clear that the Lord gave this prophesy to him [**Isaiah 53:1**]. Isaiah continues to describe Jesus, that he was born of the Earth, and grew up, like all of us humans, and that He was nothing out of the ordinary, not handsome or beautiful [**Isaiah 53:2**]. The next verse tells us about how the people regarded Him, being despised, Nazareth was one of those places that was the subject of scorn, 'can anything good come out of Nazareth?' [**John 1:46**]. It says He was acquainted with grief, and we remember that He lost His Earthly father at some point [**Isaiah 52:3**]. It is little details like this that validate the prophesy. In **Isaiah 52:4**, we get to the spiritual, that He will bear our griefs and sorrows (sin) and as He did that, taking onto himself the sin of the world, He was smitten by God. Our sin cut Him off from the Father unto death. He was pierced four times for our transgressions, once in each wrist once through His feet and once when the spear pierced His side, then crushed, (died) for our sin, after He had been punished and wounded for our sicknesses [**Isaiah 52:5**]. Through all of the torture and the pain of being crucified, Jesus never shouted or screamed because of the pain [**Isaiah 52:7**]. Verse eight then tells that He died (cut off from the land of the living).

The prophesy even says that He would be laid in the tomb of a rich man, His (possibly) uncle Joseph of Aramathea [**Isaiah 52:9**]. Verse ten only makes sense in the light of Jesus' resurrection, and says:

“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his

offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand."

There are many prophecies contained in the Psalms but two that stand out to me are **Psalm 40:1-3** which surely must be about the resurrection. The second is **Psalm 16:9-11**, talks about God abandoning His soul to 'Sheol' [Hades, the world of the dead], or allowing His body to be corrupted. Then in **Hosea 6:2**, the prophecy tell of how long Jesus will be in the tomb; for three days, this prophecy was written between 734–732 BC.

"After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him."

So, what would happen to the Messiah was well prophesied many years before Jesus was born, possibly some two thousand years, so it is with wonder that the Jewish authorities of the first half of the first century, could not recognise their long-awaited Messiah. It is then obvious that God closed their eyes and minds to these prophecies, for if Jesus had been accepted, His sacrifice would have not happened. We can now see that eighty percent of the prophecies in Scripture have been fulfilled in stunning accuracy, why then can there be any doubt as to the validity of the actual event? So, let us now look at the evidence supporting Christ's victory over death.

One method used today to find the historicity of any event is "Inference to the Best Explanation," (IBE). William Lane Craig states this as a process where we "*begin with the evidence available to us and then infer what would, if true, provide the best explanation of that evidence.*" In other words, we should accept any event as 'historical' if it there is the best explanation for the evidence around it. In this case we mainly have the Gospel accounts and the first chapter of the Book of Acts. Without involving 'faith' there are three

statements that are accepted by secular historians, because the documentary evidence (the four Gospels) is so strong.

1. Joseph's tomb where Jesus was buried was discovered empty by a group of women on the Sunday following the crucifixion [**Matthew 28:1-2**]. The fact that it was women that discovered the tomb empty actually adds to the validity. The position of women at the time, as second class citizens, would have not been the chosen witnesses. If the story were a construction, it would have been men who discovered the empty tomb, to give the report more validity.
2. The disciples all had real experiences with the risen Christ [**Matthew 28:9-10; 28:18**], [**Mark 16:12**], [**Luke 23:36**>], and [**John 21**].
3. The conviction of these disciples in Jesus' resurrection was the single event on which the Christian church was founded and grew.

There is some peripheral evidence here; the Jewish authorities were scared of this new faith system, then called 'The Way', and so they needed to squash the information that was starting to percolate the city. The fact that the tomb was empty was spreading like wild-fire, so the Sanhedrin bribed the guards who had been guarding the tomb to spread the word, they said “Tell people, ‘*His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.*” [**Matthew 28:13**]. Another detail that adds validity to the report, in v15 it seems that this took hold, and as proof I have heard this explanation in Orthodox Jews today. Dr. Paul Maier says this is "*positive evidence from a hostile source. In essence, if a source admits a fact that is decidedly not in its favour, the fact is genuine.*"

Many criticisms of the resurrection have been based upon the accounts being legend, developed over time and written many years later. However, Mark's Gospel account of the event seems to have been written soon after the event. The omission of the High Priests name in the account indicates that 'Caiaphas' who was High Priest at the time of the resurrection was still in that position when the Markan account was written. If it was written later Mark would have needed to differentiate, or specify which High Priest he was writing about. As Caiaphas was High Priest between 18 to 37 AD then we must assume that Mark wrote the account within seven years maximum, of the event. Also, the involvement of Joseph of Arimethea adds veracity, as Joseph was a member of the Council and a well known figure, so any falsehood would have been quickly discovered. We also have, according to Paul, at least five-hundred witnesses who evidenced the living Christ between the burial and the ascension [**1 Corinthians 15:3–8**]. As Paul was not witness, he must have received this from, most likely, Peter and James, who were both witnesses to the event. As the Jewish Scholar Pinchahs Lapide has said, "*this creed "may be considered the statement of eyewitnesses."*"

Finally, we turn to one piece of possible evidence that we have today in the shape of the 'Shroud of Turin'. Almost equal numbers of people have tried to disprove that this was the initial burial cloth of Jesus, as have tried to prove its authenticity. When Jesus was laid in the tomb His bod was treated with some salve, the Gospels say:

The body was wrapped in a clean linen cloth and laid in the tomb [**Matthew 27:59**]

Joseph bought a linen shroud wrapped Him in it and laid Him in the tomb [**Mark 15:46**]

He (Joseph) wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid Him in a tomb cut in stone [Luke 23:53].

Jesus' body was treated with a mix of Myrrh and Aloes (seventy-five pounds in weight [John 19:39] then bound it in linen cloths with the spices [John 19:40].

All four Gospel accounts agree almost exactly in the facts, so we can agree that there was indeed a shroud. When we think of a shroud these days we think of something like a night-shirt, but Matthew speaks only of a 'linen cloth', and John also records simply, 'linen cloths'. This then is exactly what we see in the Turin Shroud, a long length of linen over twice the length of the body it covered or 'shrouded'.

The Los Alamos National Laboratory, run by NASA has been studying the shroud for twenty-five years and NASA itself has been testing a fragment of the shroud. The report's conclusion states:

“Linen-production technology indicates that the Shroud of Turin is probably older than indicated by the date obtained in 1988. There seems to be ample evidence that an anomalous area was sampled for the radiocarbon analysis; therefore, the reported age is almost certainly invalid for the date the cloth was produced. The image was definitely not painted. The observed characteristics of the image rule out any mechanism for color formation that involves high temperatures or energetic, penetrating radiation. I believe that impurities in ancient linen could have been suspended by the surfactant property of a Saponaria officinalis washing solution. They would be concentrated at the drying surface by evaporation. Reducing saccharides would react rapidly with the amine decomposition products of a dead body. This process could explain the observations on the chemistry and appearance of the image on the Shroud of Turin. Such a natural image-production process would

not require any miraculous events; however, it would support the hypothesis that the Shroud of Turin had been a real shroud. The observations do not prove how the image was formed or the "authenticity" of the Shroud. There could be a nearly infinite number of alternate hypotheses, and the search for new hypotheses should continue."

Despite the open verdict of this series of investigations, other tests have shown some factors which narrow the possibilities. Firstly, the shroud is unique, no other example of images being left on shrouds has ever been discovered, despite this method of burial being used on millions of individuals. There are 130 blood stains on the shroud, and form a pattern compatible with the injuries recorded in the Gospels and medical opinion. The image on the shroud is not only a negative image but a 3D image which has only recently been possible to show with modern technology, making it impossible to fake. Some pollen grains found in the fabric were found to be of the kind limited to Palestine and present during the first century. One report points out that, *"This man suffered a series of pre-mortem and post-mortem wounds, was crucified and killed, and buried under all the same circumstances of time, place, instruments, executioners and buriers as the historical Jesus Christ."* All investigations have concluded that the image was created by some form of radiation, including the NASA and Los Alamos reports, further investigation indicates that the radiation was 'particle radiation' consisting of the basic building blocks of matter.

This last point I consider important because of recent investigations and observations that for the first time ever, scientists have captured images of the flash of light that sparks at the very moment a human sperm cell makes contact with an egg. This amazing video was published last year, capturing a flash of light when life begins. Light is, as we know 'electro-magnetic radiation, so it seems that in this case a specific type of radiation triggers life. Thus, it is quite

probable that the resurrection of God's Son also involved this form of radiation, 'light from light, true God from true God' for as the scriptures tell us, God is light.

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<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/spark.of.life.light.flashes.like.fireworks.when.egg.and.sperm.meet.scientists.reveal/84954.htm>

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Being Content

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” [Philippians 4:11]

What a great feeling it is to be content, but how many of us actually are content with our lot? We have ambitions, society puts massive pressure on us to be successful, to achieve as high a status as we can. Sometimes that ambition takes over our lives, consuming everything as we climb the ladder of success. The more successful we become the more cut-throat we become treading on those who stand in our way. If we are among the unsuccessful people of our society our malcontent surfaces in other ways. For some this means taking themselves out of society as drop-outs, or drug takers, for others it results in turning to crime, seeing themselves as modern day Robin Hoods. Still others maybe become the type of communist that wants to destroy a society where there are the haves and the have-nots. Most of us have been malcontent at some time in our lives, and most of us can remember how that feels. But, have we felt that since we committed ourselves to Jesus, do we still persist with ambitions, or making money or power? So, I thought we would look at what the Bible has to say about being content, and having ambitions.



The **Philippians 4:11** verse above gives us hope in our failing spirits in these days where society as well as our faith is under attack from many sources. In many countries the Christian faith is being marginalised by government or the media, as well as by other faith

systems and terror groups like ISIS. These are testing times prior to the second coming of our Lord. Both the Gospels and the Epistles tell us of how we should be content with our lot, placing our trust in God and His word. Paul tells us that he has experienced both being brought down low and being in abundance [**Philippians 4:12**], he is sharing his experience with us in order to encourage. Paul certainly had ambition before his conversion, one ambition was to hunt down the Christians, the followers of The Way. He may have seen this as a road to success. Indeed, he seems to have been a one man ISIS, trying to eradicate the faith. We find Paul, having tracked down Stephen, standing by while others stoned Stephen to death [**Acts 7:58**]. Paul, or Saul as he was called then, is said to have been “ravaging the church,” [**Acts 8:3**]. All of this time God had a plan for the man Saul, took him through his conversion, [**Acts 9:1-19**] and immediately, after spending some days with the disciples, Saul/Paul started preaching [**Acts 9:20**]. Now named Paul, he had to overcome a great amount of mistrust after his conversion as people were slow to trust him, even though the disciples had totally trusted in Jesus, as the Spirit had told them.

Returning now to Philippians 4, Paul tells us how he learned how to face plenty and hunger, and in Jesus' strength he can do all things [**Philippians 4:13**]. Paul finishes the chapter by acknowledging that God supplies his every need and ours, and gives the glory totally to God [**Philippians 4:19-20**]. As he says Paul experienced the highs and the lows; he had his share of problems, one of which he calls his 'thorn in his side' and a messenger of Satan harasses him [**2 Corinthians 12:7**]. Paul pleads three times to God to take this away [**2 Corinthians 12:8**] and in the next verse God tells him, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” When we turn to Him in our weakness, when our human self gives up and turned to God, that is when the Lord's power is strongest. So

the sooner we pass control over to Him the sooner He can take over and bring things to a perfect conclusion, “*power is made perfect*”.

Jesus told us not to be anxious about anything, not worrying about what we eat, drink or wear, [**Matthew 6:31**], but He also made the point that firstly we should seek the Kingdom of God, because when we do all the things we need to, it will be given to us [**Matthew 6:33**]. God will supply all our needs [**Philippians 4:19**]. I cannot think of anything that makes me feel more content than having all my needs met, all the worries of life taken away, which gives us the freedom to act for Christ in furthering the kingdom. In the Book of James, he asks a simple question, “*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?*” [**James 4:1**]. James continues to answer that question, by saying that these quarrels are caused by our passions about what we desire and don't have. James talks about fighting and murdering to get what you do not possess from others. So he makes the point that desiring what we do not have destroys our contentedness, and this happens because we, firstly, do not ask [**James 4:2**], and having asked do not receive because we ask for the wrong things [**James 4:3**], things that are for ourselves and our passions. He says: “*because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*” Why would we ask for more than we really need when God provides all that we need? These are the wrong things that James talks about, the things that we covet because others have them. “*He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us*” [**James 4:10**]. As **Proverbs 14:30** says, “*A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.*” All sin has a consequence and when we read these truths we can understand why. Envy has a physical result on us, and there is so much envy in the world and so much sickness.

Paul learned that, and was content with his weaknesses, and insults, and the persecutions of his time, and all the attacks and catastrophes that we, as Christians and the western world suffer. He continually makes the point that when we are weak we are strong in Christ [**2 Corinthians 12:10**]. We cannot help to be disturbed by the disasters and terrorist attacks that the west seems to be suffering. We cannot just shrug and forget these atrocities, we have to ask, what would Jesus do? He undoubtedly would have compassion for the victims, that would be His first consideration, but we are instructed to resist the evil. This does not mean physically fighting back, for we fight against the spirit realm, principalities and powers, not flesh and blood [**Ephesians 6:12**]. We cannot allow these things, as disturbing as they are, to steal our peace. Jesus Himself told us to be at peace. He foretold of wars but said, “***See that you are not alarmed,***” [**Matthew 24:6**]. Allowing things to alarm us is losing our peace, or our contentedness; note that Jesus does not say, “try not to be alarmed,” He makes it stronger than that and tells us to, “see to it” that we are not alarmed, almost a command. This is because Jesus knew what being alarmed would do; it would stop us trusting in God, and would give us sicknesses. When we think 'what will happen to us, will I get killed in the next terror attack,' we have lost our trust and reliance on Jesus, and we lose our peace.

One of the most used phrases in the Bible is “Fear not,” or “do not be afraid,” in fact it appears 365 times, that's once for every day in the year, and I do not think that is a coincidence. We are told not to be afraid for a reason, because when we are afraid we lose our reason, and our heart is weighed down [**Proverbs 12:25**]. When our heart is weighed down we cannot be effective for the Lord. Jesus left us His peace, which is a spiritual peace, not the peace of the world [**John 14:27**], which is based on material things.

So, the Bible tells us that, worry, anxiousness and fear are not good for us, living in continual fear rots the bones, and sends us to an early grave. This is something that medical science shows us after extensive research:

“Chronic worrying and emotional stress can trigger a host of health problems. The problem occurs when fight or flight is triggered daily by excessive worrying and anxiety. The fight or flight response causes the body’s sympathetic nervous system to release stress hormones such as cortisol. These hormones can increase blood sugar levels and triglycerides (blood fats) that can be used by the body for fuel. High levels of another stress hormone, adrenaline, have been shown to be directly toxic to cells of the brain and immune system. The hormones also cause physical reactions such as: Difficulty swallowing, Dizziness, Dry mouth, Fast heartbeat, Fatigue, Headaches, Inability to concentrate, Irritability, Muscle aches, Muscle tension, Nausea,, Nervous energy, Rapid breathing, Shortness of breath, Sweating, Trembling and Twitching.”

Like much of the advice in the Torah, the Laws, God knows best, and why wouldn't He? He is our creator, our maker and designer. He knows us better than any surgeon or doctor. Jesus tells us that the Father knows us so well that He even knows the number of hairs on our head [**Matthew 10:30**]. So, when our maker says not to do something, we must pay attention, because He know best. For many of us being anxious and worrying is just a learned response, and one that can be changed. One that Jesus can change through His Holy Spirit:

“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”
[**Matthew 6:34**]

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Holy Communion

Almost all churches hold communion in one form or another, either as a regular part of the weekly or bi-weekly services, or as an occasional event. Some fellowships look upon it as a ceremony, almost a magical rite, where the bread and wine turn into the actual body and blood of Jesus. Other churches use it as the occasional event, or as a symbol of oneness to bring the fellowship together, as a reminder of what Jesus did in the past, a symbol of our present relationship with him, and a promise of what he will do in the future. But where did all of this start, was it something that Jesus ordained, or was it meant to be a part of a ceremony? Let us explore the 'Breaking of Bread' together and follow its development through to the present day.



The story starts at the Last Supper with Jesus and His disciples sharing their last meal and Passover Seder together. Where Jesus took the loaf of unleavened bread and shared it around [**Matthew 26:26-29**], Jesus gave the disciples a command, “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” [**Luke 22:19**]. Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers to record this command, which is not surprising as Luke is the one disciple who records all the details, Luke was the physician and trained to observe the details. Young's literal version says “*this do ye -- to remembrance of me.*” And so, the breaking of bread became something that the early church did as a remembrance, a reminding again of what God had done. Which becomes is a theme with God, most of the ordained feasts are primarily there to remind

us of the great things that He has done for us. Therefore, it fits perfectly into what we know of God.

We need to answer if Jesus meant the Breaking of Bread to be something to be performed as a ceremony or simply meant sharing a normal meal. In the early church a communal meal was a part of everyday life, and the meal seems to officially start with one member breaking off a chunk of bread. This was a part of the etiquette of first century formal life, when someone had guests for dinner, for instance. At the time Breaking Bread had nothing at all to do with communion or worship, so Jesus was asking that His followers should remember Him when they started a meal, rather like saying grace.

This is recorded in **Acts 20:7** where the fellowship had been gathered together “*on the first of the week,*”. Many modern Christians point to this verse to justify Sunday (first day) worship, saying that the fellowship met on the “*first of the week,*” however we need to understand the Jewish system to interpret this correctly. Firstly, as we have seen the Breaking of Bread happened at the start of a communal meal, and this would not have been allowed during a Sabbath. Secondly, the Jewish days started and ended at sunset, so here when it was most obviously evening as the passage mentions how Paul prolonged his talk until midnight [**Acts 20:7**] and there were many lamps in the room [**Acts 20:8**], so it must have been evening. The evening of the first day of the week is actually Saturday evening, after the seventh day Sabbath ended at sundown. The verse fails to state that the meal was any sort of ritual or ceremony, they were simply eating a meal together after the Sabbath. There was a yearly ritual of partaking of wine with unleavened bread, which is symbolically broken, this practice was never called “breaking bread” and was only done once each year on Passover to commemorate the date of Jesus Christ’s suffering and death.

This further reinforced later in Acts where there is a description of everyday Christian life [Acts 2:42-46], where breaking bread was a daily occurrence in the believer's homes [Acts 2:46] “*And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,*”. Again, there is no special ceremony indicated here, breaking bread was something you did every day with other believers, and remembering Jesus in doing so. Paul said, “Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” [1 Corinthians 11:26].

The other mention of breaking bread in the New Testament is the day after the resurrection when the two men are walking back to Emmaus and talking about all the excitement in Jerusalem over the past days [Luke 24:13-35]. Jesus joins the two and joins in the conversation, when they get to Emmaus Jesus is invited to stay the night as it was evening. Neither of the men recognizes Jesus until, as a guest, He breaks the bread, and it is at this point that they recognize Jesus [Luke 24:30-31]. The two men return to Jerusalem and seek out the disciples and report their experience, saying, “*and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread* “. This passage confirms the tradition of Breaking Bread and reinforces that it is a reminder of Jesus and what He did. Paul actually “broke bread” with his Roman captors, and these Roman soldiers were not even Christians, which further showing that to break bread was not a uniquely Christian expression or constituted a specific religious practice [Acts 27:33-35].

The earliest record of any hint of the Lord's Supper', as it started to be called is in Paul's, 'First Corinthians' (54-55 AD) where he uses the words that are continue to be used in today's communion Eucharistin of many of our churches and denominations.

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” [1 Corinthians 11:23-25].

This passage hints at something more being added to the simple Breaking of Bread, making it more the ceremony we experience today.

The expression '*The Lord's Supper*', comes from Paul's usage in **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**, which may have originally referred to the Agape Feast (or love feast), which many churches hold today, where believers contribute food to a communal meal. The shared communal meal with which the Eucharist was at first associated is mentioned in Jude 12, as '*love feasts*'. Records of Justin Martyr (160 AD) and Hippolytus of Rome (216 AD) supplies us with the first written Eucharistic prayer, we find a much more ceremonial and formal form of celebration is in use, having several distinct parts and order, which is much the same shape as we have today, and with a presiding officiant. Justin Martyr insisted that the Prayer of Thanksgiving, (the prayer of consecration in effect) must be said by a presiding officiant, and the congregation should show their agreement “*with a loud Amen*”.

From these early beginnings, which were more of a family-type of commemoration of Jesus, the services evolved into the mysteries of ceremony, in a language not understood by the people and became a ritual, which to the common and uneducated people, must have seemed like magic, conducted, as it was by a Priest who was set apart and often robed in expensive and gaudy clothes. It evolved into a full

religious ritual that was often similar to those of the pagans from which they had been converted. There were, however, a number of practices and separations from the ritual, some leading to greater and others to less formality in conducting the service, all of which, retained the same basic pattern and place of the male presiding Officiant.

By the time we get to the first Council of Nicea, the church has decreed that only certain ranks of the clergy can minister the Eucharist, and all sorts of rules were laid down as to the order priests can take and receive the communion by rank. Little has changed, and I have experienced churches who do not allow certain people to receive communion, the Eucharist, some churched still 'license' certain people who are allowed to administer the bread and wine. As we have seen, Jesus' command seems never to have been intended to be a ceremony or ritual, but nothing more than a reminder of what Jesus had done. A reminder that Jesus had shed His blood and had His body broken for our sakes. The bread is simply a symbol of His body shared by every believer, just as we share a loaf of bread between us. The wine (fruit juice or fruit of the vine) spilled by the prophesied piercing of Jesus' side is a reminder of His cleansing blood. Just as the Passover reminds us of the new sacrificial lamb – Jesus, who saved us from our slavery to sin, to which was added in the early church the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Breaking Bread together is that reminder. There is nothing magical, or supernatural about it. Just like the two believers on the road to Emmaus, when we Break Bread let us recognise Jesus for who He is. It is interesting that the first Epistle to the Corinthians plainly states that taking communion does NOT mean that we participate in Jesus' blood or body [1 **Corinthians 10:16**] meaning that the communion is a reminder only, as with many of the feasts, Sabbaths, that God ordains. The Hebrews that escaped Egypt regarded the Passover as a

defining point in their relationship with the Lord, one that later defined them as a nation under God. An event that freed them from slavery through their Lord's intervention, and God ordained that the Passover should be observed, 'for ever'. For us Christians the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is just as much a defining point in history, our Passover, in many ways a more important event than the physical freedom given to the Hebrews. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection gave us freedom as well as redemption of sin and everlasting life. An event of such importance that we need to observe it on a more regular basis, as a regular reminder of what Jesus/God has done for us. We must also not forget to observe the Passover and other reminding Sabbaths as well, just as those early followers of 'The Way' observed them.

In **Galatians 2:20** we are told that it is Christ that lives within me, then what better illustration is there than the symbolic taking of Christ's body and blood within ourselves? It not only reminds us that Jesus, the Son of God, gave His life; His body broken and His blood spilled, for us, but reminds us that Jesus lives in us, in terms of His Holy Spirit. It also reminds of a promise for the future, that Jesus will return and eat His next meal with us [**Matthew 26:29; Luke 22:18; Mark 14:25**]. "I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." That is not The Kingdom here on Earth, of which we are all citizens, but The Kingdom of God, meaning the New Earth, presided over by God Himself, confirming the promise that Jesus will return. Here then we have the three-fold reminder through the Communion, His sacrifice and redemption of our sin, and that He lives in us and the promise of His return to establish God's Kingdom on the New Earth. Is not that worth being reminded of?

© 24/06/2017

The Whole Duty of Man.

What does God Expect of Us?
(All quotes from the ESV Bible unless otherwise stated)

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” [Ecclesiastes 12:13]



Ask anyone what God expects of them will give you a blank stare and maybe a shrug, and they’ll say something like, “To believe in Him,” or even, “To accept Jesus as our savior,” but is it that simple? Our first duty to God is to turn to Him and turn away from other gods and idols [1 Thessalonians. 1:9]. Which is what most people, Christians at least, will tell you when you ask about duty, but do we realise what 'other gods' really means? Other god's obviously refers to devotions to Apollo, Woden, Thor, Baal, and thousands of false gods; but it also refers to anything that we put before our God Jehovah. This may be our automobile, or our job or career, or even our spouse (the reason a Christian must marry a Christian), or money [1 Timothy 6:10]. Money is possibly the false god with the biggest pull on us, [Matthew 6:24] and no one can love money and love God. That does not mean that we should all be as poor as church mice, it means that we must regard our money as God's money, and we must do with it as God instructs us. In other words, we must place God above money.

God requires that all His people everywhere are to repent; a repentance that is genuine and credible, that comes from the heart. "Bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance." Repentance is man's duty; he is held responsible to repent, though in his fallen state, he cannot repent or convert himself unless God convert him (**Jeremiah 31:18; Lamentations 5:21**). Without confession and repentance, we cannot come close to God, until our sin is wiped away which is impossible, because God cannot come into the presence of sin [**Habakkuk 1:13**] or to see evil. Jesus is therefore the solution and the act of the cross is that bridge between us and God. Once we have repented of our *every* sin we can come close to God and Him us [**James 4:8**].

As David wrote in the header verse [**Ecclesiastes 12:13**], the next duty is to obey God's laws. God's laws have priority over man's laws and we are to obey the Holy laws first. God's 'commands' were given for two main reasons, firstly to preserve God's creation and secondly to preserve our relationship with God. Many people say that these laws were given for an iron-age people who knew little of hygiene and science, that they were specifically for the Jews. When these laws were given there was no Jewish race, just a hodgepodge of people who had just escaped slavery in Egypt; there were many nationalities or tribes within their number. They were mostly the descendants of Noah's son Shem (Shemetic = Semitic) which at the time may have been called the 'Hyksos' [*Ref: 3rd-century Egyptian scribe and priest Manetho*]. Secondly, the world's population consisted of two peoples. Those who adhered to Jehovah and followed His commands and prophets, and those peoples who had fallen away, the Egyptians, Canaanites, Hittites, etc. Laws of God [the Mosaic Laws] were given at a time before the Jewish state was founded, when the people who would become the Jewish race were still a rabble, lost in the desert. There are many laws written in the

Torah that obviously are no longer applicable, these *were* designed for a largely nomadic people. However, God knew best and these laws are validated by what we now know through sciences, hygienics, medicine, and so on. Many of those laws remain pertinent to us today and are supported by what we now know.

So rather than God's laws being now obsolete, they remain in force. Jesus was sinless, not because He was the Son of God, but because He obeyed His Father's laws. If He had not, His sacrifice on the cross would have been of little use. Jesus also made the important point that He had not come to abolish the law, but he was the 'fulfilment' of the law [**Matthew 5:17**]. This means that, *if* we cannot obey the law, He fulfils the law for us. Jesus goes on to make the point that nothing in the law will disappear until the New Earth is established, all is completed [**Matthew 5:18**] and that verse is followed by a stern warning to those who would teach otherwise [**v19**]. Of course, the core of those laws are the ones that we know as the Ten Commandments, on which almost every nations laws have been based. These laws are split into two sections, the first section is about our relationship with God [**Exodus 20:2-11**] and the second is about our relationship with each other [**Exodus 20 12-17**]. Nine verses and 254 words about our relationship with Him, and five verses with just 84 words about our human to human relationships; maybe this gives us an idea as to the importance or priority that God gives these laws. If we cannot keep these four laws [**Exodus 20:2-11**], then how can we expect to observe the total 613 that are contained in the Talmud?

N.B. Is there any significance in the numerical value of the word 'Torah', which is 611, and that the number of laws given to Moses by inspiration of God's Spirit was 611 also – this does not include the two laws given to Moses audibly by God – the first two of the Ten Commandments?

The next duty to God is to reflect His love and grace to others. Here we should treat others just as God has treated us. Jesus said to treat others as you would want them to treat you [**Matthew 7:12**] [**Luke 6:31**]. A simple command of Jesus but, I fear, one that is the most difficult to observe. Not every person is likeable or even loveable, but despite that we are commanded to treat them with grace and respect. Much of this problem comes from judging people. We can take an instant dislike to people as soon as we see them, something that may be subliminal, that our subconscious picks up on maybe, or something the Spirit tells us. What ever the reason, we must treat people in line with Jesus' command [**Matthew 7:1-5**]. You see Jesus did not come to make things easier, but to make them harder, not only were we to love God with every fibre of our being, but we were love others as ourselves [**Mark 12:30-31**] and Jesus told us that there is no other commandment greater than these. These two commands are then inseparable; we cannot love God without loving others [**1 John 4:20**]. This verse talks about hating your brother, and it is easier not to actually 'hate' a brother or sister, however, the Greek word translated as 'hate' is the word 'miseò' which has the literal meaning of “absence of love”. So again, it is not just hating but not loving. Jesus says that it is easy to love those who love you, but you benefit nothing from that, but that we should love those who are our enemies (those who oppose you, or are hostile to you) [**Luke 6:32-42**]. Verse 36 commands us to: “*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*” We are like polished stones that do not have a light of their own, but reflect the glory of God.

Our next duty is again one given by Jesus, the one everyone knows but few observe. It is of course what we know as the 'Great Commission' [**Matthew 28:16-20**]. The core of which commands us to: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them*

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

[**Matthew 28:19-20**]

This is a huge command, and Jesus' last word in commandments before He returned to His Father. In order to obey this command today we no longer need to travel to remote places, although some do that, or stand on street corners proclaiming the Gospel message, although, again some do this on a regular basis. Today there are many more opportunities to make disciples of people than at any other time in history. There is the internet, as bad as it can be, it is also a wonderful opportunity to evangelise the world. Through this medium we can reach the most remote locations with the click of our mouse button. We also have missions, great gatherings, some of which may even include people who are unsaved, but mostly these attract Christians looking for fellowship and experience. There are both street and beach missions that can get through to both adults and children. In a study, it was found that 85% of all believers ages 18-29 agree that they have a duty to share the Gospel message with unbelievers, 69% of those same people felt comfortable sharing their faith. However, only 25% of them look for ways to share the gospel. However, the study remarks that, “*a decidedly lower percentage actually share the gospel.*” It is not clear why Christians shy away from sharing, because Jesus promised His Holy Spirit would help us in this task [**Acts 1:8**], but Jesus seemed to already know this would be a problem when He said that the workers were few [**Luke 10:2**]. Maybe the situation was the same then as now, although it seems that thousands were added to the numbers of Christians every day [**Acts 2:47**], so we must ask where things have gone wrong today? Earlier Jesus told His disciples that He would make them 'fishers of men', [**Matthew 4:19**] now we are His disciples and should we not be out there with our fishing poles and nets looking for a good catch every day, in whatever was we can? Jesus is sending us out in His name,

just His Father sent Him [**John 20:21**], so if we wish to do our duty, should we not share the Gospel message?

To conclude then “*the whole duty of man*” to God is to follow His commands, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*”

[**Deuteronomy 6:5**]

Jesus is our Commander in Chief, above all presidents and earthly powers, and it is He we should obey. “*Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*” [**Deuteronomy 10:12**]

“*Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.*” [**Joshua 22:5**]

“*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*” [**Colossians 3:12-14**]

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Anxiety – We Have Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself

“Historians will probably call our era “the age of anxiety.” Anxiety is the natural result when our hopes are centered in anything short of God and His will for us.”

—Billy Graham 1965



Anxiety is not a modern infliction

on the human race, it has been around since the world began, I think I put this in a post some time ago, a sign outside a wayside church read:

“Don't let worry kill you, let the church help”

But often the church doesn't help. Many Christians suffer from anxiety, and many Christians that don't suffer from anxiety often think that Christians should not suffer in this way, and almost see it as a sin. While it is definitely not a sin to be anxious, it is one of Satan's most effective weapons against Christians, and keeps them bound up, and unable to be the witnesses for God [**Proverbs 12:25**] that He wants them to be. Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome, in other words 'fear'. It can be quite debilitating, in extreme cases preventing the sufferer from even going outside of their home. Often the anxiety can be an irrational fear.

In some sense all of us suffer from anxiety at one time or another. In fact it seems that thirty percent of people suffer from anxiety

disorders. When we talk about anxiety disorders, we are not talking about the fear of visiting a dentist, or taking an exam; real anxiety can be so overwhelming that it consumes every thought, making the person very ill in several ways. The solution is often just talking to a friend, seeing a counselor or even seeking a medical intervention. As anxiety is a favorite weapon of Satan, there is also a spiritual solution for suffering Christians, through specialist 'Christian Counseling'. Today I want to look at what the Bible says about anxiety.

Firstly, let me assure anyone who suffers from this disorder. God knows about, and understands, anxiety. In fact one of the most used phrases in the Bible tells us not to be afraid, that appears exactly 365 times, once for every day of the year. The first of these is when the Angel of the Lord appears to Abraham [**Genesis 15:1**], so God understands that we humans are subject to fear. In the New Testament it was almost certainly an issue as the Christians are told many times not to be anxious, and Paul talks about it quite a lot. Paul tells the Phillipian Christians not to be anxious but to take everything to God and ask Him whatever you need, he also says that you will have the peace of God in this way [**Philippians 4:6-8**]. In these two verses he also tells us to think about whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, anything of excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise. This strikes me as a good way of overcoming some anxieties. As so often is the case, we have to go back to the Old Testament and to Proverbs to get some good advice. That we should trust God, rather than trusting in ourselves and He will straighten things out for you [**Proverbs 3:5-6**]. The theme developing here is to rely on God, hand our troubles over to Him instead of worrying and trying to do things in our human, limited, strength. As we all know, human strength is limited, and is at its best when we let God take over, when we are at our weakest [**2 Corinthians 12:10**].

We have the assurance that God will never allow us to endure more than is in our ability to cope with. You see, in a way anxiety is a form of temptation, a temptation for us to take all of our problems on to ourselves. The name 'Satan' means 'opposer', one who opposes, in this case God, so Satan opposes everything God wants to do and opposes us doing God's will. So what can we, as Christians and brother and sisters together, do about anxiety in ourselves and our brothers and sisters?

One verse in Proverbs gives us a clue as to what we can do to help combat anxiety in our fellowships, give people a kind word, a positive, good word, making people feel glad [**Proverbs 12:25**]. Do we not have a duty to one another, to care for each other and lift each other up, to carry people if needs be? We are a family in Christ.

This must be impressed upon us all, that God cares for us, cares about you and He knows what we suffer with, we are precious to Him and He loves us [**Isaiah 43:4**]. How much more can He do for us than to give His only Son for our sakes? Our God desires that we are completely free from our fears, the torment and oppression of evil spirits that steal our peace. He wishes us to experience life abundantly in all its fullness [**John 10:10**]. You were called by Him, chosen by Him and will be faithful to Him [**Revelation 17:14**], you are special! Zechariah tells us that you are the apple of his eye [**Zechariah 2:8**] so you can rely on the fact that God's desire is to bring comfort to you heart [**2 Corinthians 1:4, 7:6**]. This then is the message that we need to bring to those who are anxious and in fear, and if you are in fear then you need to learn this message and store it in your heart.

I know there are many of you who are anxious this day, and I know that many of you know people who are fearful, in either case we

need to learn the lesson, to never stop encouraging those who have lost their peace. We must decide to obey God, often anxiety is a decision we make, a response to life, God commands us not to be anxious [**Philippians 4:5**]. A part of that decision is to pray, God has promised to answer our prayers [**Philippians 4:6**]. Focus our minds on positive things “*Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things*” [**Philippians 4:8**]. Transfer your focus from yourself to others, as to the model that Jesus gave us, from looking inwardly to looking out [**Philippians 4:10, 2:3-4**], if we concentrate on the problems of others and helping them, so our own fears diminish. Finally, we can also analyse our anxiety, assess it as to how probable, or improbable, it is, chances are that the vast majority of those anxieties will never come about.

So, many today take medication for anxiety, fear or depression. Some have called the two-thousands the Pill-age, look in health-food shops and there is a pill for everything from anaemia to good thoughts. Some of these, like the Homeopathic cures, are nothing less than magic spells, however there are many good and effective drugs available from our MD's that do help. Some Christians frown on these. Others ask if Christians should be relying on medication to overcome anxiety. These drugs are not necessarily wrong, the gifts that doctors of medicine have are God-given, and may well be one of the ways God has given you to help you. The human body often has deficiencies of some natural chemical, and sometimes we need medical intervention to restore the balance. This is not to say that God cannot heal those deficiencies, but often we need to learn a lesson before He will heal us. Or through medicine we can discover that those fears are unfounded, and once that is learned we can dispense with the medicine. However, I will conclude this short study the way we commenced it with a quote from Billy Graham:

“But the most important discovery you can make is that 'God loves you' just as you are, and therefore you can commit every fear and every worry into His hands. If He didn't love you, you'd have no reason to do this — but He does love you, and therefore you can. If He loved you enough to send His only Son into the world to die for you, won't He continue loving you, both now and forever? “

©03/07/2017

Satan's Fishing Trip - Temptation.

It is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was indeed tempted by Satan himself [Matthew 4:1], but it is a sin to succumb to that temptation. We are all tempted, by the world, by the devil, and more often, by our human selves. The Oxford English dictionary defines 'temptation' as:



“A desire to do something, especially something wrong or unwise: "he resisted the temptation to call Celia at the office" synonyms: desire, urge, itch, impulse, inclination.”

So 'temptation' is classed as wrong, one rarely can be said to be tempted to do good things. Temptation is therefore a negative force, or a force for evil. Temptation's power lies in the point that we want what is being offered, and our desires come, most often, from our own flesh. However, as most all of us have found out, giving in to the temptation rarely delivers on its promise. Temptations, by their very nature are deceptions, in so much that they never deliver on their promise, and they normally result in more baggage, such as guilt, regret and others. For an example of their deceit we need only look at the passage where Jesus was taken to the highest point and offered the whole world [Matthew 4:8-9] if Jesus would bow down and worship Satan. This was a deceit because the world was not Satan's to give, and as we know Jesus was God, who had created the universe, so it was already God's. On a human level, psychologically giving into temptation is disappointing and never delivers, because it is based on a lie. They are our spiritual TV advertisements; watch the advertisement + buy the product = disappointment.

Satan tempted Eve who then tempted Adam, both gave in to it. They were promised one thing and given something different. They were told that they would be like God [**Genesis 3:5**]; did they become like God? The answer must surely be 'no', but what they did get was the loss of their communion with God, a whole bunch of guilt, for they're now right from wrong. Adam and Eve and the whole of mankind also received their fallen nature. There is a saying, here in the UK that goes something like, 'their eyes were bigger than their belly', although this applies to ordering more food than we can manage to eat, it also can apply to temptation. We always seem to want what our eyes see, not what we know is right and good for us, our eyes tell us one thing, but what we get or is profitable is something different. When we forget about God we get the results of living beyond what God has set for us, spiritual obesity.

We must accept that as fallen humans our ability to resist temptation is so much less than the stress of the consequences of falling into the temptation trap. God realises that we have a hard time resisting certain temptations, temptations that are different for each of us, yet very much the same in the way they affect us. When teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus included the plea to the Father [**Matthew 6:13**] not to lead us into temptation and deliver us from evil. From this verse it is clear by the way that He links temptation with evil, or at least its repercussions. We have accepted since the fall, that all sin has a consequence, and that is certainly true for temptation. How many times have we wished to turn back the clock in order to do something differently, to have resisted that temptation? But the good news is that Jesus, and therefore God, understands temptation, because Jesus experiences it Himself [**Hebrews 2:18**]. The human part of Jesus was just as vulnerable to temptation as we

are, which is why Satan bothered to tempt Him. Satan would not have bothered tempting Jesus if there had been no chance of success [**Matthew 4**]. Jesus won our forgiveness for giving into temptation, as long as we repent of our decision to give in.

It's all about baiting traps and dangling that bait in front of us. I know some of us here love to go fishing and some of us actually catch fish. To do that we bait our hook with the juiciest worm, maggot, other titbit to tempt those innocent fish to grab our hook without thinking about the consequences. I would wager that there has never been a caught fish that afterwards thought, "I'm glad I took that worm." I guess that is common to all fish and as common to every person that has ever lived, indeed **1 Corinthians 10:13** tells us just that, but we are also assured in that verse that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist, and will always give us a way of escape. Sadly, God doesn't give fish much of an opportunity to escape, unless we decide to release them back into the river or ocean, just as God exercises mercy with us. We are more intelligent than any fish, we should be able to spot the strings attached to the bait, but we are so often wise after the event and only see the trap when we are well and truly hooked. We are weak to resist even though our spirit may be willing [**Matthew 26:41**] [**Mark 14:38**], seeing only through our eyes and not through the Spirit. We only feel the pain from the piercing of the hook after we have been hooked.

'Hooked' is a term these days used in relation to drug abuse, something that has become one of the modern scourges of the western world, but the word applies as much to temptation as it does to illegal drugs. Giving into temptation acts like a drug, just as looking to holy things increases them by acting in the ways of Jesus,

so giving into temptation increases our desire for sinful things, even though they disappoint, in our minds their expectation is greater. We all suffer from these desires of the flesh and our eyes and suffer from the pride of owning material things [**1 John 2:16**]. Like drug users, it is difficult for us to kick the habit of giving into temptation, or the habit of giving in to our fleshly desires. It is about our focus, keeping our focus on Jesus, we must be like the disciples during the 'Transfiguration':

“When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” , And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus.”

It is about refocusing, changing perceptions, by not looking toward the things of the flesh or the world but focusing on the things of the Spirit. Jesus not only understands and sympathizes with our weakness, but had experienced temptation Himself [**Hebrews 4:15**]. So how serious do the consequences have to get before you come to your senses?

Giving in to temptation is a decision. It is not something that we cannot help doing, we make the decision to fall to temptation, saying something like, “Well just one more won't hurt,” or “I'll repent later.” These are the decisions we make. Satan does not hypnotise us or force us to do these things, we decide to do them. Indeed, if we resist the devil he will retreat, [**James 4:7**]. Your temptations are no greater than any other believers temptations, though we all believe that ours are greatest. Sure, the specifics of our temptation differ wildly, as do the repercussions. We have all sinned and fall short [**Romans 3:23**]. Each of us is tempted by our own desires [**James 1:14**] and each is able to say 'NO!' because you have been released from sin [**Romans 6:18**]. In saying all of this, there is a positive side, it's called testing.

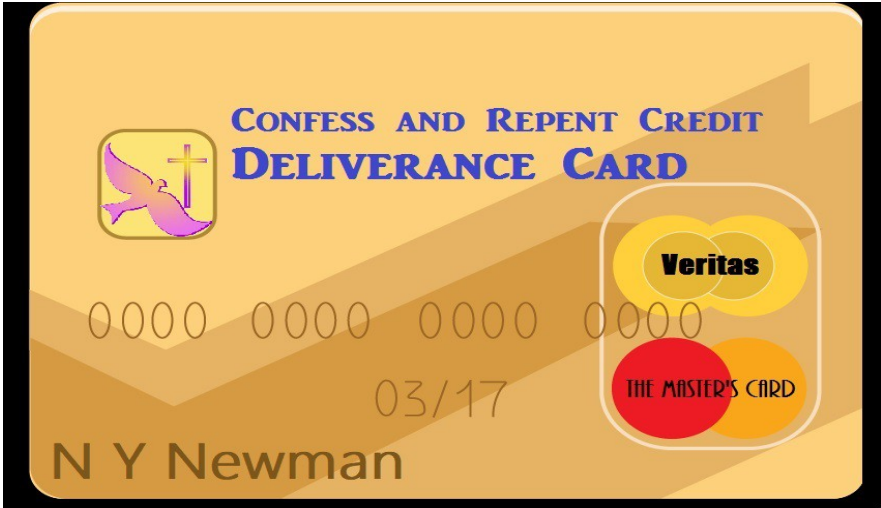
When we are tempted, it is God allowing us to be tempted. Remember that verse about not being given anything to cope with which is beyond our ability to cope with? It is God that imposes that limit, and God that gives us an escape [**1 Corinthians 10:13**]. If we are into building furniture, for instance, and we construct a chair, how can we tell that it will bear our weight if we do not test it? When we sit on a chair, we assume that someone has tested it and that it has been sat on previously, and is solid enough to bear our weight. God's word is like that, it has been tested to be true so that we can rely upon it. So, when James says that the testing of our faith leads to steadfastness [**James 1:3**] we can truly believe him. The apostle Paul was tested, the Bible tells us this in **Romans 7:18-20**. Paul disrepairs that he does what he should not do, and doesn't do what he knows he should, so we are in good company. Peter, an apostle of Christ, tells us not to be surprised when difficult trials beset us, but to rejoice in sharing in the sufferings of Christ. [**1 Peter 4:12-13**]. If we were not tested, then how could we claim to be steadfast in Christ? We have to be refined in the refiner's fire in readiness for His coming [**Malachi 3:3**]. Peter explains this by saying this is so that your faith can be tested for its genuineness, which is more precious than gold [**1 Peter 1:7**], that is the value of being tested. My wife is fond of one saying about testing, she says, "It's not what you have to deal with, it's about how you deal with it that counts." This is a great saying, because we all are tested but what matters is how we deal with the test, about what decisions we make. These tests make us what we are, they give us the experience to be able to deal with the future, and they help us to help others, just as Jesus suffered and was tempted in order to help us [**Hebrews 2:18**]. Your past may not define your future, you are forgiven through Christ, but your past does give you experience from which we learn to resist temptation. The more you know about temptation,

the more prepared you are to resist it and grow stronger as a follower of Christ.

“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.” [**James 1:14-16**]

Make the decision, we are all free to say "No" to temptation.

© 15/07/2017



Confession And Repentance = Deliverance (CARD)

Confession is good for the soul', or so the old saying tells us, but it may be more accurate than we realize. There are other sayings also along this theme; 'a trouble shared is a trouble halved', or 'it's best to get it off your chest.' I am not sure about halving a trouble, but certainly the guilt of wrong doing often feels like a heavy load on our chest, so much so that it can affect even our breathing. Of course with God, confession doesn't just halve a trouble it gets rid of it entirely, so in all those old sayings that we heard at our mother's knee, there may be some merit.

The earliest mention of 'confession' appears in the YLT translation of **2 Chronicles 30:22** which says:
“sacrificing sacrifices of peace-offerings, and making confession to Jehovah, God of their fathers.”.

However, the ESV translates this quite differently: “*sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD, the God of their fathers.*” However the KJV also uses the word 'confession', as do many other translations (*so here my favourite ESV seems to have it wrong, supporting my view that there are no perfect translations, and it's always wise to consult different translations*). So, we immediately see in **2 Chronicles 30:22** that sacrifice is not, on its own, sufficient for our sin to be forgiven, it needs confession also. In the book of Ezra we can read about the need for confession. Everyone who knows the Bible is aware of the general tone of Scripture, to discourage believers from entering into marriage bonds with those who do not share the true faith. In the post-Babylonian captivity era, one-hundred and thirteen Hebrew men were required to put away the pagan women they had married while in that heathen land [**Ezra 10:10-11**]. Doubtless those men saw nothing wrong in marrying these women, so Ezra needed to get them to confess their sin [**Ezra 10:1**]. In verse eleven Ezra tells the people,

“Now then make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.” [**Ezra 10:11**].

So, confession was an essential part of forgiveness even in the Old Testament. In **Nehemiah 9** we find another example of corporate confession [**Nehemiah 9:1-3**], and Daniel prays, “*I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession,*” [**Daniel 9:4**]. Proverbs gives us a hint about how important confession is, saying that we cannot prosper if we conceal our sin, but if we confess then they are taken from us; confession wipes it out [**Proverbs 28:13**]. The Psalmist also makes this clear in **Psalm 32:5** and God forgave the “iniquity of my sin”.

By the time of the New Testament, confession was a well established principle of forgiveness, as we can tell by the way Jesus taught His disciple on how to pray [**Matthew 6:12**], by asking God to forgive our sin, we admit that we have indeed sinned. The disciple John, who possibly knew Jesus best of all tell us that if we are faithful and confess our sin God will also be just and forgive that sin [**1 John 1:9**]. In fact, the New Testament times start with John the Baptist preparing the way for the Christ, by preaching confession and baptism, and thousands of people were flocking to John to be baptised and confess their sin [**Mark 1:5**]. These people from all over the region must have been very familiar with the concept of confession for them to travel from Judea and all Jerusalem to be baptised. Now, though, a new idea comes into play, as James says, we should confess our sins to one another [**James 5:16**]. So, it seems that our well known sayings, that we looked at the top of this study are fairly accurate, confession really is good for the soul, and sharing them is also a good principle. It may also be accurate that confession removes that heavy feeling and according to James will help us in our healing.

So now let's move on to Repentance, an action that goes hand in hand with confession, because confession needs to lead to action, so we must be sorry for what we have done. Now this is not about being legalistic and obeying the law to the letter, it is more about making God happy, blessing Him, and not grieving Him with our disobedience. Ezekiel wrote God's words and through him God said that if anyone turns away from sin and keeps His law he will live, and that none of their sin will be remembered by Him and will not be counted against that person [**Ezekiel 18:21-23**]. God says that He would rather that we would live than die, because He loves us. Jesus repeats this, and says that without repentance we will perish [**Luke**

13:3], not that we will die there and then, but that our souls will perish, there will be no 'eternal life' for us unless we repent. Returning to John the Baptist and his baptising people in the Jordan River, it seems that some Pharisees and Sadducees were also attending to be baptised. When Jesus saw these men He called them a “brood of vipers“ [**Matthew 3:7**] and told them, “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” [**Matthew 3:8**], and threatened then that trees that did not bear fruit would be cut down with an axe. From this we can understand that the fruit we produce will depend upon our repentance, if we are sincere about it or not. Jesus was not that interested in those righteous people who kept His Father's commands but in the sinners among us [**Luke 5:32**] that was His plan, to bring us sinners back to God. Jesus made the point that repentant sinners were more important, He told of the joy in heaven at one repentant sinner [**Luke 15:7**]. This was the point at which the Old Testament practice of sacrifice would end. Jesus wanted us to show mercy to others rather than make sacrifices to God to 'pay' for our sin, and to call sinners [**Matthew 9:13**]. It was for this reason that He sent out His disciples and followers to spread the good news, that He must suffer and die to allow this to happen [**Luke 24:46-47**]. He instructed that “. . . *repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*”

John the Evangelist reminds us in strong terms in Revelation that he we are a fallen people, and then he warns us to do the things that we did at first. I believe John was saying that we should return to the way the first Christians behaved and lived; he is talking about us, today. The alternative to not repenting and not living as those first Christians lived, would be to have your light removed from its place [**Revelation 2:5**]. This seems to be referring to having our names removed from the book of life. We are encouraged to 'let our light shine before men' or 'not hiding our light under a basket', and the

lamp-stand seems to represent our light. So, John is saying that if we do not repent and return to the faith of earlier time, that our light/lamp stand will be removed. A severe warning that few have taken on board.

What this results in is the gaining or losing of our Deliverance; deliverance from sin. Deliverance from death. Yes, we will all die, sooner or later, but it is what happens after our physical death that matters, our eternal life. The definition of *Deliverance* is “a rescue from bondage or danger,” to be taking out of a bad situation. Deliverance in the Bible refers to the many acts of God where He has rescued His people from peril. In the Old Testament, deliverance is focused primarily on God’s removal of those who are in the midst of trouble or danger, such as the Passover when God delivers His people from slavery [**Exodus 3:8; 6:6; 8:10**]. Almost all of the feasts that God ordained in the Old Testament were to remind His people of the things, the times He had delivered them, from bad situations. The suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was the greatest of those acts, an act where God Himself suffered for our sakes and bought us deliverance once and for all. Our passover lamb that brought us out of slavery to sin, and delivered us from the clutches of the evil one [**Colossians 1:13**]. In the Old Testament, deliverance was the one thing everyone wanted [**Psalm 40:9-10; Psalm 32:7**] and should be what we all seek today, just as the Apostle Paul sought deliverance [**Philippians 1:18-20**]. Paul says about Jesus, that He was delivered up for our sin [**Romans 4:25**], but He was delivered up to death for our sakes. However,” *then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement,*” [**2 Peter 2:9**]

Right through the Bible, repentance and confession have prepared the way for spiritual deliverance. God has always prepared His people, through people like John the Baptist, to do a great work for Him by leading them to repentance of sins. Once we acknowledge our sins and confess them, we are on track to have victory over them, through Christ. Repentance and confession are common themes throughout Acts [**Acts 17:30-31; 26:19-20**], in the early church. The church of Acts was well aware of the importance of confession and repentance, the reason why John the Evangelist reminded us of the way things were [**Revelation 2:5**].

“True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty.”-Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 38.

LLeading up to the first Pentecost, the disciples sought God in prayer. [**Acts 1:14**] Says that they were in “*one accord in prayer and supplication.*” Being of “one accord” shows a strong unity and bond between Christ’s followers that would have been impossible without 'repentance and confession', while prayer and confession certainly prepared them for what was to come.

“The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” [Acts 5:30-32]

So, as God reminds us of the times He has delivered His people we must remember that the way we live, confessing our sins to God or each other, and repenting of our transgressions will lead to deliverance through Christ. Many of us have, or even carry with us, little text-cards, that have encouraging verses, maybe you have one with your favourite verse on it in your purse or billfold. Well, next time you open that purse or wallet and look at that card, let the C.A.R.D. remind you, Confession And Repentance brings Deliverance.

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The Bible's Health Care System

“And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.”

[Numbers 21:8]



The above verse may seem strange to us, almost like magic, but God does not approve or use magic, and it may, to us, seem quite incredible and unbelievable, but the incident is confirmed by Jesus in

John 3:14-15:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.”

In this case the camp of the Israelites had been infested by poisonous snakes sent as a divine judgement because of their complaints and ingratitude, and many people had died. However, God responded to Moses' plea and provided this remedy. This is a very special occasion and God gave a very special cure, but much of

the Law of Moses is concerned with health care. Even today that symbol of the snake curled around a pole is the symbol of the medical profession. Today there is so much advice about healthy living, from the five-a-day campaign to the fallacious Coconut Oil, that has over three times the saturated fat than olive oil, but what does the Bible say?

In scripture there are many instructions from God on how to lead a healthy life,

Through scripture, we can find God's guidance to good health, as it is rated of high importance. These Bible verses direct us to God's rules for, not only spiritual health, but for good physical and mental health. This is something we should all take on board because we belong to God and because our bodies are a temple to the Holy Spirit [**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**]. This is a verse that is often used to dissuade Christians from smoking, but it also applies to other detrimental actions we take. So, whatever to put into our bodies we need to do for God's glory [**1 Corinthians 10:31**]. Such warnings as those about wine and beer and the affects they have on us [**Proverbs 20:1**]. Our Lord has always been conscious of our health and has always guided us in right paths, right from the beginning. **Deuteronomy 7:12-15** makes the most amazing promise:

“And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. ¹³ He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you. ¹⁴ You shall be blessed above all peoples. There shall not be male or female barren among you or among your livestock. ¹⁵ And the LORD will take away from you all sickness, and none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you knew,

will He inflict on you, but he will lay them on all who hate you.
(my emphasis added).

This wonderful promise is dependent on one thing, keeping God's rules. Yes, so many Christians say that we are no longer bound by the law. Certainly, those who call upon the name of Jesus will not lose their salvation, but does this negate the result of not obeying God's law? Is this then the reason that there is so much sickness in the church today? Much of the, so called 'Law of Moses' is concerned with health, and many say that they only applied to God's people while they wandered through the desert, and say that they are now burdensome, outdated, bizarre and even barbaric.

In Leviticus 11–20 we find God telling Moses to tell the people that certain meats were clean and some unclean [**Leviticus 11:1–2**]. These laws may well have been because the climate in the desert was hot and dead tissue did not keep well, but it may also have been so that God's people could be an example to other pagan peoples of the middle east. Some meats keep better than others and some, like beef can be dried in the Sun for later consumption (jerky). In **Leviticus 3:17** God gives a law that He says is '*for ever, throughout your generations,*' that fat nor blood should be consumed. God instigates this law 'forever' not even until the Messiah arrives, but for all time. How many of us today consume fat? Here in the UK health pundits continually tell us that we eat too much fat, indeed all of the food packaging here has to show how much fat is in the product. Medical science tells us that eating too much fat leads to increased levels of heart disease, stroke, cancer of the colon and breast, and a host of other pathologies. One issue over the past few decades is that of contaminated blood and products that contain blood. This is a major reason for avoiding both fat and blood as a prevention of bad health that still works today.

The Bible also recommends the use of plant based foods – carbohydrates – like wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt [**Ezekiel 4:9**]. Another healthy option today is 'Multi-grain Bread'; very nutritious as opposed to the usual white bread we get from the supermarket. The Old Testament also advises us to use honey, but also warns about eating too much [**Proverbs 25:16 & 27**]. Today's health advice is exactly the same, just as the Bible warns against gluttony [**Proverbs 28:7**], we are today concerned about obesity. Another issue today, as it must have been in Bible times is alcoholism, the first recorded issue was Noah getting drunk and collapsing naked and unconscious [**Genesis 9:20–21**]. However, the Bible says that *drunkenness* is what is sinful - *not* the use of alcohol. Mild alcoholic drink was safer to drink in Bible times than the water [**Ephesians 5:18**][**1 Peter 4:3**]. Alcohol in itself cannot be evil, or Jesus would not have converted water into wine at the wedding in Canaan [**John 2:1–11**], and Paul tells Timothy to take a little wine to help with his stomach problems [**1 Timothy 5:23**]. However, God gives one of His eternal laws that a priest should never drink alcohol [**Leviticus 10:9**]. Over the past years many studies have shown that wine in moderation has many health benefits, but the emphasis is on, 'moderation'.

The law of God also contains sanitary advice such as the midwives washing after they assist with child birth. This can be taken conversely from a woman who has given birth not touching anyone for a number of days [**Leviticus 12**]. The same passage includes circumcision on the eighth day [**Leviticus 12:3**], just when the blood-clotting mechanism in a baby is fully developed. Medical science has shown that circumcised little boys have a *reduced* risk of urinary infections, circumcised men have *lower* rates of cancer and women married to circumcised men have *much lower* rates of cervical cancer. Cleanliness is very much the subject of many of

God's laws (read **Leviticus 13–15**) where you will find instructions about washing and cleaning equipment. Contaminated garments were to be washed or burned, dwellings that showed signs of mould, or that had harboured sick individuals, were to be cleaned, repaired or destroyed, porous vessels that came into contact with dead animals were to be broken, and people showing signs of sickness were to be isolated or '*quarantined*'. And people were to wash after having sex. All these actions are today understood and the actions in one way or another are taken to prevent illness. Because of preventing infections, even tattoos were outlawed [**Leviticus 19:28**], and we still hear horror stories today that come from infected tattoo needles. The law says that human wastes were to be '*buried*', away from human dwellings [**Deuteronomy 23:9–14**], something that has saved many lives over the past hundred and fifty years, since this was rediscovered. Medical journals are full of tales of epidemics, like typhus, cholera and dysentery, all linked to the careless dumping of human waste into streets and rivers.

Morality also has an impact on our health. Our permissive times have given us a increase in sexual diseases and of course the AIDS epidemic. The Ten Commandments strictly forbids adultery [**Exodus 20:14**], and if you think that this law was just for the Old Testament times, then think again. In the New Covenant we are given a list of who will not inherit the Kingdom: sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who are active homosexuals [**1 Corinthians 6:9**]. These people damage themselves and those around them, they damage relationships and even cause death, which is why Paul tells us to avoid these sins [**1 Corinthians 6:18**]. Homosexual acts cause untold damage, not only to the gay person but all they touch, which is why God singles out this act as an abomination [**Leviticus 18:22**] which also includes bestiality [**Leviticus 18:23–30**].

There seems to be so many parallels between today and the Bible times that we cannot help but make a link between our health and the lives of our ancestors. Much of what was written in the 'Law of Moses', God's law, was forgotten, only to be rediscovered in recent times, and then often ignored. God said that if we keep His commands then the diseases of the Egyptians would not be visited upon us [**Deuteronomy 7:15**], so we have to ask; are our sicknesses due to the curse of the law, or simply the physical result of disregarding the advice of He who made us? So many times I have heard the excuse that, 'everything changed at the cross,' but God does not change [**Malachi 3:6**] so why should His law change or become obsolete? We have forgiveness when we sin, and we will not lose our salvation, but that does not make us immune to the effects of sin. All sin has a consequence, and we ignore Gods law at our own cost.

Many people believe that as far as the laws of clean and unclean foods was concerned, Jesus declared all foods clean in **Mark 7:18-19**; He didn't! When we compare these verses with the parallel verse in Matthew 15, we find that Jesus was talking about tradition, the ritual act of washing the hands before eating. Nothing seems to have changed in the law due to Jesus' sacrificial act. As far as the law is concerned, Jesus actually said that nothing in the law would disappear this side of glory [**Matthew 5:17-19**], not even a period mark will change. God's law still applies, just as human waste remains a threat to health, even though we have found better ways of 'treating' it to make it inert. So, the other health laws also apply, because nothing has changed, indeed John the Evangelist wrote in **Revelation 14:12**:

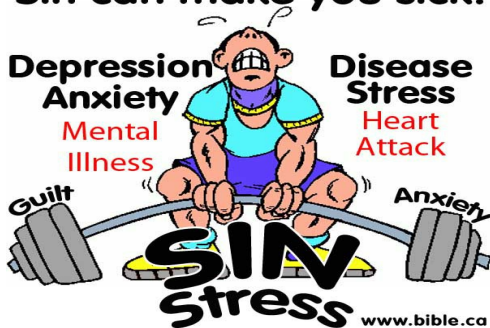
“Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”

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Consequences!

I don't know if anyone has ever played the popular game of 'Consequences', where each person in a group takes turns to write a word or phrase on a length of paper, which is then folded in such a way that the next person cannot see any previous words. The words are written in a certain order, and at the end the paper is opened up and someone reads it out in the form of a story. It can be quite fun, and it is something that is often used in team building exercises, or as ice-breakers. It is called 'consequences' because each word or phrase has a consequence on the one before, or after, in the revealed story.

Sin can make you sick!



In the same way, everything we do or say in life has a consequence, and I have heard many times that “all sin has a consequence,” which is what I want to look at in this study. Firstly, we need to make one thing clear that has a bearing on sin. What is sin? Billy Graham was once asked this question and he answered: “*A sin is any thought or action that falls short of God’s will. God is perfect, and anything we do that falls short of His perfection is sin.*” The Bible tells us that no matter what we do, how good we try to be, we all sin and fall short of that standard of perfection [**Romans 3:23**]. But we need guidance here, what exactly are God's standards, how do we know what is a sin or what isn't? Sin is anything that is contrary to the law or will of God, and God's will can never be contrary to His law. In addition, if you do not do what God has commanded, you also sin [**James 4:17**]. So, we can accept that sin is doing what God says not to do, as well

as not doing what He tells us to do; the things we have done and have failed to do. The Greek word that is translated as 'sin' is 'ἁμαρτία' = "hamartia" it literally means 'to miss the mark', missing God's standard. We are all in the same boat, none is righteous or without sin: [**Romans 3:10-12**].

10 as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.

12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

That is why we need a Savior, Jesus the Christ, who saves our souls from spiritual death and gives us a hope of life after physical death. However, this does not alter God's law, the law still remains as Jesus Himself told us [**Matthew 5:17-18**]. Jesus says that He has not come to abolish the law, and not even a dot of the law will be changed this side of glory. So, it seems that Jesus has saved us and given us salvation from death, but not from the law. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* [**Romans 6:23**]

So where do our consequences come in? For the answer to this we need to go back to the Old Testament and the Law of Moses; sorry, but Jesus did say that the law was still valid. The first consequence we find is that our sin, breaking God's law, separates us from God.

“but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” [**Isaiah 59:2**].

You may believe that our loving God who is full of grace and mercy with 'over look' our minor faults, our momentary lapses and our occasional overlooking of what we should have done. Are those

'Little white lies', like slightly false statements on our tax returns, or keeping a pen that is not ours, or a few paper-clips and a note-pad from the stationary cupboard at work, worth our spiritual death? God views all sin, the theft of a pen or murder, as equal in His eyes, which cannot tolerate any wrong doing [**Habakkuk 1:13**]. Because our God is pure and without any sin at all, He cannot ignore sin, even the hidden sins, the ones we dare not mention, even in confession to God, He knows your sin [**Numbers 32:23**]. We sometimes like to think that God only knows what we tell Him, what we admit to; that we can hide certain sins away in our hearts, but nothing is hidden from God [**Hebrews 4:13**] and on judgement day we will need to give an account.

There are also serious physical consequences that all started in the Garden of Eden when Adam sinned and brought death into the world. At that point a gulf was created between God and man, a separation because of the original sin, and when they were ejected from Eden, from the 'Tree of Life' they started the process that resulted in physical death [**Genesis 3:22-24; 5:5**], and the separation of spirit and body [**James 2:26**]. A part of that process that results in death is sickness, and a life full of troubles [**Job 14:1**], so we can accept that sickness is indeed connected with sin, through the fall at least. Can we say that all sickness is the result of sin? **Exodus 15:26** seems to link keeping God's laws with sicknesses, but the verse sounds as if sickness is a punishment from God for our disobedience. It says: “. . . ***I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians,***”, which sounds like a purposeful act by God. None of the translations I have seen suggests that God 'allows' sickness, rather that God can put sickness on the people. But skip ahead to **Deuteronomy 7:12-16**, and in particular to **Deuteronomy 7:15** it seems that God promises to 'take away' all the sicknesses. The ESV and the KJV agree here: “. . . ***will take away from you all sickness,*** . . .” and the YLT says: “. . . ***hath turned aside from thee***

every sickness, . . .” which may suggest 'protection from'. Neither of these translations suggest that sickness is a punishment. Later in Deuteronomy we read that the curses will come upon you if we do not obey the law [**Deuteronomy 28:15**], and later in the same chapter it says: *“The LORD will send on you curses, confusion,”*[**Deuteronomy 28:20-68**]. So here we are back to punishment, and the passage includes an extensive list of diseases that seems to cover all know sickness:

17. Wasting Disease [**v22**]
18. Fever [**v22**]
19. Inflammation [**v22**]
20. Fiery Heat [**v22**]
21. Boils [**v27**]
22. Tumors, scabs and itch [**v27**]
23. Mental health issues [**v28**]
24. Blindness [**v28**]
25. Famine
26. Afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting. [**v59**]

In **Leviticus 26**:

27. Fevers that consume the eyes [**Lev 26**]
28. Heart disease [**Lev 26**]

These are what we call, 'The Curse of the Law', which is basically death, ultimately death, but Jesus released us from the curse of the law:

“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” 12 But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the

curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— “ [Galatians 3:10-13]

What this passage is saying is that we should NOT rely on keeping the law, because we can't! Because the things of the flesh and the spirit are opposed to each other [Galatians 5:17] and stops us from doing the things we want to do, and keeps us doing the things we should do.

However, God is constant. He never changes [Malachi 3:6], nor does He change His mind [Numbers 23:19], so how did Jesus release us from the curse of God's law? If God set the law, surely He still wants us to obey it. There is an account in the Gospels about Jesus meeting a woman who was afflicted and was bent over, unable to stand up straight, Jesus attributes her condition to Satan for binding her up [Luke 13:16]. Now Satan has no power to directly afflict anyone physically, so Satan will have tempted [Matthew 4:3] her into breaking some law, resulting in her malady. Jesus released her for this affliction, which was the result of breaking the law. In John 5:1-17 is the story of the man who was healed, also on the Sabbath, beside the Pool of Bethesda. The man had been an invalid for thirty-eight years and Jesus said to him, “*Get up, take up your bed, and walk.*” which he did. Afterwards Jesus said to the man, “*See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.*” [John 5:14] Here again Jesus links the long-term affliction with sin, otherwise why would have He have said this?

There are also mental consequences to sin. These are well known in Christian Counseling circles, many of the issues that affect Christians stem from the mind. Guilt, wrong thoughts, wrong perceptions, even spirit oppression, and grief, are usually problems of thought and

mind, and worldly grief results in death [**2 Corinthians 7:10**]. Dr. S. I. McMillen M.D. declares that “*medical science recognizes that emotions such as fear, sorrow, envy, resentment and hatred are responsible for the majority of our sicknesses. Estimates vary from 60 percent to nearly 100 percent*” (1963, 7). As we know very well where 'guilt' is concerned the only real remedy is forgiveness, and only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The real relief from the heavy burden of sin and guilt is accessed only through obedience to the gospel plan of salvation [**Romans 6:3-4, 17-18**]. We can 'know' that we have forgiveness through Christ, but often our hearts are harder to convince, being harder to forgive ourselves. Until we forgive ourselves, the effects of the sin can continue to cause health problems in body and mind.

David was forgiven by the Lord for his adultery and subsequent murder of the husband in [**2 Samuel 11**] despite the prophet Nathan assuring David that the Lord had 'put his sin aside' [**2 Samuel 12:13**] he continued to lament his transgressions [**Psalms 51:3**]. It is the most difficult thing to wipe the memory of sins from the mind, and this often causes problems. In the New Testament there is also the case of Saul/Paul of Tarsus, who was a bitter enemy of Christians, or followers of The Way, who he persecuted [**Galatians 1:13**]. Again, despite the pardon [**Acts 22:16**] Paul continued to suffer from the memories of the things he had done as an enemy of The Way [**Ephesians 3:8; 1 Corinthians 15:9; 1 Timothy 1:15b**].

God has made it clear that those who habitually live their lives outside of Christ, yet have been convinced by the gospel of Christ, should adhere to the example of the first converts of the church: “They were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” The answer was simple: “Repent!”

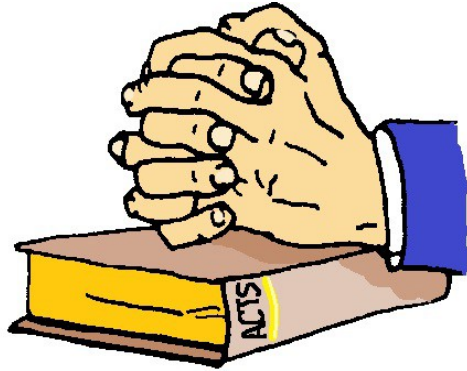
[**Acts 2:37-38**]. Jesus commenced His Earthly ministry by saying Jesus' first words when He began His ministry were, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel (– the good news!)" [**Mark 1:15**]. Repentance is right and good, but we must accept the forgiveness that comes with it, not just to 'know' it in our minds but to accept it in our hearts; that is the recipe for both physical and mental health. Many good and true followers of Christ seem unable to accept this forgiveness for what it is, that our sin has been washed away, completely, put aside and pardoned. Yes, all sin has a consequence, a consequence we can avoid, through full acceptance of our forgiveness.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [**Romans 6:23**]

© 07/08/2017

The ACTS of Prayer

If there is one thing common to all Christians, it's talking to God, something we call 'Prayer'. Talking to God is something that the human race has done for as long as we have existed, for as long as man has possessed an



intellect, a logical thought process. Adam walked and talked to God in the Garden of Eden, before he fell from grace, along with his every descendant. Whether walking and talking to God could be classed as prayer or not, I'm not sure. However, the first mention of prayer in the ESV is in **Genesis 20:7** when God instructs Abimelech to ask Abraham to pray for him. In many occasions in the Old Testament, the word pray is used in the context of saying 'please', as in "Let me swallow, I **pray** thee, a little water from thy pitcher;" [**Genesis 24:17**]. However, the single most common Greek word translated as "prayer" in the New Testament is the word '*proseuche*', used 127 times. The word *proseuche* is a compound of the words '*pros*' and '*euche*', '*pros*' means '*toward*' or indicates '*closeness*', and '*euche*' is an old Greek word that describes '*a wish*', or '*desire*'. So, the word '*proseuche*' means a wish/desire toward someone who is close, God.

There are many types of prayer; personal prayer, intercession, prayer of tongues, warfare prayer, corporate prayer and so on. When we render all the types of prayer, we come down to four basic categories, we call these 'ACTS'. ACTS is an acronym for A=Adoration, C=Confession, T=Thanksgiving, and S=Supplication, we will take each of these in turn and see what the Bible says about

each one. ACTS together gives us a good proforma of how we should pray.

Adoration

Any prayer must be about worship, this is what God made us for, we were created to worship God [**Revelation 4:11**]. The whole duty to God is to fear Him and obey His laws [**Ecclesiastes 12:13**]. In **John 4:24** we are told to worship in “Spirit and truth,” which is what the Father ordained the Sabbath for. Worship of God has always been a feature of prayer from the very early days, the first actual mention of worship in **Genesis 22:5**. Worship makes the Father happy, it blesses Him [**Genesis 22:5**] just as corporate worship blesses Him [**1 Chronicles 29:20**]. So sincere worshipping of God pleases Him, if you like to look at it that way, 'puts Him in a good mood' [**Nehemiah 8:6**].

Confession

Then again, we come back to confession, which we always seem to be returning to in our studies recently. It seems that the Spirit keeps wanting to drum this into our heads. The Lord's prayer says “*and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us*” [**Luke 11:4**]. When Jesus was teaching His disciples how to pray He included the principle of confession in that lesson, so it is one that we need to take on-board when we pray, and if we are to pray effectively. Effective prayer is prayer that actually gets through to our God, which will then be answered; yes, no, not yet. For our God to hear us we must get a connection, we cannot telephone someone if we are not connected, if the lines are down or there is no signal for our cell-phone. The one thing that cuts us off from God is our sin, but to make that connection again all we need to do is dispose of our sin, we do that by confessing our sins and repenting in Jesus name. Jesus then took our sin onto Himself, clearing the way

to the Father, reconnecting with the Creator. God told David that if we humble ourselves, pray and look to God and turn away from our sin, he will hear us and forgive us [**2 Chron 7:14**]. Isn't that what we want when we pray, to be heard in heaven? **Daniel 9:4** tells us that he prayed to the Lord and confessed his sin. John says that if we say we have no sin we lie to ourselves, but that if we confess our sin God will forgive our sin [**1 John 1:8-9**]. This is the importance of confession, we cannot approach God or even contact Him unless our sin is forgiven by Him – no confession, no connection.

Thanksgiving

God also loves to be praised, many Christians think that worship and praise is the same thing, or at least get them muddled. God set feasts and holidays for one thing, to remind us of the great things He had done for us [**Numbers 10:10**]. After the Passover God told Moses that the Passover feast, the Seder should be observed 'forever' through all generations, it was to be a 'memorial' [**Exodus 12:14**]. A memorial is a way of remembering something, just as a war memorial reminds us of people who lost their lives for a cause, or a stone on the grave of a loved one. So, the Father likes us to remember the great things He has done for us, the greatest of which was sending His Son to be our Passover Lamb and saving us from the slavery to sin, just as He saved His people from slavery to the Egyptians. So, we must thank Him for all that He has done when we talk to Him in prayer, thank Him for something He has done in our lives, a prayer answered, a heart's desire granted or just for Jesus. A good example is Paul's prayer of thanksgiving for the believers in Philippi in **Philippians 1:3-5**, he prays:

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

God has done so much for us I often feel embarrassed by His goodness and mercy to me, it must be an easy thing to praise Him for something, some event. Other examples are: **Psalms 100:4, 107:1, 118:21, Matthew 14:19 and Ephesians 1:15.**

Supplication

Supplication is asking or requesting, which, let's face it, most of our prayers are about, whether its for ourselves or someone else, the Father wants us to bring our requests and needs to Him [**Philippians 4:6**]. Note this verse includes both supplication and thanksgiving. Jesus compares us to the Father as parents, he says that as evil as we are, we still know how to look after our children, and give them good things, so our Father will know so much better what is good for us when we ask Him. Of course this verse is about trust, trusting that our Father knows best, and He may say 'No' when we ask for things that are not good for us [**Matthew 7:11**]. We know that God wants the best for us, which is expressed in **Romans 5:8**. Our Father has plans for us all and those plans are to prosper us, not to bring evil on us [**Jeremiah 29:11**]. However, we must trust Him that He knows best, and will not grant prayers that are bad for us, physically or spiritually, or wants rather than needs. He will never grant selfish requests, if we need an automobile; he may well grant that request if you need it, but pray for a Jaguar or Ferrari, and the answer will most likely be 'No'. To avoid this, it is good to pray with other people, one, two, or more, Jesus promised that where two or three are gathered in His name, He would be there also [**Matthew 18:20**]. Jesus also gave us an astounding promise that where two or more agreed in prayer, it would be granted [**Matthew 18:19**]. This is a safeguard against selfish or unreasonable requests, I have never added my "Amen," to a prayer I did not agree with, even those communal prayers in Church. This is why corporate prayer is so

important, when the many agree on something it will be granted, as long as it fits with God's plan, or is scriptural.

Prayers for others are the least selfish prayers because they are not about ourselves, and again they are more effective when two or more agree. This prayer is often called 'intercession' because we intercede of behalf of others. Praying, not just for our friends but for those who persecute us, our enemies, [**Matthew 5:44**] we step in-between them and the Father. When we are praying for others I believe that we should be as specific as possible. As wholly God, Jesus was entirely open to God's Spirit (who knows all things), but Jesus asked people what they wanted before He healed them. Remember the healing of Blind Bartimaeus [**Mark 10:46-52**] in verse 51? Jesus asked him a question to which the answer must have been obvious, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* and the answer was predictable, 'to see'. Jesus wanted Bartimaeus to be specific about what he wanted, and this is in line with our confession also, where if we can we should be specific.

Getting the 'Busy' signal

I have heard so many people say, 'there is no point to prayer, because nothing ever changes,' I guess we have all been in the situation where we have heard nothing for God and our prayer goes unanswered. It's so frustrating, like trying to phone someone and continually getting the busy tone, we don't know for they are there or not. Have they left the phone off the hook, or are they busy talking to someone else, or even, is there a fault on the line? God is never too busy for us, but maybe the fault is with us. Have we requested something that is not in God's plan, not scriptural or it may have a negative effect on someone or something else? Or maybe we are not listening. If prayer is a conversation, then isn't a conversation a two way event? So often we are so busy talking and asking God for things that at the

end we just hang up the phone before He gets a chance to answer. We must learn to hear his voice [**John 10:27**], if we listen the Spirit will speak to us, and if we hear His voice, not to harden our hearts against it [**Hebrews 3:7-9**]. We so often hear God's voice but ignore it because it is not the answer we want. If we truly want God's answer, then Jesus says we should not give up, and Jesus told a parable about this. He said there was a widow who tried to get justice from a corrupt judge; she came back day in and day out and asked the same thing. Eventually, although the judge did not care about the widow, he granted her request, just to be free of her [**Luke 18:1-8**]

However a great part of prayer, if we listen and read the Word, is learning about what God wants for us and how we figure in His plan. Like in our Earthly relationships, the more we talk to each other the more we learn and understand the other person. Prayer puts us in that position of talking to God, finding out what His character is and knowing some of His mind. The more we talk to God the more our minds will transform and come into line with His. Read **John 15**.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. [**Matthew 6:33**]

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to enquire in his temple.
[**Psalm 27:4**]

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Intercessory Prayer

Last week we took a look at The ACTS of Prayer and in that study Intercessory Prayer was mentioned, so this week I felt it would be good to have a closer look at what that involved. It may be clear to

some, but we should all be clear on what 'intercessory prayer' is. The dictionary defines it as:

"act of interceding;" c. 1500, "intercessory prayer, a pleading on behalf of another," from Latin intercessionem (nominative intercessio) "a going between, coming between, mediation," noun of action from past participle stem of intercedere "intervene, come between, be between" (in Medieval Latin "to interpose on someone's behalf;" see intercede). The sense "pleading on behalf of another" developed in Christianity."
So, we see that an intercessor is someone who intercedes, a mediator or an agent, someone who pleads on behalf of someone. In our case someone who makes a plea to God on behalf of another person. The Greek word that that is translated 'intercession' is a noun, "enteuxus", its primary meaning, according to Strong's, is "a meeting" but came to mean a petition on behalf of others. We can see this in **Exodus 33:7**, where Moses sets up a tent outside of the camp, a meeting tent where he could talk to God in intercession.

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time." [1 Timothy 2:1-6]

The Prophet Isaiah prophesied about Jesus, the Messiah, the Great intercessor, saying that He will divide the people and pour out His soul to death and would intercede for the sinners [Isaiah 53:12].

Jesus was the ultimate intercessor, interceding for us with the Father, pouring out His soul unto death, for us. Intercession is not just a New Testament principle, as we can see the principle was well established in the O.T. Times. In **Jeremiah 7:16** God tells Jeremiah not to pray for the people, but intercession comes into its own in the New Testament, after Jesus' sacrifice.

We are told that the Spirit helps us and tells us what to pray for and intercedes for us [**Romans 8:26**] and continues to do so to 'the utmost' [**Hebrews 7:25**], meaning that Jesus gave His life for us, and no one can go further than that [**John 15:13**]. He stands at the right hand of the Father, interceding on our behalf [**Romans 8:34**]. Again **Hebrews 7:25** uses the term 'uttermost' translated from the Greek, 'pantelés', made up from two Greek words, 'πάν' pan or pas, meaning literally 'including all'. The other word here is 'telos' meaning 'to set out for a definite point or goal, together they mean, 'full-ended, entire - perfect' translated to mean 'all complete'. It is such a pity that we cannot express these Greek words in a better more literal way.

Jesus is not only our Savior then, but He is our role model for our lives. How can we compete with God, I hear you say, how can our lives reflect the life of someone who was God and therefore perfect, 'pantelés'? We must remember also that Jesus was fully human [1 John 1:1], and as such faced all the issues and temptations that we endure, for how else could Satan have tempted Him [**Matthew 4:1**]? Needless to say, we are human, so Jesus gave us no excuse for not following His example, and to help us Jesus gave us His Spirit [**Romans 8:27**], "*according to the will of God*", just as Jesus had God's Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that He could do nothing without the Father's authority [**John 5:19**], showing He was indeed

human, like us. Indeed, we are called to that very service, with the help of that same Spirit that Jesus gave us as a gift.

In the header verses Timothy calls us all into intercession for all people [**1 Timothy 2:1**]. Remember we are special, because we have been chosen, it was not us who chose God but God who chose us, **John 6:44** tells us, “the Father who sent me draws him.” The Father has drawn you to Him for a purpose, His purpose, and that is to pray for all people, because God has rejected no one [**Romans 11:2**]. **Ezekiel 22:30-31**, gives us a call to stand in the gap, which is exactly what intercession is, standing in the gap between one person and the Father, Ezekiel writes that God told him:

30”And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. 31 Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the Lord God.”

I was once told that Intercessory Prayer is putting yourself in the place of the person you are praying for. I have heard of people actually taking the afflictions of others onto themselves. At first thought this does seem to be true, but isn't that more like placing yourself in God's stead, as a representative of God, commissioned with His authority [**Matthew 10:1**] over much; bad spirits, diseases and afflictions. Now that authority comes with the Holy Spirit [**John 16:13**] to us for the purpose of carrying out God's orders as soldiers in His Earthly army, commissioned by Jesus. Jesus prayed to His Father that just as the Father had sent Him, so He was sending us (disciples) into the world [**John 17:18**]. In the next verse He consecrates Himself for our sakes, so that we will be sanctified in

truth [**John 17:19**] and He asks this not just for His twelve disciples but for all who follow [**John 17:20-21**]. For this purpose and by His authority, God gives us instructions to pray for others in several places in the Bible. The apostle James tells us to “pray for one another, that you may be healed” [**James 5:16**], but again the verse instructs us to first confess our sins, which we are told to do in all situations of prayer, as Paul tells us in [**Ephesians 6:18-20**].

We have to ask the question, why does God want us to pray for others? He certainly does not 'need' us to pray, as God, He could see what wants doing and just do it. But when we pray, especially intercessory prayer, it reflects God’s character of love, mercy and grace. We are made in God's image and God wants to be like Him, to think like Him, that is how we were made, therefore showing mercy in praying for others reflects the Father. It also allows us to think beyond ourselves and to grow in mercy, compassion and love, just as Jesus thought that way. God compares prayer to “*golden bowls full of incense*” [**Revelation 5:8**].

If we want to do the work we were commissioned to do, then we need to know how to 'intercede' in prayer, we need to pray:

4. From the heart. **2 Kings 20:1-3**

1. Regularly. The Lord's Prayer indicates a daily prayer, [**Matthew 6:11**] “this day.”

29. In detail.

30. With faith,

31. With love.

32. Fervently. **James 5:16** “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”
33. With a desire to help where we can. Reflecting God's character.
34. Occasionally with fasting. If the Spirit leads you to fast, this seems to be a must; not every prayer requires fasting, and God takes regard to your health, because He cares for you.
- 36 Be Biblical. Study what the Bible says and read examples, so that we can emulate Jesus and what the Father wants of us.

- Abraham interceded for the people of Sodom for the sake of his nephew Lot (**Genesis 18:23-33**).
- Moses pleaded for God's mercy for the sinning people of Israel (**Exodus 32:9-14; Numbers 14:11-20**).
- Daniel made supplication to God for his people (**Daniel 9:3-19**).
- The apostle Peter prayed for Dorcas (**Acts 9:36-41**).
- The apostle Paul prayed for the people he served (**Romans 1:9-10; 10:1; Ephesians 1:15-19; Philippians 1:3-11; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**).

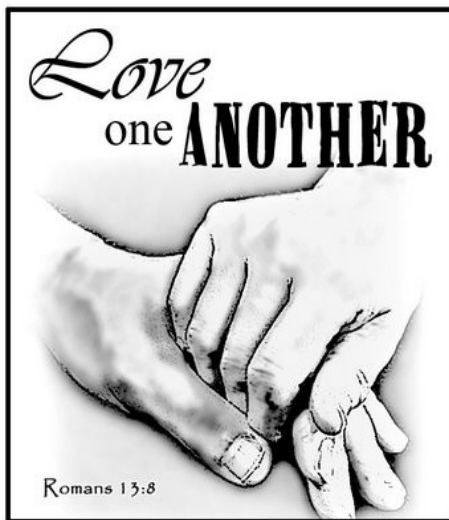
“And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” [**Luke 18:1**]

Intercessory Prayer; Praying the Utmost for His Highest

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Relationships

Relationship is defined as “*the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected*”. In Psychological terms a relationship is a: “*Particular type of connection between two or more entities or phenomena. A binding, usually continuous association between individuals wherein one has some influence on feelings or actions of the other.*”



The root comes from the 1640s, being a "sense or state of being related," from two earlier words, 'relation' and 'ship'. 'Relation is of the late 14 century, meaning, "connection, correspondence;" also "act of telling," from Anglo-French 'relacioun', Old French 'relacion' "report, connection". Ship is a word-forming element meaning "quality, condition; act, power, skill; office, position; relation between," Middle English -schipe, from Old English -sciepe, Anglian -scip "state, condition of being." So simply a condition of there being a connection.

The Ten Commandments are split into two distinct parts, commands one through four are all about our relationship with God, and commands five to ten are essentially about our relationships with each other. It is our relationships with each other I want to concentrate on in this study, because I seem to have been led by several people talking about relationships recently, and it seems that we humans are truly bad at maintaining relationships. Our

relationships should be a reflection, a mirror image, of our relationship with our heavenly Father. I use the term 'Mirror Image,' because it seems to work two ways. Our relationship with God is affected by our earthly relationships, but our relationship with God should inform our relationship with those around us. Relationships depend on agape love, respect and blessing (pleasing) each other. In our relationships there are two classes, the paternal and the romantic and God's word has much to say about both.

God determined that it was not good for man to be alone and proceeded to 'make' Adam a helper, a mate, fit for him [**Genesis 2:18**], someone who was suitable for him. **Genesis 2:24** tells us that a man should leave his parents and be one with his wife. This was before there were parents and the Father was laying down rules for the future of man and woman. Becoming one flesh sets a standard of marriage also, being one in the flesh means being connected to the one Spirit. There is no doubt that this helper is female as the Scripture later tells us that any other situation than a male and a female is “*an abomination*” [**Leviticus 18:22**]. God seems to single this out for special attention and class of sin, maybe because it was the second ordinance God gave after keeping His day holy. The pairing of a man and a woman was a central point of creation, which was completed when God made woman from Adam's rib [**Genesis 2:22**]. When God says “*fit for him,*” it seems one of those things would be that they should be of the same faith, worshipping the same God, He forbids intermarrying with people who “*serve other gods*” [**Deuteronomy 7:3-4**]. I think we have all seen the disasters that marrying someone outside the faith can cause, especially a non-believer who does not understand things of the Spirit. **2 Corinthians 6:14** continues this theme in the New Testament and calls it being “*unequally yoked with unbelievers.*” God, however, recognizes that all relationships are an important part of our lives, He says that two are better than one for many reasons; mutual support, for safety, for

keeping warm, etc. [**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**] He also recognizes that good partners are hard to find and says that a good woman is more valuable than jewels and says how a wife blesses a husband [**Proverbs 31:10-11**]. We have seen marriage coming under attack of late, and it seems that in Jesus' day it was also under question, but Jesus answered:

“He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” [**Matthew 19:4-6**]

It is obvious that Jesus would have taken this stance since He was the medium through which God created; The Word. Jesus also placed His seal of approval on marriage by using a wedding to perform His first miracle [**John 2:1-12**]. But there may be more to this miracle than just an approval of marriage; people commented on why the good wine was saved to the last, rather than having the good wine first. That was the tradition, that the good wine was served first when the guests could appreciate it, the rough wine was served later, after the guest's ability to appreciate it had been reduced by the alcohol. It seems to me that this was a picture about both the kingdom to come, when life would be so much better, and a picture of marriage itself. A good marriage is like this, that the relationship should mature over time and become a true partnership, flesh being one [**Ephesians 5:31**]. The Bible makes it so clear that marriage was designed to be between one man and one woman, for life. As fallen humans we fail in this just as much as we fail in other areas. This particular fail has undoubtedly resulted and is continuing to result in much of the moral breakdown in both the secular and Christian communities. Being of one flesh is a real and true partnership, not a chauvinistic one. There are two very important pieces of advice on

this partnership, which is so often overlooked; that husbands should love their wives as their own bodies [**Ephesians 5:28**] and that the wife should respect her husband [**Ephesians 5:33**]. If these two rules are obeyed, then how can a marriage fail?

Let's move on to our relationships with other people, our friends, relations and those who oppose us. Society depends upon these relationships, and all around us we see the result of the breakdown of relationships, either between individuals or between countries. Again, what seems to be missing is, again, love and respect. Jesus' teaching was based on these, as Peter encourages us to love one another, as love covers a multitude of sins [**1 Peter 4:8**]. When we become a Christian, accept Jesus as our Saviour, we become a part of one body, connected by the same Spirit [**2 Corinthians 4:13; Corinthians 12:11-13; cf. Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11**]. So how then can there be relationship breakdowns between believers? The answer is that we are not listening to the Spirit, we let our 'self' intervene, and we listen to the advice of others rather than the Spirit, those who consort with the foolish become fools [**Proverbs 13:20**]. We comply with the standards and demands of the world and its philosophy of self [**Philippians 2:4**], which we should renounce [**Titus 2:12**]. Often when there are arguments and disagreements the fellowship fails to follow the guidelines laid down by Jesus, to bring brothers/sisters back together [**Matthew 18:15-17**]. It does the church no credit when members are not in accord, and not loving each other as Jesus commanded, the unbeliever will be impressed by how we love each other, it will be a witness [**John 13:34-35**].

Again, there are some simple rules for how we treat other members of the body, as we have seen they are basically love and respect. Our duty is to encourage each other and build one another [**1 Thessalonians 5:11**]. Our role is to encourage and not to rebuke, **1 Timothy 5:1-2** tells us not to rebuke an older man, but treat him as a

father, to treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers and younger women as sisters. There is a saying about families that goes something like: 'Families who pray together, stay together', if this is true, should this not work for the families of our churches? James writes, *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”* [**James 5:16**]. This means a total transparency within any fellowship, confessing our sins to one another? That can be quite scary for anyone, because we wish to be seen in the best light to our fellows, when we confess everything there is no sin left covered and we share our vulnerability. If then everything is shared, the good, the bad and the ugly, then there is no room for petty jealousies and personal desires, in Acts it tells us that those in the early church had, 'all things in common [**Acts 2:44**].

What of our relationship with unbelievers? As we have already seen, the way we act affects those outside of the body [**John 13:34-35**]. We all need to ask ourselves, does the way I act, or my church fellowship acts impressing our worldly community? As I keep repeating the words of the British evangelist, Rob Snowden, “If our fellowship does not impact upon our community, the community (world) will impact on our church.” The way we treat people is a large part of that. I believe that it does not impress the world when we conform to that worldly view, but we have to shine like lights in the world, blameless and innocent [**Philippians 2:15**]. Again, we have some guidance here on how to treat unbelievers; we should walk in wisdom, meaning to listen to the Spirit and maybe to receive 'words of wisdom' to know how we should answer. We are to make the best use of the time, being gracious, and give them a 'flavor' of something that we hope they may want, [**Colossians 4:5-6**] 'seasoning with salt' (wanting more). In these latter days Christians are so often insulted by unbelievers or atheists, that we need to be on our guard, being wise, not reacting in kind to insults. We must keep

unity with the Spirit, showing sympathy and counseling with brotherly love, with a tender heart and humble mind [**1 Peter 3:8**]. We should not repay evil for evil, but bless those who would revile you [**1 Peter 3:9**], being careful how you walk, not being foolish, understanding what the will of the Lord is [**Ephesians 5:15–17**].

Finally, it is about our attitude and if we are 'on fire' for Jesus; we have already mentioned seasoning and salt, and Jesus uses the example for those that have become lukewarm in their faith. He calls us the 'Salt of the Earth', but if we allowed our faith to dull, He says we have lost our taste, and as the saltiness of salt cannot be restored, we are no good for anything, other than to be used to make paths [**Matthew 5:13**]. We are to be a light in this world, the light we have is our faith, but what use is it if we hide it, afraid to let people know that we are Christians, hiding our light (faith) under a basket [**Matthew 5:13**]. But rather, as **v16** tells us:

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

What difference then do these verses make in our lives? All the difference in the world. Your relationship with your spouse is crucial to our marriages, reflecting our relationship with the Father, caring and loving with respect. The way we interact with our brothers and sisters and radiate love to those unbelievers that see we are Christians by the love for each other. The way we conduct our actions and speech before an unbeliever, all is vitally important. Your conduct should be with wisdom, your speech with grace, love and respect.

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Salvation - God's Plan for Unbelievers

“But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” [Matthew 9:12-13]

I remember when I was a kid, my parents packed me off to Sunday School every Sunday afternoon. We were given small sticker books and we given postage-like stickers every time we attended and another if we could recite a verse from memory that we were given the previous week. I loved getting those stickers, although I can't say my sticker-book was really that full; I always seemed to have better

things to do than sit memorizing a verse of scripture. Even though I turned my back on the Christian faith, those lessons stood me in good stead later in life when I returned to Jesus. Amazingly, I could still remember some of those verses. The Bible however, is not just a book of verses. It is full of doctrines, interesting topics, edifying stories and adventures, but above all it's about God's plan for our salvation. It would be so great that as children we could all understand what the Bible is about, and equally so for us adults. It is that understanding of God's plan that is important, and is crucial when we trying to lead an unbeliever to salvation. We can quote Bible verses all we want, but that person needs to understand the plan of salvation, and only that plan until after they are saved.

The Bible understands this, saying that the unbeliever thinks that things of the faith are foolish, [**1 Corinthians 2:14**] because they are not yet informed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus told us that His Spirit will convict those that God draws to Him, because they do not believe in Jesus [**John 16:7-11**]. So, it is a waste of time and our breath to try to impart deeper truths to the unsaved. So how does the Bible recommend we approach unbelievers? Of course, this will be different for different people, some will have had some religious background, and others none and we must be sensitive to pick up on which areas need to be dealt with. So, we first must be conversant with the doctrine of the Bible and how we can use it when speaking and guiding unbelievers.

That doctrine tells us firstly that we need to acknowledge that we are all sinners [**Romans 3:23**], we need to understand that this means everyone, no matter who we are or who they are, from the most spiritual person you can think of [**Ecclesiastes 7:20**], to the worst offender. Isaiah says that we are “like a polluted garment,” a dirty rag [**Isaiah 64:6**]. Many of us think more highly of ourselves than we should, but when compared with God, or Jesus, how good are

we? That then is the standard that we must compare our lives to, and on that standard we are far from perfect; we fail. The word translated as sin or sinned comes from the Greek word, "hamartano" for which the literal meaning is 'to miss the mark', no matter how hard we humanly try, and we miss the mark of God's standard. This is the first single point that an unbeliever needs to accept to start his or her journey to salvation in Christ. Pointing this out, that our needs for forgiveness and grace on our part, perhaps admitting that we ourselves are sinners, especially if they see you as some role-model, someone who walks the walk, not just talk the talk. Sometimes it's good to put out a challenge, asking when the last time that person thinks they have sinned? The point being that, even if we have sinned just once in our lives (unlikely) we are accountable for infringing the whole law [**James 2:10**], and therefore need a savior. We must never forget that we are also sinners and need a savior, and must be humble, never saying that we haven't sinned since we found Jesus [**1 John 1:8**], or anything of the kind. We will be sinners until we receive our risen bodies.

Often the one thing stopping someone coming to faith is that they think they are too great a sinner, that God could not possibly forgive them. The thinking that you need to be a good person to be a Christian is total fallacy, we all have turned from God and become worthless [**Romans 3:12**], Jesus died for the sinners not the righteous [**Luke 19:10**], no matter how vile our sin. No matter how many good works we do we can never 'pay' for our sin, and that the wages of sin are death [**Romans 6:23**] is something we should get across to the unbeliever, being a member of a church just does not cut it. It is not about paying for our sin, but about removing the sin, because sin separates us from God by an impenetrable barrier, God can neither see you or hear you [**Isaiah 59:2**]. As our creator God does not want us to be separated from Him. He did not make us to suffer and be punished for our sin and disbelief [**2 Thessalonians**

1:8,9], and this is why He gave His only Son to save us [**John 3:16**] and demolish that barrier. The unbeliever has a decision to make before they die, which could be tomorrow or in an hour, month or fifty years, we just don't know. Except for those who are alive at the rapture and second coming, everyone will die, our soul will then either sleep in the Lord or go to hell [**Ephesians 2:1**], so we must all be born again in Christ [**John 3:7**]. Should a person die without accepting Christ as his personal Savior, that soul will be separated from God forever, and he will be cast into the lake of fire forever... the Bible calls this the "second death" [**Rev. 20:14,15**].

Obviously, this is heavy stuff to get across to someone who does not even believe in God, or at least has no faith. We should make sure that we keep making the point that God loves the sinner but not the sin, to the extent of Jesus' love in giving His life as a sacrifice [**John 15:13**], there is no greater love than this. It is love that separates us humans from the rest of creation, because when we were created God gave us the ability to love, and because of that love we also love, [**1 John 4:19**] [**1 John 4:7**]. Christ even died in love for those who were ungodly (sinners) [**Romans 5:6**] as long as they accept Him as God and Savior [**Acts 4:12**]. We can also use the promise of that perfect place to come, the New Earth [**2 Peter 3:13**], but to get this promise of a perfect world our names must be written in the book of life [**Revelation 21:27**]. Sin cannot enter into the New Earth, because God will dwell there [**Psalms 5:4**]. He lives in it [**Psalms 11:4**] [**Psalms 115:3**] and there will be no death in Heaven or the New Earth [**Revelation 21:4**], nor will there be tears, sorrow or pain. Our bodies are not made to live for ever, they have built in obsolescence, it is in our DNA, which was altered when Adam and Eve rebelled and disobeyed God, just like our car, our TV or anything else, our bodies need replacing, which will take place on resurrection day [**Philippians 3:21**] [**1 John 3:2**].

To achieve this promise of a perfect life in a paradise of Earth, there is nothing we can do to achieve it for ourselves because it is a gift of God, given through faith in Jesus [**Ephesians 2:8-9**]. One cannot stress this point too much, that there is really nothing an unbeliever can do other than turn to Christ, because faith is counted as righteousness [**Romans 4:5**] [**Galatians 2:16**] [**Titus 3:5**]. This is such excellent news, both for ourselves and the unbeliever, that we should be able to show some excitement at it, and excitement is one of those emotions that is contagious. Our excitement should rub off on the person. That man's efforts, no matter how good or well intended (before or after salvation), have nothing to do with it. Salvation is by the finished work of Christ and nothing can be added to it. Simply put: Jesus+✠= Salvation 4 † “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” [**Romans 3:28**].

I have lost count of the times I have people use the word 'religious' in relation to me or someone else of faith, and I have to say that below the surface it annoys me. One modern definition of the word 'religious' is that it is something that we do habitually, over and over. The word 'religious' has uncertain roots, 're+legere' meaning to "read again", according to Cicero. Then there are two other possibles: 'religare' "to bind fast" this is according to later ancients (and many modern writers), and we also have 'religiens' meaning to be "careful". The first of these sounds about right to me although a combination of all three would also fit well, as “Carefully re-reading the Gospel and binding fast to it.” It should be made clear though that we have a faith, and that reading the Bible religiously does not in itself make one a Christian. Religions are often constructs of man and many are constructed under the inspiration of Satan, who rejoices in making people believe that they can earn salvation through good works, and Paul warns us about these in **2 Corinthians 11:14,15**. When you witness, always make the point that the GOSPEL is NOT a

"religion." We are not discussing man's philosophy but God's Word, a message of what God has already done for us to bring us back to Him.

It is always good practice to find out the unbeliever's beliefs, there are many misconceptions about Christianity and indeed there are many denominations and other faiths. Misconceptions should be corrected in view of the Gospel, and we are charged to correct these with gentleness [**2 Timothy 2:25**]. Not every religion or faith that presents itself in Jesus' name is of Jesus or the Spirit [**Matthew 7:21-23**], and any unsaved or newly saved person should be made aware of this. So often Satan will attack the new Christian, and warnings of this should be included. Above all we need to be connected to the Holy Spirit, and walk in His wisdom, using our time with the unbelievers to the best possible purpose, being gracious and interesting and the Spirit will know how we are to answer each person [**Colossians 4:5-6**]. We must be Christ's advertisement for His church, having the Gospel written on our hearts to be read by all we meet [**2 Corinthians 3:2-3**]. We then are ambassadors for Christ, and we are to model what we do on Him who saved us. God works through us, when people look at us they must see Jesus, not us because we represent Him [**2 Corinthians 5:20**] on Earth. In the early centuries of our faith it was not called Christianity, the word was first used as an insult, 'Christianos' was almost spat rather than spoken, our faith was given the name 'The Way'. The Way was very appropriate as it was what Jesus called Himself [John 14:6], but it also referred to 'the way' we should live, with Jesus as our example. That is the greatest example of all, to live 'the way' Jesus taught us to live.

***2** “You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. **3** And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the*

Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” [2 Corinthians 3:2-3]

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The End Times -Are We Ready?

I have read so much this week about people linking the recent eclipse, tornadoes, solar flares and a host of other things to the end-times, so I thought we would look at what the Bible has to say, in terms of prophesy.

As we know, there are some two and a half thousand prophesies contained in the canon of the Bible, of which eighty percent have been fulfilled in extraordinary detail. Of the ones that are left, around five-hundred, they are currently being fulfilled or are about the future. Based upon the current eighty percent success rate, I think it is safe to assume that the remaining twenty percent will be fulfilled with equal accuracy.

Bible prophesy about the end times actually starts over seven-hundred years before Christ in the Book of Isaiah. His ministry commences around 740 BC at a time, rather like today, when Israel was prosperous and full of confidence in it's self. Isaiah prophesies about the great end battle and talks about the horrors of the dead bodies piling up and the smell, while the mountains run with blood, [Isaiah 34:3]. In **Ezekiel 39:12** it says that it will take Israel seven months to bury them, there are so many, in order to cleanse the land. This is a major event that has not yet been fulfilled but we have the assurance that God will create a New Heaven and a New Earth [Isaiah 65:17], which is the most exciting encouragement for those of faith [2 Peter 3:13]. This is the one single thing that we should hold onto, our assurance of a life in communion with God, as He intended. The one promise that will take us through the horrors of



the last days, setting our eyes on Jesus, indeed Jesus tells us not to worry, or fear [**Luke 12:32**] because God will give us the kingdom.

Through the ages many have endeavoured to calculate when the second coming and the last days will be. Jesus Himself did not know the time or day of His return [**Matthew 24:36**]. One would think that, as Jesus was fully God, He would know everything, however He was also fully human and only had the information that His Father, to whom He prayed, allowed Him to have. The verse also suggests that the day of Jesus' return is set in stone, otherwise the phrase “**that day or that hour, no one knows,**” would not have been used. So how then can we know? We can't; it's as simple as that. Jesus said that we would only know at the point it was actually happening. When Jesus was speaking about the rapture, He indicated that it would happen without warning, when asked where this will happen he told His disciples that where they see vultures gathering, the corpse is already dead [**Luke 17:34-37**]. In another occasion Jesus says that if the owner of the house knew when the burglar was going to break in He would have stayed awake [**Matthew 24:43**], Paul translates this into: it will come like a thief in the night [**1 Thessalonians 5:2**]. The point of these verses is that we should be ready *all* the time, because if we knew when it would happen, we would not live our lives rightly until just before that time. Jesus also gave us the parable of the Ten Virgins, five of which were foolish and were not prepared [**Matthew 25:1-13**]. This whole parable is a picture of the second coming, the bridegroom being Jesus and the wedding being a picture of His church.

Though we do not know the actual day of the rapture or the second coming of Jesus, the Father has given us many pointers, by way of prophesy, as a warning to us to be ready. Many believe that these prophesies are being fulfilled today and that many have already been fulfilled. We must however, be cautious, as probably millions of

believers in the past have also been convinced that the time is close at hand; all, so far, have been wrong. There are some interesting verses in Revelation 20, that shed some light on the timing of the second coming. They tell us that Satan (that old serpent) will be cast into the pit for a thousand years [**Revelation 20:1-3**]. That thousand years may be taken from Satan's defeat at the cross, around AD 33, which seems to be a logical assumption. At the end of that millennium Satan is to be set free "for a little while." The word translated as 'while' here is the Greek word '*Chronos*' meaning an undetermined period of time. Verse seven says that Satan will be released at the end of that thousand years to create havoc across the world [**Revelation 20:7-10**] but does not indicate how long that period will be. We have to ask then if it was a coincidence that the site of Jesus' crucifixion, and consecrated on the 13 September 335, was demolished in 1009, then rebuilt in 1048. This point in time almost exactly one thousand years after the crucifixion seems to be the fulcrum that changed everything in Christendom. In 1095 Pope Urban II called for the First Crusade in a sermon to the Council of Clermont. He asked for military support for the Emperor, Alexios of the Byzantine Empire who needed reinforcements for his growing conflict against the westward spread of migrating Turks colonizing Anatolia, now the north-western part of Turkey. This triggered the millennium of conflict with Islam and the atrocities perpetrated by the crusaders. The fact that it started at the very place of Christ's victory may be significant in marking the end of Satan's imprisonment. Could that '*Chronos*' mean another thousand years?

So, what are the prophetic signs that we should look for as an indicator that we are in or entering the last days? It certainly seems right that we should start with **Ezekiel 38:22** that speaks about torrential rains and hailstones, which we have seen in the past weeks, with floods across the world. At the same time, we have seen an increase in earthquakes in Mexico, Italy, Greece and other places.

The USGS lists 89 earthquakes in the past twenty-four hours (09/09/2017) all above Magnitude 2.5. Earthquakes are prophesied several times in connection to the end of days [**Isaiah 24:18-20; Ezekiel 38:19,20; Joel 3:16; Amos 9:5; Zechariah 14:4**]. Jesus Himself warns of natural disasters and wars as just the beginning of the birth pains [**Matthew 24:7-8**].

Besides the natural signs of the last times one class of prophesy stands out, the prophesies about the church. Paul writes about the coming lawlessness (that being the law of GOD) coming from the works of Satan. He writes about the wicked deception of those who are dying because they refuse to love the truth, and about false signs and wonders in the church that took pleasure in their sin [**2 Thessalonians 2:9-12**]. Daniel prophesied that during the latter days people would speak out against God (the Most High). Over the past few years we have seen God's word classified as a 'Hate Crime', and those who stand firm on His Word have been persecuted, taken to law courts, and prosecuted. This has become so bad that the church (the saints) have been worn down and many have capitulated, turning against what God's Word says, agreeing with those who seek to speak against God. Those people seek to change God's law and change the times that God has ordained as His days (Sabbaths). Recently there have been moves to change God's law in respect to homosexuality and redefine marriage, among others [**Daniel 7:25**]. Daniel also says that those kingdoms will be given to the saints (us) and that kingdom will last for ever, serving and obeying God [**Daniel 7:27**].

We are also seeing nations of the Middle east coming together against Israel [**Ezekiel 38:2-16**] and speaks of the armies of Persia, Cush, and Put coming against Israel. Cush is modern day Ethiopia and Put is now Libya, then a part of Egypt, and of course Persia is now modern day Iran, the one nation who leads the attack on Israel.

We can add the Chaldeans to this list, which is modern day Iraq [Jeremiah 51:1-4] suggesting the attempted takeover by Islamists and annihilation by "fire" (a commentary explosion?). These are all events that are happening today, events that we hear in our news broadcasts almost every week. Daniel predicted that two wars were to occur at the Euphrates River [Daniel.8:5-8]. With two identical victories concluded in recent times in that exact location by the western military forces of the United States, Daniel's prophecy appears to be fulfilled. The western 'He-Goat' has toppled the eastern 'Ram' at the Euphrates river in accordance with Daniel's vision [Daniel 8:5-8]. These two western victories were accomplished just as Daniel predicted, with forces that crossed the entire earth without touching the ground [Daniel 8:5]. According to Daniel, these wars will structure a boundary between North and South near the Euphrates river. That perimeter will divide East from West, producing a type of "Maginot line" between them. U.S. forces currently stationed there are a sign that this line is now in place [Jeremiah 46:2]. Western troops will remain along this line until the time comes for the kings of the east [Revelation 16:12] to launch their attack. [Jeremiah 46:6]. Just see how much you can recognize in the following list than Timothy writes:

***“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people”.** [2 Timothy 3:1-5]*

Enough of the prophecies that are being fulfilled in this age, what are the prophecies that are yet to come to fruition? Just previous to His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples of some signs to look for and

said that when these things occur He will return within one generation [**Matthew 24:34**]. We saw above that the prophesy about earthquakes is being fulfilled today, but that verse also includes other elements, like war between nations and famines [**Matthew 24:7**]. We have seen many conflicts over the past century, but are these the wars that Jesus spoke about or are there more intense wars yet to come? With so much disagreement between nations today it seems that we are heading for a period of intense warfare in many places. Famine spreads across the African continent almost continuously and natural disasters add to the scarcity of food, destroying both stockpiled food and crops. Inundation of the land from the ocean poisons the land making it impossible to re-grow crops. The undernourished are not limited to Africa, however. A large portion of the worlds five billion people suffers from a shortage of food.

Matthew 24:8-9 says that Christians will be hated, “*and you will be hated by all nations on account of my name.*” Christians are under constant attack today. Even for the American and British Christians, where freedom to worship God is entrenched, hatred and discrimination at work and school is starting to raise its evil head. In many other countries such as China, Sudan, Africa, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Russia, and Muslim nations, Christians suffer a much greater persecution and frequently death for their faith. During the coming tribulation, suffering of the faithful will be worldwide, even to the point of martyrdom. One prophesy that has not been fulfilled yet is the Gospel being preached to the whole world [**Matthew 24:14**], this is one of Jesus' precepts that must happen before the end. At this time there are large swathes of this planet where the Gospel has yet to be preached despite brave people in China, certain African countries and the Middle-east.

Revelation 9:16 gives us another condition that must be fulfilled before the end finally comes. It is the formation of an army two-hundred million strong. The only country that has ever achieved that

number is China back in the 1960's, today that army is much diminished. However, one can imagine that the combined armies of Islam could, if needed, achieve that number. That number may well include Muslims who are already living in the west. Now there is one prophesy that many know about, but that many contest, because it is inferred rather than specifically prophesied, the rebuilding/building of the third temple. There are three prophesies to be fulfilled, which rely on the rebuilding of the temple [**Revelation 11:2; Daniel 9:27; Daniel 9:26**], neither one of these can be fulfilled without a third temple. That temple is well into the planning stage, and the implements and utensils required to fit out the temple are in production, many of them are on open view in Jerusalem today, called 'The Temple Mount Faithful'. There is however a serious doubt that the Temple Mount is the historic site of the previous two temples.

Two last prophesies we will deal with here are the 'Mark of the Beast' and plans for a world government. The mark of the beast is a mark on the forehead or on the right hand, possible something like a bar-code or an implanted chip, without which no one person can buy or sell anything [**Revelation 13:16-17**]. We certainly have the technology now to bring this into being but as yet there is no desire to use it. Recently banks have issued 'Contactless' debit and credit cards, which contain a tiny chip which does the same thing as placing the card into a machine and inputting a pin code. These chips can easily be modified to be sub-dermal implants, which may be the very next step as recently three members of a family in Florida became the first people to receive the biochip implant. Each device, made of silicon and called a VeriChip, is a small radio transmitter about the size of a piece of rice that is injected under a person's skin. It transmits a unique personal ID number whenever it is within a few feet of a special receiver unit that can be used in a variety of security, emergency and healthcare applications, they say. Again, like the

temple, there is no specific prophesy for world government; however, there are prophecies regarding the 'Beast' that would not be possible if a world government were not evident.

In the Book of Revelation, John the Evangelist sees the 'beast' rising out of the sea having seven heads and ten horns [**Revelation 13:1**]. If we combine this vision with Daniel's similar vision [**Daniel 7:16-24**], we can see that some sort of world system will be constituted by the beast, the most powerful "horn," who will defeat the other nine and will begin to wage war against the Christians. A ten nation confederacy is also seen in Daniel's image of the statue in [**Daniel 2:41-42**], where he sees the final world government consisting of ten parts, represented by the ten toes of the statue. We don't know who the ten belong to or how they come into power. Scripture is, however, plain that the beast will either destroy them or turn them into figureheads, to do his bidding.

Different authorities count prophecies in different ways, depending on passages or verses. J. Barton Payne's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* lists 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies in the New Testament, for a total of 1,817. These encompass 8,352 verses. Based on these numbers we have not even scratched the surface with the verses we have examined, there is so much more to explore. The point, however, is that we really do not know the day of the rapture or the second coming. When it comes it will surprise us. It also will surprise us if it does not come [**2 Peter 3:1-18**]. That we must be prepared for it, not just when we think it's imminent, but all of the time, every day; we must be like the five wise virgins, keep our wicks trimmed and dry with spare oil. [**Matthew 25:1-13**] "*Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing-near.*"[Luke21:28].



Signs and Wonders

Back in the eighties there was one phrase on the lips of Christians across the western world, that phrase was 'Signs & Wonders'. It became the end all and be all of many churches. If your church was charismatic, then you were looking to Signs & Wonders, and if you were not seeing them, you were somehow deficient and not Spirit filled. Christians everywhere were asking, "is your church into signs and wonders?", it was worn like a badge of honor. At the center of the movement was an American man called John Wimber, whose teachings on signs and wonders brought on a wave of critical responses, a wave referred to as the "fourth wave of the Holy Spirit. Within the church it was certainly a revival, but outside, the wave hardly made a ripple. My church then was a partner with Vineyard Ministries of which Wimber was the leader. We had several visits from him and he taught the church about signs and wonders as his disciples. The movement was discredited in the mid-nineties as many of the signs and indeed the wonders started to be faked. For those who are desperate seek after a sign that seem to satisfy the senses are easy to be dazzled by charlatans.

The movement had its roots in Scripture in **Deuteronomy 26:8** which reads:

“And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders.”

Referring of course to the plagues which God suffered onto the Egyptians in order to set His people free from slavery. This verse is a part of the passages that are read in the Passover Haggadah and in the Seder. Much emphasis was placed on **Mark 16:20** when Jesus sends the disciples out with the message and accompanying signs. A large part of the ministry was healing, seen as a sign from God to verify the teaching. The ministry came up against great controversy over time and personally I started to have serious doubts, when John Wimber introduced his Five Point Healing Model. My view was that the Holy Spirit needs no plan to do His work. As stated, however, 'signs and wonders' are biblical, so in this study I would like to explore what the Bible actually tells us.

In the Second Book of acts we find the apostles going out and healing the sick and performing many wonders and signs [**Acts 2:43**], and it says the same thing in **Acts 5:12** when they were in Solomon's Portico. Jesus says that signs will follow those who believe [**Mark 16:17-18**], but what are these signs that should follow the believer? The same verse lists these signs as; casting out of demons, speaking in new tongues, picking up poisonous snakes, surviving poison and laying hands on the sick. This verse however is a part of a portion of scripture that is hotly disputed; many Bible scholars are of the opinion that **Mark 16:9-20** is of a later addition by an unknown writer.

“A few manuscripts insert additional material after verse 14; one Latin manuscript adds after verse 8 the following: *“But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal*

salvation.” Other manuscripts include this same wording after verse eight, then continue with verses 9-20.”

The purpose of signs and wonders is to validate the message that Jesus' followers were taking to the people, just as the miracles and healing that Jesus performed validated who Jesus was. This is shown clearly when Paul and Barnabas were at Iconium where they stayed for a long time. They spoke boldly of Jesus and signs and wonders bore witness to the word [**Acts 14:3**]. Now Paul and Barnabas were apostles and the wonders seem to validate them as such. The word 'apostle' is actually an Old English word 'apostol' meaning 'messenger'. Which comes from the Greek 'apostolos' "messenger, or envoy," literally "person sent forth," from apostellein "send away, send forth". In this case someone who is sent, or commissioned, by God. The apostle Paul says:

“by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ” [**Romans 15:19**]

We know that God ordained Paul directly by His Spirit, there is plenty of evidence to show that. Paul, then called Saul, was a man who was persecuting the Christians of the day, the followers of The Way [**Acts 9**]. God stopped him dead on the road to Damascus [**Acts 9:3**] and blinded him with a flash of light, something closely connected with God since the creation. The Lord told Ananias to go to Saul and lay hands on him to restore his sight. [**Acts 9:12**] Despite fearing this man, Ananias was obedient. God says “he is a chosen instrument of mine, ”[**Acts 9:15**], and at that point Saul was commissioned by God as His 'envoy' to the Gentiles. It is a very dramatic story, and few people have received their commission in so dramatic a way.

A high profile UK evangelist friend of mine was very fond of saying, "Christians don't follow miracles, miracles follow Christians," but so often this just doesn't seem to be reality. At the other end of the scale, many Christians believe that miracles no longer occur, that was just for 'Apostolic Times'. This is also untrue, as so many Christians have personally witnessed. There is, however, definitely a deficiency, a gap, here; if miracles truly follow Christians then why don't we see more healing and more miracles? Perhaps they do not instill faith, just thought, or possibly those people who witness wonders have not been drawn to Him [**John 12:36-38**]. Jesus said that we do not choose Him, but He chooses us [**John 15:16**]. The day after the feeding of the multitude the crowd were still there waiting for Him and Jesus told them that they were not seeking Him because of the signs, but because they wanted more food [**John 6:26**]. Later Jesus made it clear that no one came to Him unless the Father draws Him [**John 6:44**]. This was also recognized during Old Testament times, as Jeremiah says that God had told him that he (Jeremiah) was consecrated before he was born and appointed, commissioned, as a prophet [**Jeremiah 1:5**]. Paul certainly was convinced, as He should be, about being chosen by God [**1 Thessalonians 1:4**], and John was also convinced of being chosen, but also of the need to be anointed. He says that the anointing stays with us and we have no need for anyone to teach us as the Spirit teaches all truth about everything [**1 John 2:27**].

We have seen before that the Holy Spirit brings gifts, but not every believer has all of the gifts at any one time to keep, they are either given for a season or they are a part of an anointing, for a variety of service and activities [**1 Corinthians 12:5**]. This Epistle tells us that to one is given this gift or that gift, "*to another gifts of healing*" [**1 Corinthians 12:9**], "*to another the working of miracles,*" [**1 Corinthians 12:9**]. So, we can take it that not everyone has the gift of healing or miracles. Signs and wonders are for a specific purpose

and anyone seeking to perform these wonders needs to be anointed by God, anointed to be an apostle. If we do not have that apostleship we may fail, we are not all apostles, we are all disciples, but few are apostles; could you name one modern day apostle?

Performing signs and wonders, or miracles, does not make you a popular person, most of the prophets who performed miracles were hated, and even turned people away from God. Moses performed several miracles [**Exodus 7:10-12**] but the people turned against him several times [**Numbers 11-17; Numbers 11:4-6**] and the plagues certainly turned the Egyptians against God. Just read also **Jeremiah 11** to see how the people felt about God's prophets. No one performed more signs and wonders than Jesus, and the Israelites rejected Him and crucified Him. Even miracles wrought by the original apostles did not result in faith as Israel failed to turn to Christ [**Acts 2:43**]. Peter healed the lame man at the Temple [**Acts 3:7-11**]; God answered Peter in a miraculous earthquake [**Acts 4:31**]; Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the Lord [**Acts 5:5-10**]. Signs and wonders followed the apostles [**Acts 5:12**] wherever they went and Peter healed many from various cities [**Acts 5:12-16**]. When the apostles were in the prison the doors were opened by an angel [Acts 5:19] and Stephen wrought great wonders and signs [Acts 6:8] before he was martyred, whilst in Samaria, Philip did great miracles and signs [Acts 8:6,7,13]. Yet Israel failed to change their ways and refused to see that Jesus was the promised messiah. Those who follow signs and wonders seem to have missed the point, despite Jesus promising that His apostles would do greater things than He had [**John 14:12**]. What Jesus taught was the preaching of the Gospel; it was commanded, not miracles or the miraculous healing of unbelievers [**Matthew 28:19-20**]. There is no mention in that great commission of signs or wonders, just making disciples, baptising and teaching, these things come first, signs and wonders follow as a means of strengthening the faith of believers. Many seemed to have

missed the message, because it followed, not preceded, it was a validation of apostleship.

What then of the statement above that, “you will do even greater works than these,” by Jesus? [**John 14:12**]. Many people have quoted this verse to me many times, and asked why miracles were so few and far between? Have we misread or mistranslated this verse? The word used here is the Greek word '*megas*', which has many meanings, Strong's dictionary says the word has, “a very wide application”. The word means greater, in many ways, including quantity, measure, stature, weight and about a dozen others. Jesus would certainly have known that His followers would increase and be 'greater' in number over the years, so it is likely that what was meant here was in quantity/volume, rather than stature. The Spirit, of course, was the source of Jesus' power, and that same spirit now inhabits millions of followers around the world. How can any human do greater works than God, that just does not make sense.

So we must be careful because in the end times there will be many false Signs & Wonders, as **2 Thessalonians 2:9-10** warns us:

9 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

We must Test everything and hold to what is good [**1 Thessalonians 5:21**], listen to the Spirit, if it does not feel right, it probably isn't.

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Six Little Words of Love

‘Love,’ possibly one of the most over used words in the English language, and maybe that is because in English we have just one word for the emotion. We use that one word, ‘love’ for saying we enjoyed a film, to express our love for our wife, for the sexual act, for how we love our parents, for how we love our fellow man, family members, our favorite dish or restaurant or our favorite hobby pursuit. All of these are slightly different, ranging from our passionate love for our partner to taking photographs. So often the English language lets us down, again and again.



In Hebrew and Greek there are a handful of words to describe each type of love, and the Bible translates each of these as 'love'. Love is one of the greatest principles of Jesus' teaching and of our faith, the word is mentioned, in all its forms 683 times (ESV), 448 in the Old Testament, and 235 times in the new Testament. In **Matthew 22:36-40**, one of His disciples asks which is the greatest commandment?

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ **And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** ³⁸ **This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You**

shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

So first we are commanded to love God with everything we have, heart, soul and mind; this indicates an important principle, love is not just a thing of the heart, but your soul and mind also. We are also commanded to love each other as much as we love ourselves; Jesus knew our true nature that we are self-loving people, selfish in fact. So loving others as much as we love ourselves is a big ask. The question now comes, how do we know what sort of love Jesus is talking about?

In the above verse from **Matthew 22**, the Greek word is 'ἀγάπαό'; in both instances. Strong's dictionary defines this as “to love in a social or moral sense”. But like most Greek words it has different meanings according to the context. Agapao means an unconditional love that is something we choose to do and to act out both to God and others; it is an act of will, not an emotion. It is unconditional, which is to say not founded on the goodness of others toward us. It is a love that seeks to see the goodness in others, rather than the faults. This kind of love is unique to Christians, because it is the love that flows from the Father, and anyone who loves in this way is born of God [**1 John 4:7-8**]. In fact, Jesus not only said that we should love each other in this way, but He also said that people will know we are Christians by the way we love each other [**1 John 4:7-8**], do people look at us and know we are Christians by the way we treat one another? I remember that old song from back in the 1970's. “*They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love*” In my experience we are truly lacking in this 'Agapao' love, which is prophesied as a sign of the End Times [**Matthew 24:12**]. *Agape* is a sacrificial love, a love that voluntarily suffers inconvenience for another's sake, without expecting a return or reciprocation. Just as God accepts us as we are, we need to imitate that love to others [**Ephesians 5:1-2**].

Jesus says that we must love the unlovable and love our enemy, those who would persecute us [**Matthew 5:43-46**]. This then is a decision we make, to treat others as we would want, and how God does, treat us. It is inconsistent if we claim to love God and not show the same love to our brothers and sisters. It is also inconsistent to claim that we love God, but not obey His commandments, His law, because in loving others we obey the law, Galatians 5:14 makes this clear:

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The next word of love we have is a Hebrew word '**Ahab**' which has a variety of intensely close emotional bonds. The word is used to describe the relationship between Abraham and his son Isaac [**Genesis 22:2**] Strong's defines this as “to have affection for (sexually or otherwise)” and says that it is the human love for family. Ahab is very much like the way we use the word 'love' today and has many different contexts: Human appetite for objects; food; drink; sleep; wisdom; human love for God; act of being a friend; God's love toward man, etc. This word also appears in relation to how Isaac loved his son Esau [**Gen. 25:28**], but is also used in the romantic sense between Isaac and his wife Rachel [**Gen. 29:18**] and also in relation to our love for God [**Deuteronomy 6:5**]. So, it is certainly a general purpose word for emotional love, the feeling we get about someone or something.

Another Hebrew word that is often translated as 'love' is the word “**hesed**”, which is better translated as 'kindness' in the English language. Hesed suggests a hierarchy of some sort, where someone in a higher position is dispensing kindness to those in a lower position. Hesed is often used in respect to God's kindness and mercy toward man, but not ever used to describe man's love toward God. This is something we need to have in mind when understanding scripture. In **Hosea 4:1**, the second part of the verse

reads: “There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land;”. Here the word love was incorrectly translated from 'hesed', and again in **Hosea 6:4**, where the same mistake is made:

*“What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?
Your love is like a morning cloud,*

Which should read:

*“Your kindness is like a morning cloud,”
like the dew that goes early away.”*

This 'love' is not the love of the people towards God, but the kindness of people toward each other, especially from kings and overseers to their underlings, which changes the meaning of the verse. In this context the above verse [**Hosea 4:1**] actually means that Hosea is speaking (prophesying) the words of God, meaning: '*You don't love me because you do not show love and kindness toward other people.*'

Next in our list of love words is possibly one that is more common or well known, especially to Christians, the word '**Agape**'. The word appears many times in the New Testament and in the Septuagint (the oldest Greek version of the Old Testament), but the word is rare in existing Greek manuscripts. The main use is to describe the relationship between persons, Jesus uses the word in the verse we looked at above about people knowing we are Christians by the love we have for one another [**John 13:35**]. It also describes the love we have for God, or God's love for us [**Romans 5:8**] or God's love for His Son, Jesus [**John 17:26**]. Agape love is differentiated from other words as being founded on deep appreciation and high regard. The essence of agape love is goodwill, benevolence, and wilful delight in the object of love. In our churches and fellowships we often see Agape Feasts (some call them 'Love Feasts'), where we take food and

share it with our brothers and sisters. It is then an expression of regard and good will, showing benevolence, faithfulness, commitment, and an act of the will. This love is described in 1 Corinthians 13. Many believe that 'agape' means 'brotherly love' but this is not so, that word is the Greek word '*philia*', which we will look at next. Agape is the love that “*has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us*” [Romans 5:5] “*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.*” [1 John 3:16].

We now come to another Greek word '**Phileo**' which is associated with friendship, fondness, affection, delight, and personal attachment. The word is one based upon feelings – a heart of love – as opposed to 'agape' which is a matter of benevolence, duty, and commitment. We are commanded to have 'agape' love [Matt. 5:44] but there is no command for 'phileo-love' indeed feelings cannot be commanded. 'Phileo' is about brotherly love like that exhibited in a close friendship such as best friends who will show this affectionate love for each other. In Scripture the account of David and Jonathan is a good illustration of *phileo* love: [1 Samuel 18:1-3], they loved as brothers. Because *phileo* love is about 'feelings' of warmth and affection to someone, we do not see *phileo* love used toward our enemies. This shows us the difference because He commands us to have *agape* love toward everyone. One amazing fact is that in time, as we obey God's commandment of *agape* love for our enemies, or those we cannot love, it often turns into *phileo* love for some, as we start to see them through God's eyes. When Jesus asks Peter if he loved Him, Jesus used the Greek word '*agapao*' in His question, but when Peter answers, “Yes Lord; you know that I love you,” he uses the word '*phileo*' word for love [John 21:15-17]. This not only demonstrates how Peter felt about Jesus, it demonstrates the difference between the two words '*agapao*' and '*phileo*'. Strong's dictionary also defines '*phileo*' as the word for a 'kiss', as in the

betrayers kiss that Judas gave Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus was arrested [**Matthew 26:48**]. It can also be seen in the passage where the sinful woman washed Jesus' with water and her tears, then dried them with her hair. The Gospel says that she kissed Jesus' feet, the word that is translated 'kissed' comes also from the root 'phileo' is the Greek word '*kataphileo*' [**Luke 7:38**].

One last Greek word, one that may be surprising is the word '*φιλadelphia, ας, ?*' transliterated as '*philadelphia*'. Yes this is a very famous US city, and they call it the 'City of Brotherly Love', which is exactly what the word means, 'brotherly love' or as Strong's defines it, 'fraternal affection' also brotherly kindness or the love of the 'brethren'. This word is used in **Romans 12:9** and is translated as 'affection'. It is also translated as 'love' in **1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22** where it is preceded by the word 'brotherly' which qualifies it, and in **2 Peter 1:7** again as affection. The word '*philadelphia*' has its root in two Greek words, our '*phileo*' and the word '*adelphos*' which means 'brother'. It's not the love God has for us, but rather love between brothers and sisters in Christ. It implies a familial bond between people of the same belief or family, who would not otherwise have any affection, but this is possible through Christ.

There are other words that are used only briefly in Scripture; '*Philemon*' which means 'kindly' but is sometimes translated as love, and '*storge*' meaning 'cherishing one's kindred, especially parents or children'. We have however, covered above the main words that are often translated as love, and it is important to discern which meaning each word has, because its meaning so much depends on that little word. To know the types of love we are commanded to give others, and the various emotional responses that originate from friends, family and God.

'Agapao' = an unconditional love that we choose to do and to act out, both to God and others,

'Ahab' = to have affection for (sexually or otherwise), the human love for family.

'Hesed' = to dispense kindness from higher position to those in a lower position.

'Agape' = deep appreciation and high regard, our love for God and His for us.

'Phileo' = of friendship, fondness, affection, delight, and personal attachment.

'Philadelphia' = brotherly love, brotherly kindness or the love of the brethren.

Be sure you know which meaning is being translated, it matters.

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Why We Suffer

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

[2 Corinthians 1:3-4]



How many times have you heard the question, “Why does God allow suffering?” Suffering comes on every scale possible, from the personal to global catastrophes, often Christians ask the same question. From extreme weather to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, landslides, to terror attacks and depression, they all bring suffering, even to God's people. There is a saying that goes: 'In every catastrophe is an opportunity,' and this has certainly been the case with many disasters. In 2004 the Boxing Day Tsunami occurred in the Indian Ocean, Indonesia was one of the worst hit places, altogether across the region 230,000–280,000 people dead and more missing. In several of the countries hit, Christians had never before been able to access on an official basis, indeed some Christians had been arrested for witnessing. After the tsunami, several Christian aid organizations were allowed into the area, giving silent witness to Christ's love. So why does God allow natural disasters, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, typhoons, cyclones, mudslides, wildfires, etc? Especially when these things seem to do the opposite to endearing people to Him? The simple answer is that God created

the universe [**Genesis 1:1**] and with it the natural laws. Most natural disasters are a result of these laws at work.

The Bible tells us that Jesus, 'The Word', “*holds all things together,*” [**Colossians 1:16-17**], so it is possible that He could prevent natural disasters, and He sometimes does just that. The Bible again tells us that God does manipulate our weather, He can certainly withhold rain [**Colossians 1:16-17** and **James 5:7**]. He can also create earthquakes [Numbers 16:30-34] that swallow people and buildings whole. In the Bible these were caused by judgements against the Israelite's sin. In the Apocrypha, there are many events that we could describe as natural disasters [**Revelation chapters 6, 8, and 16**]. In New Covenant times there is little need for God to punish His people through natural disasters. Those natural laws that God put in place, they allow the Earth to react to the consequences of sin [**Romans 8:19-21**], the sins of greed are paramount in causing the Earth to reply. We have already seen that all sin has a consequence, of death, disease, and suffering. So why does God allow these disasters, when He could plainly stop them? It is a matter of record that church congregations increase after a disaster, especially those in the immediate area. Churches are often the first to respond with comfort, shelter and succour, demonstrating their love. These disasters often result in people re-evaluating their lives and their priorities and have different needs, help, ministry, counselling and even prayer for them. It presents an opportunity to lead those people to faith in Jesus [**Romans 8:28**].

I am sure we can all understand how natural disasters are used by God, who 'allows' them rather than causes them; however, how does that work with God's faithful? Why does God allow these, and other more personal tragedies, to be laid upon Christians? There was a time when there was no suffering on Earth. God made man perfectly, with no sickness, or pain, or sorrow of any kind [**Genesis 1:31**]. It

was meant to be that way until man chose the way of Satan in Genesis 3 and sorrow entered the world through man's sin against God [**Genesis 3:6-7**], and God showed Adam and Eve that there are consequences to sin [**Genesis 3:16-19**]. So the suffering and sorrow that afflicts us today is the fault of man, and not of an unjust God; it is the consequences of man's sin, and death is the ultimate payment for sin [**Romans 6:23**].

Many ask, “What have I done to deserve this?” Well, scripture tells us that we are all born with a sinful nature [**Romans 3:23**]. Whether we realise it or not we have all sinned. Even if we have never actually sinned, we still have a sinful nature [**Romans 5:12**]. We suffer because we are sinners by nature. We will all suffer from personal disasters, not one of us is immune; it may be a death in the family or a close friend, it maybe debt or illness, or even being the innocent victim of someone else's actions. It is at these times that people reach out to others, and thereby hangs an opportunity. When people reach the end of their own efforts, when they hit rock bottom and don't know which way to turn, they are more open to God than that at almost any other time. I can personally testify that this was how I came to Christ, and many of us will also be able to say the same thing. We all need someone to place an arm around us and need someone to comfort us. Many of us, however, find that this is the very time when we feel most alone and need a comforter. Well, we have one! Jesus told us, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever,*” [**John 14:15-16**]. This is of course the Holy Spirit, otherwise known as 'The Comforter'. Many of the troubles we suffer are indeed our own fault, because we live in the futility* of our own minds [**Ephesians 4:17**] (*some translations use the word 'vanity'). Basically, if we hear and read the word of God and fail to live by it, then we deceive ourselves into thinking we are something we are not [**James 1: 22**]. If we are a

doer rather than a hearer God promises He will bless us [**James 1:25**]. This is by no means a new problem. It was a problem in apostolic times and it was a problem during the Old Testament times. David, the psalmist, who knew about sin and breaking God's law, says the same thing in **Psalm 1:1-3**. Paul warns us not to let anyone deceive us, otherwise we will see the wrath of God [**Ephesians 5:6-7**], the wrath of God is when God withholds His protection or blessing. God spelled out what this meant in the Old Testament saying that if the people disobeyed the law, then 'curses would come upon them [**Deuteronomy 28:15**], The word 'curses' is translated from the original Hebrew word, 'lálá', meaning 'vilification', which in turn means “*to lower in estimation or importance*”. In other words to lose God's blessing.

If there is one thing we know about God, it's that He turns every situation to His purpose, for the good [**Romans 8:28**], so when troubles do beset us, He does not waste the opportunity. Indeed, He will allow us to experience these difficulties because it is a part of His plan for when we turn to Him [**Jeremiah 29:11**]. One example of this is of course the character Job, someone who experiences every trouble in the book. He lost everything; wife, children, riches, everything. After Job stood firm in his faith in his God, he was rewarded, and God gave him twice as much as he had before [**Job 42:10**] and seven sons and three daughters [**Job 42:13**]. The Lord will also use people who have suffered, for His purpose. To be effective in that purpose we need to be strong, and our suffering proves us, tests us; these are the trials that we need to go through. James says we should count it as a joy when we go through trials [**James 1:2**], the word 'trials' is translated from the Greek word 'peirasmos', meaning “*putting something to proof by experiment*”. If we were an aeroplane it would be like getting an 'airworthiness certificate'. In First Peter the same theme is repeated, and Peter makes reference to being like gold, refined in fire [**1 Peter 1:6-7**]. I

would make the comparison to steel. As an engineer I know that in some applications, steel is useless until it has been heat-treated in a furnace and hardened. When we suffer we are a part of a process that builds our character [**Romans 5:3-4**], and James confirms this saying that it produces steadfastness, and lacking nothing [**James 1:3-4**].

But our suffering has a purpose, for His glory. Our suffering can be a powerful witness to others, when we approach our problems with joy. In Paul's letter to Timothy, when Paul was in prison, he makes it clear that he 'endures' it for us, the 'elect' [**2 Tim 2:8-10**]. Paul famously suffered for Christ in many ways, besides being committed to prison he seems to have had other issues, among them a stomach complaint. He says that he prayed for healing many times for this and God gave him that famous answer, "My grace is sufficient for you," and Paul wore this like a badge in contentment [**2 Corinthians. 12:9**] as a witness and encouragement to other believers. These things are there so that His glory can be displayed [**John 9:3**].

More than this, we suffer in order that we may help others; **2 Corinthians 1:3-4**, says:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

Here then is a great reason for some of our suffering, so that we can help others in a similar situation, and verse 5 makes it clear why, *"For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too."* How truly wonderful is that, to be able help others through our own suffering. It is like a

training session for ministry. God is giving us the tools that we need to comfort and help our brothers and sisters in Christ, surely something in which to rejoice, “*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,*” [1 Peter 1:6]. Through these troubles we grow, troubles make us rely upon the Lord and God's word, they not only test our faith, but they cause us to fall on, rely on the promises and principles of His word and laws [Psalm 119:71]. Suffering or trials teach us the truth of Psalm 62:1-8, the truth of learning to “*wait on the Lord only.*”, and gives the experience and the tools to heal others in Jesus' name. Praise Him that you are being trained and equipped to do His work, to comfort others just as you were comforted and saved by His grace.

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Dealing with Depression

I have heard it many times, that Christians should not suffer from depression, “You have Jesus,” they say, but nevertheless believers do suffer from this debilitating affliction. Many get confused between depression and just being 'fed-up', which everyone experiences from time to time. Let's start by getting some definitions, or diagnoses, of what depression really is. The UK National Health Service (NHS), defines depression as:



“Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act. Fortunately, it is also treatable. Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease a person’s ability to function at work and at home.”

It lists the symptoms as:

Feeling sad or having a depressed mood

- *Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed*
- *Changes in appetite — weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting*
- *Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much*
- *Loss of energy or increased fatigue*
- *Increase in purposeless physical activity (e.g., hand-wringing or pacing) or slowed movements and speech (actions observable by others)*
- *Feeling worthless or guilty*

- *Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions*
- *Thoughts of death or suicide*

Symptoms must last at least two weeks for a diagnosis of depression.

There are four main causes, according to Health professionals. **Biochemistry:** Differences in certain chemicals in the brain may contribute to symptoms of depression. **Genetic factors,** depression can run in families; biochemical, abnormality in certain chemical production in the body; **Personality,** people with low self-esteem who are easily overwhelmed by life's difficulties, e.g. stress; and **Environmental factors,** long-term exposure to violence, neglect, abuse or poverty.

While there are medical solutions to Biochemical anomalies, there is no cure, so we just treat the symptoms. There are things that can be done to alleviate the suffering from other causes of depression also. One of the feelings we get through depression is 'hopelessness', **Psalm 34:17** encourages us to cry out to the Lord who will 'deliver' us from ALL our troubles. **Verse 18** also tells us that He “*saves the crushed in spirit*”. Now that is a great promise, 'all our problems' encompasses what it says, everything. Humans are humans and depression is no new thing. People back in Old Testament times were no different. **Lamentations 3** shows that there was a problem with hopelessness, **Lamentations 3:19-20**, but a few verses later the writer expresses how his hope is in the Lord [**Lamentations 3:21-26**]

Depression means that sufferers see things differently, when **1 Corinthians 13:12** speaks of seeing spiritual things as if looking through an imperfect mirror, it also seems to apply to our view of our own lives. Movie and TV companies, to save all the problems of shooting at night, often used to use 'night filters' that turned day to

night, people with depression often see the world and their lives through one of these filters. God wants to remove that filter, because He cares about all of us [**Psalm 145:8-9**] and wants us to have an abundant life [**John 10:10**] but Satan wants to take that life away. Jesus wants us to enjoy peace in our lives [**John 14:27**] a peace in our hearts about ourselves and the way we see the world. The twenty-third Psalm is one that expresses both sides of this coin, it assures us that even though we walk through darkness [**Psalm 23:4**] we should fear no evil or bad things because God is with us [**Psalm 23:4**] and goes on to give hope for the future in His promise. It is about changing our view, our perceptions through that night filter, of our problems and our hopes. Jesus wants our hearts to soar on eagle's wings [**Isaiah 40:31**] giving you strength to keep going and not grow weary or give up.

Genetic Factors:

Clinical research shows a connection in genetics, if the parents suffer from depression, there is a good chance that the offspring will do also. A British research team recently isolated a gene that appears to be prevalent in multiple family members with depression. The chromosome 3p25-26 was found in more than 800 families with recurrent depression. Scientists believe that as many as 40 percent of those with depression can trace it to a genetic link. God's word tells us that sin can affect not only the person who committed the sin, but to the third and fourth generation [**Deuteronomy 5:9; Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18**]. As with all sin these generational curses can be broken by confession and repentance. We cannot always know the sins of our great-grandparents so we cannot be totally specific, however what angers God more than anything is putting anything before Him (other gods) and conforming to the world is just that [**Romans 12:1-2**]. That curse then can be broken through repentance, “so that you may be healed” [**James 5:16**].

Personality:

Essentially, this is about how we feel about ourselves, about our self worth. People with a mind set that says they are not worth listening to, even listening to themselves, they allow the stress and strains of life to overcome them. God does not want you to feel this way, you are dear to Him and He makes a promise, that you will never suffer anything that is not common to other people, and not let you suffer beyond your ability to cope [**1 Corinthians 10:13**]. You are not experiencing anything that other people do not cope with, you are not alone. And God always provides a way to escape, there are always options. Why? Because, as a Christian, you are a dwelling of the Holy Spirit, a part (or fragment) of God that lives within you [**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**]. You are owned by God [**v20**] so to damage your own body, as many do in frustration (self harm), is to damage God's property and hurts the Spirit. Satan also wants you to be bound up in your depressive personality, because you are useless to God if you continually are continually overcome by life. Satan will take advantage of your sorrow [**2 Corinthians 2:7, 11**], so we are called to put on the armour that God has supplied in order to fend off the wiles of the devil [**Ephesians 6:11-12**]. Our first stop when we feel that we cannot bear our load is Jesus, who calls us to Himself with *“all you who labour and are heavy laden,”* and promises us rest [**Matthew 11:28-30**]. You are certainly not alone, it is obvious from his songs (Psalms) that King David suffered from depression. David cries out to the Lord in so many of his songs, saying that his heart is overwhelmed, that God should lift him up and give him shelter [**Psalms 61:1-4**].

Environmental factors:

Many of these factors come from our early environment, the way we lived, the way people treated us and how we were brought up. Some people have parents that were emotionally abusive, many have experienced painful and inappropriate “spankings.” Many children

are told that they are stupid and unable to do anything right, and parents can be distant at times. Children have many emotional needs that are often neglected. Children, above all else, need love and to know that they are loved, love needs to be demonstrated. Many children are bullies, something that is often inherited from parents shown by the way they interact with other people. For every bully there needs to be those who are bullied, something that may also come from parents in the way they interact with the world. Much of our behavior in later life are learned responses, either learned directly from our parents or learned from 'what works' to enable us to get our own way.

We certainly need to examine our relationship with our parents, the Bible says that we should honor our fathers and mothers [**Exodus 20:12, Matthew 5:4, 19:19, Mark 7:10, Luke 18:20, Ephesians 6:1, Colossians 3:20**]. The results of this, we are told, result in a long and good life. But God's word also instructs fathers not to provoke their children to anger [**Ephesians 6:4**]. If you parents have damaged you they are wrong and have sinned against God's law, however you first need to forgive them, and ask God to forgive them. In this way we free ourselves from their curse. Then what is left is to re-learn our responses to the things that beset us, by reading God's word, and believing it. It is not only the sins of others that cause depression, but our own sin. A guilty conscience can lead us into deep depression, but God tells us to confess our sin to Him, and He will forgive us. Sincere repentance requires turning from sin, meaning we must try not to repeat the sin. God will forgive us the sin, but we still have to deal with the consequences of our mistakes, but God will always be there to help us through, and He holds us up [**Isaiah 41:10**].

In General

When we are feeling depressed, what can we do? The best answer is to open your Bible and read what advice God gives you for you. He

says seek out someone you can trust that can help you just by being there [**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**], and keep your friends close to you, your neighbors, nurturing their friendship [**Proverbs 27:10**]. Keep cheerful; cheerfulness is contagious and it acts like a medicine, be sad and you just get worse [**Proverbs 17:22**]. The Bible also says to meditate on good things, happy thoughts, think about the wonderful things in this universe [**Philippians 4:8**]. David tells us that he would have lost heart but for his belief that God's goodness would see him through [**Psalms 27:13**], and he advises anyone to wait for God to strengthen your heart [**v14**]. God will answer your call, David knew that, and Jesus tells us the same thing, to ask the Father, because everyone who asks will receive [**Luke 11:9-10**].

God wishes us to think positively during times we feel we are going through hard times. We need to stop dwelling and thinking about the negative, bad things and start looking for the good in everything. It is often our own thoughts that bring us down into a depression. If we force ourselves to think of good things we will be able to see God and He will lift us out of those dark places. All we need to do is to pray to God, asking Him to give us peace of mind. Do what is in your power to help yourself, then just trust in Him, and wait upon the Lord to do the rest.

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Beyond the Curtain

One of the greatest mysteries in life is death, the final curtain one act play that is our lives. William Shakespeare once wrote:

*“All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely
players;
They have their exits and their
entrances,
And one man in his time plays many
parts,
His acts being seven ages.”*

The monologue concludes with the words:

*“Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion . . .”*

Mere oblivion, but what is really after that final curtain has fallen on our part in the great drama of this civilisation? People have asked questions many times about this subject, and different people have differing views as to what happens and where our spirit goes. It is always comforting to think that when we die our soul travels directly into Heaven and is greeted by St Peter, welcomed by Jesus and all of our friends and family that have passed before us. In this study we will attempt to find out exactly what the Bible says about our crossing from this physical world into whatever lies beyond the curtain.



There are two certain things in this life, taxes and death, and nothing makes us consider our mortality, and what comes afterwards, than the loss of a loved one. Atheists believe that this is all there is, we die and we are gone, our life force returns to the cosmos. Job was the first recorded asking the question, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” [Job 14:14] Almost every religion that has been around on this Earth is based on the continuance of life in some form after death, it seems that no one can face life ending at death. Statements like, “is this all there is?” have been asked since Adam, but it's only in the last couple of centuries that a view has become widespread that this is indeed all there is. Fortunately, all of those faith systems were right on one thing, because there is the promise of life after death, for those who are God's people.

If there is no existence after death, then our faith is a total lie, hundreds of people have been martyred for nothing, Jesus died for nothing and billions of people over thousands of years have been deluded. Paul tells us that God cannot lie and that our hope of eternal life is true [Titus 1:2] and there is plentiful evidence that God exists. He makes that promise abundantly clear, that the whole purpose of what Jesus did was to gain life after death for us, and not condemn us to perish [John 3:16-17]. Here we see a difference between the two words, 'death' and 'perish'. Perish is translated from the Greek word, '*apollymi*', which literally means 'to destroy fully'. The word translated as death is the Greek word '*thanatos*' which, according to Strong's, means the separation of the body from the soul by which life on Earth is ended; that's quite a difference.

How then does this work? Our physical bodies certainly decay or are cremated through death or *thanatos*, but our soul has been separated from our bodies at the point of death. Paul again tells us

that flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God, nor can our decayed bodies. He says that we will not all sleep but we will all be changed, possibly to our resurrection bodies. Those sleeping in the Lord will be raised in the twinkling of an eye with their new bodies at the sound of the last trumpet [**1 Corinthians 15:50-54**]. This passage also gives us a clue as to what happens to us between our physical death and resurrection. It says, "We shall not all sleep" indicating that we will indeed sleep in the Lord. One Corinthians chapter fifteen is known as the "resurrection chapter" because it gives us so much information about our future.

We actually have at least four witnesses that this is possible, witnesses that wrote down what they saw and learned. Those statements are called 'The Gospels', and those four people actually witnessed their friend Jesus die, and gain a new body after death, an incorruptible body that could do all the things we can do, talk, eat, walk, everything [**Luke 24:41-43, Luke 24:13-31**]. As if that was not enough thousands of people saw Jesus during that time and who knows how many witnessed His ascension [**Acts 1:6-11**]. All of this we can take as reliable evidence of the possibility, the hope, of resurrection and eternal life.

What happens at, or just after the point of death? The Bible gives us ample information about what happens at this point, in fact the Bible compares death to being asleep more than fifty times. It can maybe be compared to being under anaesthesia, if anyone has experienced major surgery, where our eyes seem to close and the open again several hours later. We are not aware of the passing of time, nor do we dream or know anything of what is happening around us. Therefore, if we die before the second coming, it will be like being transported directly to the resurrection. The Bible seems to confirm this when it tells us that everyone knows they will die but that the dead know nothing [**Ecclesiastes 9:5**]. It tells us that all our

thoughts and plans will end [**Psalm 146:4**] and we do not hear anything, we do not even praise the Lord [**Psalm 115:17**]. When we read about the raising of Lazarus, who was dead for three days, he had nothing to share about the experience, because there was nothing to share. He simply slept in the tomb.

When Peter was speaking to the astounded crowd on the original day of Pentecost, he spoke about King David, that he died and was buried, David's tomb was still with them and known at that time. Even he, a great man of God, and ancestor of Jesus, he did not ascend but was committed to the grave [**Acts 2:29, 34**]. Even someone as great as King David did not escape the grave, nor will we, but David will be resurrected along with all those who have slept in the Lord. Hell is not a crowded place at this time, in fact it is doubtful that Hell even exists, yet. There is a real misconception about Hell. It seems to come from a misunderstanding of the Greek word 'Hades' or the Hebrew word '*she'ol*' or '*sheh-ole*', both of these have the dual meaning of 'the grave' or a place of torment, "grave, hell, pit." "the world/realm of the dead" (Strong's H7585) as in **Matthew 11:23**. Whether we are good or bad does not matter, and the Bible is clear that we are not judged at the moment of death, but we have to wait for 'Judgement Day' when the dead rise. The Scripture says that the sea, death and Hades (sheh-ole & the world of the dead) will give up their dead, and they will be judged according to whether their names are in the Book of Life. If their names are not there they will be consigned to the lake of fire, the second death [**Revelation 20:13–15**]. It is likely that the idea that the bad go to Hell came from northern European traditions, the word 'Hell', easily confused with Hades, comes from Old Norse (Viking) meaning the 'underworld'. In Norse the word '*Hellir*' means cave or cavern, a physical place below ground.

Exactly the same will apply to going to Heaven, because the New Heaven and the New Earth are yet to come. We cannot enter Heaven, God's abode, unless we have our resurrected bodies, corrupt flesh cannot come into the presence of God. **1 Corinthians 15:35–50** gives a great example about our resurrected bodies through a seed that dies before it produces the new plant, and that the seed, our bodies, is just the husk that contains the core of us. In **1 John 3:2**, John assures us that what we will be, has not yet appeared and that we will be like Jesus. Paul also agrees we need to wait to become citizens of Heaven until Jesus returns, he says that Jesus will transform us from, “lowly body to be like his glorious body”. We have some information about what happens after death, but it seems that the New Testament writers were also confused as to the details. Paul admits that he does not know, and it seems that there are things that man may not know [**2 Corinthians 12:3–4**]. The tradition of Heaven being a physical place, up there, above us has a long history, in European religions, high places have always been regarded as sacred. In Britain these places were called, 'tors' or 'henge's', so it is natural to assume that Heaven is opposite to Hell and be above us somewhere.

There is a huge amount of uncertainty about the terms used in the Bible that speak about death and where we go;

- **Sheol**, temporary address of the disembodied souls of dead. It is translated "grave" 31 times, "hell" 31 times, and "pit" 3 times
- **Hades**, identical to *Sheol* (Hebrew). Hades is translated "Hell" 10 times and "grave" once. It is the place for the soul, not the body.
- **Gehenna**, Greek, (but originally from a Hebrew name) - translated "Hell" all 12 times. It is the permanent place for destruction of the "... *soul and body* ..." [**Matthew 10:28**]. It

is a place of "... *fire that never shall be quenched*" [**Mark 9:45**].

- **paradeisos** - Paradise. It is translated "paradise" all 3 times by the KJV. "Paradise" is not the English translation of any other Greek word in scripture. First, we hear the words of the thief and Jesus Christ on their crosses in **Luke 23:42-43, 2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7**.
- **Abussos** (Greek) - Abyss. It is translated "bottomless pit" 5 times, "deep" twice, and "bottomless" twice. **Revelation 20:1-3; Revelation 9:1-11; Luke 16:26**.
- **chasma** (Greek) - a gaping opening, chasm, or gulf, pit **Luke 16:26**.

The Hebrew **Sheol** and the Greek **Hades** are both temporary places of torment for the souls of the wicked. Before Christ's resurrection, the saints (us) resided and were comforted half of Hades, called 'Abraham's Bosom' which is no longer used under Christian theology. The Greek **Gehenna**, (which comes from a Hebrew name) is the **Lake of Fire**, the permanent place of torment for the souls of the wicked in their resurrected bodies. **Hell** is a rather general term that seems to be used to mean either Gehenna or the other side of Hades, both by those who know the basic difference between these two specific places and by those who do not. Because we have reliable witnesses in the form of the disciples, four written statements in the form of the Gospels, supported by many giving up their lives, we have a certain hope. We can therefore rely on what we are told, that Christians will sleep in Christ until Judgement Day and will proceed to the New Heaven and New Earth if our names are in the Book of Life.

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Where is Heaven?

Another BIG question that has been intriguing humans for thousands of years is; where and what is Heaven, the abode of God, the trinity and the angels. In this study, which follows on from the previous study on 'what happens when we die', I



want to investigate what the Bible tells us about heaven and examine how some popular misconceptions line up with the Bible.

Firstly, to define what we are to study, we must look at the meaning of the word 'Heaven' in scripture. Basically there are three meanings in scripture; Heaven, the realm of our God, the word that describes the space, and the state of mind. However, the Bible phrase, "heaven and earth" usually indicates the whole universe [Genesis 1:1] [Jeremiah 23:24] [Acts 17:24]. In the Jewish tradition, there were three heavens:

- The firmament, as "fowls of the heaven" [**Genesis 2:19**] [**Genesis 7:3**] [**Genesis 7:23**] [**Psalms 8:8**] "the eagles of heaven" [**Lamentations 4:19**].
- The starry heavens [**Deuteronomy 17:3**] [**Jeremiah 8:2**] [**Matthew 24:29**].
- "The heaven of heavens," or "the third heaven" [**Deuteronomy 10:14**] [**1 Kings 8:27**] [**Psalms 115:16**] [**Psalm 148:4**].

In Hebrew the word '*shamayim*' is used for "heavens", the plural form of the word meaning 'heights,' or 'elevations' [**Genesis 1:1**] & [**Genesis 2:1**]. In the poetic book of Psalms, the Hebrew word '*marom*' is used as an alternative to '*shamayim*', which literally means 'in high places' or 'heights', also translated as 'heaven'. Psalms also uses '*galgal*', literally 'wheel' or 'whirlwind' [**Psalms 77:18**], also translated as 'heaven', both '*shahak*', translated 'sky' [**Deuteronomy 33:26**] [**Job 37:18**] [**Psalms 18:11**] or 'clouds' [**Job 35:5**] [**Job 36:28**] [**Psalms 68:34**] (firmament). Before you start yawning, suffice to say that in Hebrew there are many words that seem to be translated as 'heaven'. One thing to note here is that the common denominator between the above is that heaven is, "Up there, somewhere," obviously it is this that has informed people to think that God's realm is also somewhere "Up there". Besides these, which are essentially 'physical', we also have the Metaphorical and the Spiritual meaning.

Some of the Metaphorical meanings are contained in the book of Isaiah as the 'doors of heaven' [**Isaiah 14:13**] and [**Isaiah 14:14**], in **1 Kings 8:35** as heaven shut and in **Ezekiel 1:1** as 'opened'. The New Testament use of 'heaven' is mostly the Spiritual use Spiritual meaning a place of eternal blessings, righteous, and even the abode of departed spirits, the place where the dead in Christ, rest. The New Testament refers to Heaven variously as: the "kingdom of heaven" [**Matthew 25:1**] & [**James 2:5**]; "paradise" [**Luke 23:43**] [**Revelation 2:7**]; Christ calls it his "Father's house"[**John 14:2**]; "The Jerusalem above" [**Galatians 4:26**] [**Hebrews 12:22**] [**Revelation 3:12**]; "imperishable inheritance" [**1 Peter 1:4**] [**Hebrews 9:15**]; "homeland" [**2 Peter 1:11**]; and a "better country" [**Hebrews 11:14**] "better country" [**Hebrews 11:16**]. All of these are different descriptions of Heaven, the promised future place for those whose name appears in the Book of Life.

But the question is, where is Heaven? It was thought that Heaven was 'Up there', above the clouds and the ferment. In the past half century or so we have travelled above the clouds, and into space, we have seen pictures from the Hubble Space Telescope from the far reaches of our visible universe and we have not seen Heaven. Is Heaven then, a real place, or is it a fantasy, made up by the minds of men and women who wish to believe that there is somewhere to go after we die? My personal belief is that Heaven is a real place, the Bible says that Heaven is God's throne [**Isaiah 66:1**] [**Acts 7:48-49**] [**Matthew 5:34-35**] and we know by witness statement (Gospels) that Jesus was taken up, ascended, so if Heaven did not exist, where did He ascend to [**Mark 16:19**] [**Acts 7:55-56**]? When Jesus ascended He was certainly alive as He rose upwards, leaving His disciples behind to enter Heaven on our behalf and become our great High Priest [**Hebrews 6:19-20**]. Jesus also talks to His disciples as of Heaven being a real place. He tells them that, in His Father's house there are many rooms [**John 14:1-4**]. This verse in John 14 makes Heaven sound like a huge building, but the words translated 'house' more accurately means residence or abode (Strong's G36140); the word translated 'rooms' is the Greek word '*monè*' (Strong's G3306) meaning again, 'abode, dwelling, residence or mansion'. This could mean that the phrase could well mean, 'In my Father's residence (abode) there are many dwellings', what do you think? However, this is an explicit promise of Jesus, that belief in Him will reserve one of those dwellings for us. It is worth taking on-board as a memory verse **Hebrews 10:19-22**, which says:

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full

assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

We find then that Heaven does indeed exist as Scripture speaks of it as such, and we get access through Jesus Christ. There are of course no verses in the Bible that indicate exactly where Heaven is, no GPS coordinates or pin on Google Earth or Space to indicate its position, but God must be somewhere, so Heaven is where God is. Paul certainly believed and told of a living man who, fourteen years ago was 'caught up' into the third Heaven [**2 Corinthians 12:1-4**] the same word, '*harpazo*' (Strong's G0726) is used in **1 Thessalonian's 4:17**, which describes the rapture. These two passages may indicate that Heaven is somewhere beyond the stars and space itself, possibly outside of our physical universe. What evidence is there that Heaven may be outside of our universe or in some parallel existence? If, as we are told, that God is Spirit He must inhabit a realm which is both remote and close to us because the Bible says we can come close to Him and He close to us [**James 4:8**] (read **Hebrews 10:1 & v22**).

Some look at this as being on a different plane from us, rather than in a different place, although there is evidence that God exists outside of space and time. God describes Himself as being the 'I Am' [**Exodus 3:14**], which suggests that God 'just is'. We can also see that God's time is not our time, a thousand years is like yesterday the Scripture says, [**Psalms 90:4**] [**2 Peter 3:8**] which suggests that God is somehow outside of our time. Scripture also says that God inhabits eternity [**Isaiah 57:15**] [**Psalms 102:12, 24-27**]. God is above, and outside, of the sphere of our time. God sees all of eternity's past and eternity's future as one, this is why His prophecies are accurate, because He sees it as history. We were chosen before the Earth was made and He saw how man would forsake Him at the same instant [**Ephesians 1:4**] [**1 Peter 1:20**]. God does not just live a long time, He does not have longevity, suggesting that He grows

old slowly, He is 'eternal' [**Deuteronomy 33:27**] meaning He is always the same, He never changes [**Malachi 3:6**]. This can also be said of Jesus, that He is the same yesterday, and today and tomorrow [**Hebrews 13:7**] and as Jesus is one of the Trinity of God, we can take this as further evidence that God is indeed 'Eternal'.

Is there then a location for Heaven? Some believe that there is evidence in Scripture that Heaven is to the north, certainly there are many verses that point to the north as having some significance. When God's people offered a sacrifice in the Old Testament they would offer it northward toward the Lord. Notice what Moses said in [**Leviticus 1:11**]. In Job He stretches out the north over the void [**Job 26:7**] and in **Psalm 75:6** God's judgement and lifting up does not come from the east or west or from the wilderness (south). **Isaiah 14:13** also mentions the north and says:

*“You said in your heart,
‘I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of assembly
in the far reaches of the north;”*

Strangely there is indeed an empty space or void in the North of our universe beyond the north star. This place is so large it could contain 200 of our Milky Way galaxies. Dave Finley, of NARO (National Radio Astronomy Observatory) says, *“What we’ve found is not normal, based on either observational studies or on computer simulations of the large-scale evolution of the Universe,”* The void is indeed there and no one has yet been able to account for it, in fact astronomers say it should not be there. Certainly, God tells Job that out of the North comes golden splendor that God is clothed with awesome majesty [**Job 27:22**], and **Leviticus 1:11** instructs that sacrifices should be slain on the north side of the altar, northward

toward the Lord. So there does seem to be something special about the north. If they want, or need, a location for Heaven, north is as good a direction as any.

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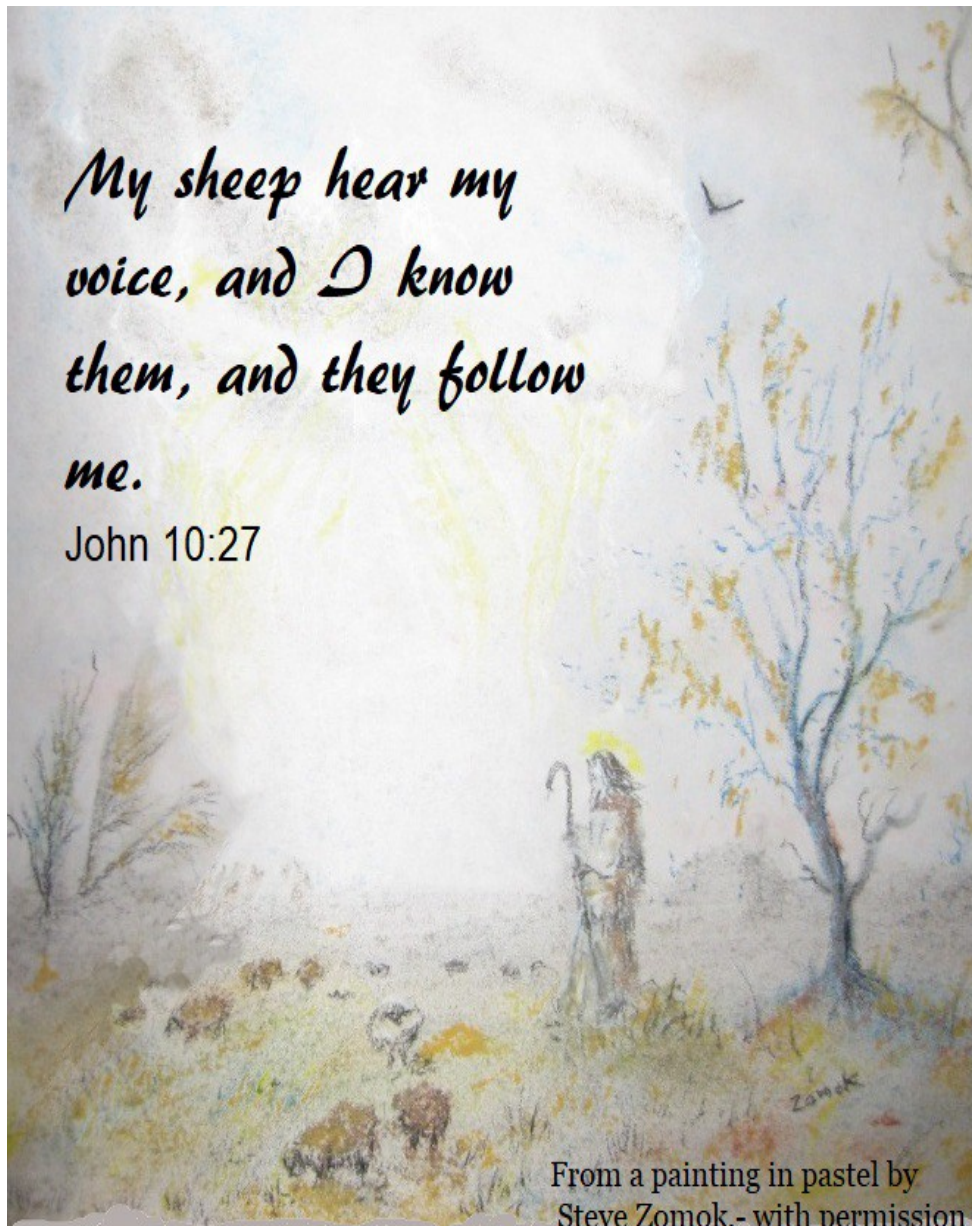
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*My sheep hear my
voice, and I know
them, and they follow
me.*

John 10:27



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