

Matthew

“ Teachings of Jesus “

**Study series as posted at the website
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The unconventional punctuation styles you will see are related to the way these studies were originally intended for the e-mail audience, using plain text to keep file sizes smaller for bulk mailing; creatively 'formatting' with punctuation, for various kinds of emphases, in the absence of formatting the actual type. You may find occasional misspellings, and the more rare cases of a Scripture reference going to a wrong passage; those will be 'typos', not intentional. With this type of POD (Print On Demand) publishing, it seems simplest, and the most prudent use of time, to not completely go through and revamp everything, but to just leave things as they are. Please accept this book, warts and all; but rather, please pay attention to, and receive God's Truth presented herein.

Matthew

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Jesus: Son of David

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."(1:1)

In this one tiny verse is wrapped up the essence of Jesus Christ. First of all we see the "genealogy." In this, we see His "humanity." Jesus was born as "water and blood."(1Jn5:6) That which makes up humanity. Mankind is referred to as "flesh and blood."(1Cor15:50) And He "partook" of the same.(Heb2:14)

As we look at parts of the genealogy, we see incest (1:3), marriage to two pagans (1:5), adultery and murder (1:6); thus, fulfilling Paul's description, "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant.."(Phil2:7) Even, as society saw him, they saw the product of what they perceived to be an illegitimate birth.(1:18), which notion they did not neglect to point out, "we were not born of fornication." (Jn8:41) Even today scoffers reject the "virgin birth." (Is7:14,Mt1:23) Things haven't changed a bit in 2000 years. And so we can understand how He "took our infirmities" upon Himself.(Mt8:17) And how He is able to give support to us (Heb2:18), since He has gone through everything we, as people, go through. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb4:15)

The "Throne of David" was promised in the Old Testament as an everlasting covenant.(1Kg2:45) When His birth was prophesied, He was to bring peace, order and justice.(Isa9:7) Something which is yet future. Because His first coming was to be as a "Savior."(Isa53:1-6, 61:2a, Lk4:19) Thus, the name "Jesus." But, at His first coming the records needed to be confirmed, that this was the "right Man." That He was the "Messiah" the "Christ" the "Anointed One." The One qualified by prophetic lineage to sit on David's throne.

He was constantly called, "Son of David."(Mt9:27,15:22,20:30) And as the multitudes saw His works and heard His teaching, they wondered, "Could this be the Son of David?"(Mt12:23) The One they waited for.

Confirmation of His qualifications to be the Savior "Jesus" is also contained in the statement "Son of Abraham." The covenant to Abraham was, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."(Gen12:2-3) All "families" would be "blessed" with "salvation" when He would die on the cross.(Gal3:7-9)

Since David came through the line of Jacob (Israel), Jesus was then, also, the Son of the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."(Ex2:24,3:6) Our translations capitalize the word "Son" making it a proper noun, as of Deity.

Jesus claimed to be the "Son of God." "Before Abraham was, I am." (Jn8:58) Claiming ownership of the title "God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob" (Ex3:6) ...the "I AM" (Ex3:14) And when Peter proclaimed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"(Mt16:16) Jesus told him that the Father had made this revelation.(vs17) The Father, Himself, made the proclamation at His baptism, as the "Spirit of God..[alighted] upon Him" and with His voice said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."(Mt3:17)

In presenting the royal genealogy the book of Matthew presents Jesus as "King." The wise men came looking for the "King of the Jews."(2:2) When standing before Pilate, Jesus spoke of His "kingdom" (Jn18:36-37) And at His crucifixion, the gentile governor placed the title over His cross, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews."(Mt27:36) Ultimately, Jesus will wrench away the "kingdoms of this world" from satan, who presently has that authority (Mt4:8-9,Lk4:6), and will take charge and reign "forever and ever."(Rev11:15)

Just before Jesus returned to the Father after His resurrection, He told His disciples, "all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."(Mt28:18) That authority was given to Him by the Father. Ultimately, He will give back to the Father "the kingdom" and will put an end to all "rule and all authority and power"(1Cor15:24) And once He has done that, He, Himself, will subject Himself back to the Father, Who is "all in all."(vs28)

This is the One Whose teachings we will study. John writes much about "keeping His commandments." (1John) How can we keep that which we don't know? Thus, this series. Rather than study commentaries of some men about what they "say" Jesus said, let's go directly to the Source. Where else can we go? In Peter's own words...

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.(Jn6:68)

It is Written: temptation - (Mat 4:1-11)

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."(vs1)

As Jesus is about to begin His ministry he is first of all baptised. (3:14-17) As John objects by saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" Jesus says something interesting, "..it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."(vs15) I'm not going to pretend to understand that statement fully, except that it was part of God's plan to fully prepare the "Sacrificial Lamb" which needed to be perfect. Without any blemish. At His birth everything was fulfilled "according to the law" to make Him a "Jew."(Lk2:39) And now He, the "human," is being prepared to authenticate His righteousness. He has just been authenticated by the Father's voice, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."(3:17)

Now, we need to find out whether He can sin. Can He be tempted? The phrase "to be tempted" is quite fascinating. Is it possible for Him to be tempted? If He is tempted, will He succumb? Let's specifically put Him to the test, to see if it is possible. In Mark 1:12 we get a picture of Him being "driven" out into the wilderness. "As if with violence." This was not some little "happenstance" as He was passing along. This is examination time! Graduation depends on its outcome!

We must understand what's at stake. The first Adam (1Cor15:45) had been tempted, had yielded, and brought sin upon the whole human race. If the "last Adam" was to be a "life-giving spirit" He had to be tempted in the same manner, to be absolutely certain He was qualified to atone for sin. And we are told that He was, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb 4:15)

So we see this as an "appointment." "To be tempted by the devil." If we consider the conversation between God and satan in Job ch1, we can just about imagine God's challenge to satan here; "There He is. My Son is JUST a 'man' now. Take your best shot." In Mark we are also told that He was with the "wild beasts"(1:13) no doubt thinking He might be their next meal. That, along with 40 days of hunger has Him in dire physical straights. Possibly on the verge of death?

Perhaps some "ground rules" had been laid out? While He would later make bread to feed multitudes, perhaps He was not "allowed to" do so for Himself? After all, He had taken on a "human" body. "being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself.."(Phil2:8) If He was going to willy nilly perform "creative" feats, He was no longer "just" a man, was He? As He was being arrested for crucifixion He said, "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than

twelve legions of angels? (Mt26:53) But, He had come to be a "man" and had to live under human limitations.

So, satan takes his first shot. "C'mon Jesus. I know how hungry you are. Make the stones into bread. You can do it. After all, You're the Creator. You've just been baptized and heard 'His' voice. You're God's Son. Think of all this POWER at Your disposal!"

Here is Jesus' first teaching. And who, the more appropriate pupil, than satan! His answer, "IT IS WRITTEN..."(vs4) He did not say, "well, I don't THINK that would be a good idea." Or, "do you think I should?" "Well, I don't know...let me think on it a while." As He then rationalizes how "good it would taste."(Gen3:6) "After all, I'm just about to die out here...and then, how would I SAVE the world?"

"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You! (Psa 119:9,11) While Jesus quoted a Scripture related to "bread" the point we need to understand here, is that He relied upon the "already-given" Word of God.(Jude3) Not some "New Truth" or "situational ethics." Since Scripture is sufficient for the "thorough equipping" for "every good work."(2Tm3:17)

So now the crafty serpent (Gen3:1) tempts Him again, and this time uses Jesus' defense "against Himself" by saying "...for it is written."(vs6) Same thing he did with Eve, "for God knows..."(Gen3:5)

Hunger hadn't killed Him yet, nor the wild animals; so the appeal is to pride and fame. "Just jump off this high place"(vs6) ...after all, doesn't the Bible say...? Satan, of course, is hoping, yet, to kill Him before He can get to the cross. And as an "angel of light"(2Cor11:14) presents Scripture in a manner most appealing to the present situation.

But we are told to "rightly [divide] the Word of truth." (2Tm2:15) And so, this time Jesus moves from the temptation at hand, and gets to the core of what satan is doing. "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." Don't twist the Scriptures (2Pt3:16) to suit your own fancy, and then call upon God to obey your interpretation of it. After all, doesn't it say, "If we asking anything...He will hear"? Well, "according to His will" ...yes.(1Jn5:14)

As an example: Jesus said, "..they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them.."(Mk16:18) And so there are some cults who "handle snakes" in their worship, expecting God to "protect them" ...putting God to the test, when that passage has nothing to do with courting danger purposefully. But when Scriptures are distorted, an entire cult results. And some people get bit and die.

Now, the stakes are raised. At this point Satan seems willing to forfeit everything, just to fulfill his dream of being "like the Most High."(Is14:14)

How could he fulfill that? By having Jesus, the "second in command" bow and worship him. After all, Jesus was "second" to the Father. The only One Jesus would be in subjection to was the Father; "I always do those things that please Him"(Jn8:29) And if he could get Jesus to bow to him, in that moment, he would be "like" the Father, the Most High.

What is satan willing to give up for this one moment? "All the kingdoms of the world and their glory."(vs8) Wait a minute! What is this? He is going to give "to Jesus" (the Creator of all things) the kingdoms of the world? Hopefully this is a bit of an eye-opener for us. While we Believers know that God is "in control" we must never lose sight of the fact of "who" is CURRENTLY RULING the world. Satan said, "for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish."(Lk4:6) And you will notice that Jesus does not deny that claim. As Paul reminds us that our "warfare" is "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."(Eph6:12)

The appeal for Jesus in this is to get His "kingship" NOW. After all, He was introduced as "..Son of David, Son of Abraham."(1:1) But He knew He was coming two times: first as Savior and then as King. (Is61:2,Lk4:19) If He took the kingship "now" He could bypass altogether the torturous, grueling suffering and separation from the Father on the cross. Hebrews says that "though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (Heb5:8) If He did not exercise endurance the world would not be saved, humanity would "all" die without any hope of redemption, and ultimately Satan would have "won" in the struggle against God.

So what does Jesus respond? "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve'." (vs10) In His submission to God, refusing to bow to satan, He "[resisted] the devil" and the devil [fled] from Him.(Jas4:7)

You will notice there is one thing in this account that Jesus did NOT do. He did not "bind" satan! Of all people in creation, one would think Jesus would have had the qualifications to do so. But He (the "man") did not. So, all the "little christs" that run around today, pretending to "bind" satan, are way in over the heads (Jude10) as they seek an authority that even Jesus, Himself, did not appropriate. He stood firm (Eph6:13b), stood His ground and said, "Be Gone!" Go on, get out of here! "Away with you!"

As James continues, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.." (vs8) And so, in Jesus' case, what happened when He had made satan flee? "Angels came and ministered to Him."(vs11)

So, as Jesus provided the example in resisting temptation, we, too, can do the same. Nothing will be allowed to come that we cannot resist. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able,

but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1Cor10:13)

And yes, He will even send angels to minister to us. That is what they are there for. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Heb1:14)

Repent: follow Me - (Mat 4:17-24)

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."(vs17)

This message, so succinctly stated in this short sentence, is power-packed. First of all we see a continuance of the recurring O.T. theme. The prophets didn't use the word "repent" as such, but another that means the same thing. "Turn." Solomon prayed about God's people "turn[ing] from their wicked ways."(2Chr7:14) The watchman warning the "wicked" person in order that they might "turn from his wickedness." (Ez3:19) John the Baptist retorted to the self-righteous, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance."(Mt3:7)

This is the part of the "gospel" that is mostly lacking in today's sermons, but was most preached by Bible prophets. People today are told that they are "already good" and God sees all sorts of "worth" in them. That God accepts them "just as they are." No change is necessary. For if anybody were to suggest the need for change, that would mean the person was being "judgmental." After all, doesn't Jesus say a bit later, "judge not, that you be not judged"?(7:1)

While we know from other studies we've had that salvation is a "free gift" which is "not of works"(Eph2:8-9) we also realize that a CLAIM to righteousness without its proving "works" is meaningless.(Jas2:26) What a person sees in himself when he truly comes to God is his own worthlessness. His utter depravity in sin. He sees that because of his WORKS which proceed out of the heart.(Mt15:19) So, until the knowledge of Christ enters his heart, the "need" he sees is to cleanse his heart. To get rid of the evil. To change. Yes...by definition..."Repent."

Now, this next part of the message is unique. He says, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The O.T. prophets did not preach this. John the Baptist was the first. Why? Because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the very essence of God's glory (Jn14:9-11,1Jn1:2) was now in their midst.

This word "kingdom" confused the disciples, just as it does many today. They expected that their Messiah had come to establish the earthly-rule kingdom (Acts1:6). But what He was actually proclaiming was that "the Person of right and authority" was in their midst. The expression "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are synonymous. The kingdom of God, the "King of kings and Lord of lords"(Rev19:16) was "at hand." He is "here." You can "approach" Him. As John would later write, "..we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life."(1Jn1:1)

Put most simplistically, Jesus was proclaiming, "Repent! I'm here."

But, as most of His teaching was done with parables, "because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear...lest they should understand with their hearts and turn so that I should heal them." (13:13,15) He knew they would reject Him. He needed to die on the cross. God foreknew their hardness of heart. So, He "couched" His own introduction "indirectly."

But, those special ones whom He chose, whose hearts he knew, He called specifically. "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."(4:19) As He would later say, "No one can come to me unless the Father..draws him."(Jn6:44) And even this was "granted" by the Father.(Jn6:65) As He would also say later, "of all that He has given Me I should loose nothing."(Jn6:39) And again, "Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition.."(Jn17:12)

And so He begins to choose His disciples, and calls them to follow Him. The mission; to "catch men." Jesus' whole purpose in coming was to "seek and to save that which was lost."(Lk19:10)

He did not come to be politically involved and become king. Those were the "righteous" leaders of the day. And He says, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."(9:13) But the ones needing "saving" were the sick.(9:12) And of Rome He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."(22:21) He did not come, at that time, to rule politically.

Now, while the disciples followed Him for three years, and never fully understood His mission until after His resurrection and ascension, they were willing subjects. "They immediately left their nets and followed Him."(4:20)

No doubt they did so naively, not fully aware of what they were "in for." But ultimately these "simple" fishermen would become the backbone of the Church. They would be known for "having been with Jesus" (Acts4:13) as they "turned the world upside down"(17:6)

Do you want to do great things for God? First you must learn to "follow." That means giving up all rights to your own desires and goals. Humility. "Whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant."(20:26)

Someone not long ago forwarded to me some information about a "Golden Medal Journey." A program designed to make "you and Jesus come together" in some sort of, I suppose, "spiritual self-esteem." The program had this "flavor" of being "chummy" with Jesus. Thinking hard, and "deciding" what a person wanted to do, establishing some personal goals, and "then" asking Jesus if He'd like to do it with you. Asking Jesus to come alongside, and be supportive...and in that way, getting to know Jesus. Starting with the person, and "including Jesus" in one's own private plans.

But you notice, these men already had a direction in their lives. They were fishermen...and Jesus called them to "leave it all" (their sole livelihoods and personal goals) and "follow Him." If you want to be with Jesus, you must leave all behind, forsake it all. "So...whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (Lk14:33)

What have you left behind, to follow Him?

Sermon on the Mount:

opening comments - (Mat 5:1-2)

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them..."(vs1-2)

Possibly one of the most "famous" passages in all of Scripture. A passage the "main line" churches love. For many who don't know Christ, if you ask them if they are going to heaven, will respond, "Well, I try to live the best I can, and follow the 'Sermon on the Mount'." And if you were to ask them what it's about, they might respond..."Isn't that the place were it says 'God helps those who help themselves'?"

While the unregenerate have grossly distorted, "to their own destruction"(2Pt3:16b) most of the teachings of these next three chapters, in a very real sense, this group of teachings contains a synopsis of all necessary Truth. If a person had no other section of Scripture, these three chapters contain enough "information" for one who is truly seeking for God, to get him to heaven safely. For as Paul writes that the Law was a gauge for how sinful we are (Rom5:20), and that it is our "tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."(Gal3:24) Jesus in this section teaches us what the intent of the Law was.(5:17,22) What God's intention was for the Law, before rebellious man distorted God's will, as Jesus would say, "You have heard it said" ...by the human traditions... "but I say to you." This is the Law. Man has distorted it this way. But here is what it really meant all along

So, as "His disciples came [TO] Him" to learn, let us do the same.

Sermon on the Mount:

beatitudes - (Mat 5:3-12)

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."(vs3)

In this one "simple" sentence is the key to salvation. One who is "poor in spirit" is one who is "destitute, afflicted, lowly, helpless, powerless." He is the one who came "beating his breast and said, "God be merciful to me the sinner."(Lk18:13) He could see that there was nothing good about himself, because he realized "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells."(Rom7:18)

This is the opposite of what the world and current churches teach; self-worth, self-esteem, self-importance, self-empowerment, self-righteousness and holiness. And these people will not be saved in such a state, because Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."(Mt9:13) As he would say to Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."(Jn13:8) Of the self-righteous pharisee who praised himself to God and the humble tax collector who asked for God's mercy Jesus said the "sinner" went home justified rather than the "church leader" pharisee.(Lk18:14)

The one who is helpless to save himself is precisely the one for whom Christ came. "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."(Rom5:6) And Jesus says, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven."(vs3)

"Blessed are those who mourn..."(vs4) James says, "Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." (Jas4:9) The salvation that brings eternal life is not a "feel good" experience. If you go about to indulge your feelings, you will never be saved. Being saved starts with "sorrow leading to repentance." As Paul writes, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted...(2Cor7:10) But, once a person has come in sorrow, and Christ has washed away the sins (Rev1:5b) as the burden of sin has been taken away, then there is the "relief" that a clear conscience brings. (1Jn3:21) As Jesus says, "...they shall be comforted."

"Blessed are the meek..."(vs5) James continues, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."(Jas4:10) When we are in Christ, we are "joint heirs" with Him.(Rom8:17) Just as all things have been given to Christ, so too, we will "reign with Him" (2Tm2:12) And as the earth is "His footstool"(5:35) the one who comes to Him in meekness can sit at His feet, as the disciples did on the mountain, and learn from Him. "...inheriting the earth."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...(vs6) Job said, "I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food.(Job23:12) Jesus invited His hearers, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (Jn6:35) "The water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."(Jn4:14) "...for they shall be filled."

"Blessed are the merciful..."(vs7) Here we get into "faith in action." Later He will teach "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." (6:12) and says, "if you forgive men...your heavenly Father will forgive you."(6:14) And of the one who was unmerciful, "I forgave you that debt...'Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' (Mt18:32-33) If we have truly come in humility and received God's grace upon us, we cannot BUT be the same to others. If we do He says, "...they shall obtain mercy."

"Blessed are the pure in heart..."(vs8) "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"(1Cor15:50) because it is the "body of death." (Rom7:24) While God gave the Law as a "tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith"(Gal3:24) Israel was promising, "all that the LORD our God says to you [Moses] ..we will hear and do it."(Deu5:27) But you see, Israel was an obstinate people..."they always go astray in their heart."(Heb3:10) But what did God want from them? To keep the Law? Yes...but more than that. "Oh, that they had such a HEART in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!"(Deu5:29) "But with most of them God was not well pleased, for they were scattered in the wilderness."(1Cor10:5) They did not partake of God's "rest."(Heb3:11) But Jesus says that God's desire is for people to have "pure hearts" ...to "see God." "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."(1Jn3:3) This is another step in the maturing process, as a person has his "senses exercised to discern both good and evil."(Heb5:14)

"Blessed are the peacemakers..."(vs9) Even more maturing and growth is required here. Not the brashness of youth that would wage battle at every opportunity. Paul wrote, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom12:18) Even regarding something like an unbeliever seeking divorce from a Believer, Paul gives the Believer the recommendation to go along with it, even though God "hates divorce"(Mal2:16) because, "God has called us to peace."(1Cor7:15) In pursuing the path of peace (Rom14:19, Heb12:14, 1Pt3:11) we become more like Christ the "Prince of Peace" (Is9:6) and Jesus says, "...they shall be called sons of God."

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake..."(vs10) Ultimate maturity here, as often, persecution results in martyrdom. When a person has given his life, there is nothing greater (or more) that he can

give.(Jn15:13) If we submit to persecution for Christ, and even, possibly, martyrdom, that is "ultimate love" demonstrated for Christ, Who called us His "friends."(Jn15:14) And you will notice the great honor bestowed upon His first martyr, Stephen, as he was about to depart. Jesus rose from His seat and was "standing" at the Father's right hand (Acts7:55-56) to welcome him into heaven for his faithfulness. His was the "...kingdom of heaven."

Before I realized that many of those around me, whom I had thought were Christians, were not; who were railing upon me for this or that as I was trying to be faithful to God's Word, and they were not; I used to get down in the glum-dumps of dejection because of their abuses. First of all, I didn't realize they were not True Believers. And, I was "hurt" that they would attack me for being faithful to God and His Word. And for a few years I started to "cave in" and "softened" my approach...and even became watered down a bit in doctrine...in order to be more "loving" and "tolerant" and not so "judgmental." After all, we are supposed to "love our brothers." Right? But...they were not "Brothers in Christ." And I realize that now.

Also, a gauge as to one's faithfulness is the "kind of" objections God's enemies bring one's way. If we receive the "praise of men" then we are like the "false prophets." Jesus said it thus, Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.(Lk6:26) Do we want the "passing pleasures" of the praise of this world? Moses rejected them in order to serve God (Heb11:25) as he "esteem[ed] the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.(vs26)

As we are in the arena in battle, many in the stands (Heb12:1) are "booing" us. And at times it seems like the "boos" are louder than the cheers, as they also "throw stuff" at us. But we are called to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us...run[ning] with endurance the race that is set before us...LOOKING UNTO JESUS. (Heb12:2) This is our ultimate goal. To look to Jesus. To follow Jesus. Receive abuse for Jesus.(Col1:24) And, if called upon...to die for Jesus.

It is not "demeaning" to suffer for Christ. On the contrary! The early disciples rejoiced "that they were counted WORTHY to suffer shame for His name."(Acts5:41) It is an honor. Jesus said...

"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."(vs12)

Sermon on the Mount:

salt & light - (Mat 5:13-16)

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. (vs.13)

In Jesus' teachings He often uses word "pictures." Examples from everyday life. Things that people understand well, that are familiar. To illustrate spiritual/heavenly principles.

As I understand things, they did not have the "Morton salt-boy" walking in the rain with his fine-grained iodized salt pouring out of his oversized container. They had salt "rocks" which would be put into the cooking pot until enough salt had come out of the rock into the food to flavor it as intended, and then the rock was taken out. Eventually with repeated use the salt would all become dissolved out of the rock. And then, obviously, the rock was not useable for flavoring any more. And it was thrown out to join the other rocks on the roadway. Unfit.

Believers are to be "flavorful" in the world. Paul speaks of a "sweat aroma"(Eph5:2,Phil4:18) We are, if possible, to live "peaceably with all men."(Rom12:18) The world is to be able to know we are Christians by our "love."(Jn13:35) We are to be a positive influence on the world.

Salt is also a cleansing agent. If a person has a wound, and nothing else medicinally is available, salt would be a suitable agent..although QUITE painful. And the same properties which make it a healing agent also make it a preservative; killing the spoiling bacterium.

Yes, sometimes a Christian's testimony seems to "sting" a bit when a sinner hears the Gospel message or Biblical doctrine faithfully proclaimed and lived. The person sees the sin in his own life, and God's word seeks to kill the bacteria of sin, and it hurts.

Putting this verse together with 2Ths2:7 the Holy Spirit "restrains .. lawlessness." If the Believer is acting as "salt" in the same way, it is apparent that the "salt" here is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit "convicts the world of sin and righteousness"(Jn16:8) And it is supported by Jesus' words, "have salt in yourselves."(Mk9:50) The Believer is the human agent by which He has chosen to accomplish His work. So the Believer is to provide "flavor." But he is also to be vigilant for sound doctrine, standing against sin; not adapting to the world's ways to win the world, but being distinct. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal."(2Cor10:4)

But the salt (rock) does not have flavor of its own will. It is merely a "rock." The container. It must have the "salt" installed by Christ. "Christ in you."(Col1:27) "Be filled with the [Holy] Spirit."(Eph5:18)

But you also notice He mentions the possibility of "los[ing] its flavor."(vs13) Having salt/flavor is a choice. In the context of speaking of eternal hell fire He says, "have salt in yourselves." (Mk9:50) And what happens if the rock becomes "unflavorful?" It is cast out and "trampled." Throughout His teachings, Jesus speaks often of the circumstances which will cause a person to be "cast out." (We have spoken of this .."once saved, always saved".. in the past in other studies. It will also be covered again in more depth later in this series.)

He goes on in the same teaching to say, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house."(vs14-15)

Again, a "contrast" to the world. The world is darkness. A Christian is not to try to appropriate darkness in order to win the world. The light is set up prominently so it can shine in the darkness, and make it light. But we presently see a "church" full of people purposely dousing their flames in order to grope around like the world does. After all, we don't want to "offend" the world. If we shine too brightly, it will expose the sin that the world commits, as they "love darkness rather than light."(Jn3:19) And that would be "judgmental." But you notice Paul writes, "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather EXPOSE them."(Eph5:11)

You notice, Jesus doesn't tell us to go around pointing our fingers and wagging them in people's faces, nor bombing their murder clinics. He says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."(vs16) Live pure and holy lives. But don't be hoity-toity "to be seen by men."(6:1) And certainly don't grovel around in their filth.

Just as a Christian spouse provides, by a good life, a testimony to the unsaved (1Cor7:16,1Pt3:2), so, too, the light of the Holy Spirit living through the person brings about praise unto our heavenly Father.(vs16)

Have salt... Let your light shine...!

See also Addendum: "Light of the World"

Sermon on the Mount: the Law & Prophets - (Mat 5:17-20)

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."(vs17)

There are many professing Christians who believe that the Old Testament isn't for the Church. During my college days in the 70's, the hippy "Jesus people" movement, and other similar offshoots essentially threw out the O.T. and would only discuss the N.T. This that became what today might be called the "Love & Grace" generation would quote, "for you are not under law, but under grace." (Rom6:14) After all, didn't Paul chide the Christians of Galatia for trying to adhere to the Law? "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"(Gal3:3)..as they merrily seek their "spirit-filled" experiences.

But Jesus is talking about the "Law [AND] Prophets." Since there was not yet a "New Testament" the Scriptures given up to that point consisted of what we, today, call the "Old Testament." They called it the "Law and the Prophets" (Mt7:12,Acts13:15) You will also note that the "Psalms" were included.(Lk24:44)

That Jesus is not isolating specifically the "Ten Commandments" or Levitical ceremonies and rituals can be illustrated by Paul, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, (Rom3:21) The "Law and the Prophets" giving witness to the "law."

Jesus is not only teaching God's Truth, He is also setting things up to refute and show the fallacies of the teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees. "Now the Pharisees...derided Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts..."The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached...it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.(Lk16:14-17)

The religious leaders "legalistically" would pick-n-choose specific laws as proof-texts of a person's obedience to God. They continually harassed Jesus for not keeping the Sabbath the way they thought it should be kept. And He would focus in on their hearts instead, declaring "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (Mt23:23)

So, as He is about to tear into their perversions, He assures them (and us) that He is not about to overturn what God had previously given. He is not

getting ready to reveal "new truths." Some new "revelations." But He came to FULFILL the Law. Remember Paul's words about some "other gospel" (Gal1:9) Jesus is not about to declare a "new" way to get to heaven. Salvation has ALWAYS BEEN by "grace through faith." (Eph2:8, Lam3:22, Gal3:5-6) It has always been based on the "seed of the women." (Gen3:15, Acts4:12) (And He was the fulfillment, the "Seed.")

"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."(vs18) God's Word is "settled in heaven."(Ps119:89) It is firmly established, not because it has been scribed and printed on parchment and paper, but because it is the very essence of Jesus Christ, Himself. "...the Word was God...and the word became flesh." (Jn1:1,14) And so, Jesus was well qualified to assure His hearers that God's Word would not pass away, that it would be fulfilled down to the minutest details, because He was speaking of Himself. And it will be "fulfilled." As the "Prophets" had said, "so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper for which I sent it." (Is55:11)

He speaks of "jot or tittle." This would be like all the "t"s are crossed, all the "i"s are dotted, every article is correct, every gender, case and tense is specific and true. Thus we know that the "Word was God", not "a" God.(Jn1:1) We know that "Jesus is THE Christ" (1Jn1:22), not "a" christ "principle." We know that Jesus came from the Father (Jn8:42) and is the human representation of God. (Jn14:9-11, Heb1:3) He did not go off to Tibet someplace during his adolescence and learn from the "masters" until He had accumulated enough goodness. If you read through the Gospels regarding His humanity, you will notice innumerable references to fulfilled prophecy, even down to the soldiers' gambling over His garments at His crucifixion. And then, what of prophecies concerning Israel..That's another whole subject in itself.

And, as past prophecies have been fulfilled down to the letter, we have similar assurance of fulfillment of future prophecies. People think of the earth as being fairly stable and predictable, engendering it's nick name "terra firma." However, the earth is going to pass away. It will be burned up.(2Pt3:10) But God's Word remains, "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; (Heb1:10-11) Whatever unfulfilled prophecies that remain, WILL BE fulfilled. "God is not slack concerning His promises."(2Pt3:9a)

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."(vs19)

Oh the sorrow and lamentation to those who deliberately have perverted and distorted Scripture! As Peter says, "to their own destruction." (2Pt3:16)

Never before in history have there been so many "translations" of Scripture as today. Each, catering to their own clientele. They want a "pleasant voice..for they hear Your words but they do not do them"(Ez33:32) They "heap up for themselves teachers" (2Tm4:3) because they don't want "sound doctrine" ...they want to do their own thing. And so we see a generation of "versions" which cater to their desires.

While humanity today exalts teachers that make them "feel" good, casting aside the Doctrine of God's Word, and those who militantly hold to God's Word are castigated; you notice Jesus ranks them differently. Those who uphold God's Word faithfully, are considered "great" in the kingdom of heaven.

And finally, who gets to heaven? Jesus was rather bold in proclaiming that the scribes and Pharisees would "by no means" enter heaven. Wait just a second! Aren't You being rather judgmental there?! They are our "pastors" and "teachers!" They are up in the pulpits every Sunday. They have hundreds and thousands of people coming forward to their "altars" for "commitment." They are published authors, see this book (by one of them) I've been reading lately. It's sooo good. See the wonderful ministries they have for God! Jesus said, "unless your righteousness exceeds" theirs, you'll never get there. "...by no means..."

Why is this? What is righteousness? Having skirt hemlines a certain length? Having a certain kind of haircut? Faithfully adhering to "Sabbath restrictions?" (This is what the Pharisees did...) They pretended to follow the law, but their hearts were not right. God had originally desired, "Oh that they had such a heart.."(Deu5:29) However, "They always [went] astray IN THEIR HEART, And they have not known [His] ways." (Heb3:10)

So, now we have a little background for the next section where Jesus analyzes the "law" that they were keeping.

See Also Addendum: "Relaxing a Commandment"

Sermon on the Mount: but I say to you - (Mat 5:21-48)

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder..' but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."(vs21-22)

Is Jesus "creating" a new law here when He says "But I say to you"? Let's take a look at this. Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to the Lord.(Gen4:3~) Abel followed God's commandment, and his sacrifice was accepted. Cain did something of his own choosing, trying a different "path" to God, and his sacrifice was not accepted...by God. Rather than "mend his ways" with God, he became angry with Abel. (Sound familiar to what happens today?)

God speaks to Cain, "Why are you angry?"(vs6) Basically tells him that if he was doing well, he would be accepted. Since he was not accepted, it meant he had sin in his heart. That sin was wanting to take over. That he should resist.(vs7)(Jas4:7,1Pt5:9) However, Cain gives in to sin and kills Abel.(vs8)

Jesus is getting to the root core of "what" murder is, and where it originates. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders..." (Mt15:19)

By the same token, a person coming before God in worship cannot expect to be "accepted" if he harbors hatred in his heart, can he. Go take care of the sin first, and then come back to God's "presence."(vs24) For the Corinthians, partaking of the Lord's Supper with improper heart preparation and cleansing resulted in physical death.(1Cor11:30)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'"(vs27-28)

So, this means that women should maintain "drab" get-up. That beauty is sinful. That attractiveness is worldly. Right? After all, doesn't Peter say to not fix up the hair, wear jewelry, or nice clothes?(1Pt3:3)

No. Not quite. God made women to be "beautiful" to men. Are we going to condemn what God called "very good"?(Gen1:31) The Egyptians noticed that Abraham's wife was "beautiful."(Gen12:14) Rachel was "beautiful of form and appearance."(Gen29:17) What Peter is saying is, don't let the outward things be what characterizes you. But rather let the beauty "be the hidden person of the heart..gentle and quiet spirit."(1Pt3:4) Abraham's servant brought out much jewelry for Rebecca.(Gen24:22) And nothing was given in the law that said they should not wear jewelry.

Oh, and by the way, from my experience with my "ex..unequal-yoke" who was beautiful; it didn't matter how she was dressed (scuzzy or nice), she still got the "looks" from people. So, men, don't blame the woman. (And then, for balance, let's not forget the matter of "stumbling blocks." But that's another study for another time.)

So, if "it's OK" for a woman to be beautiful, what is Jesus saying? As God said to Cain, "control yourselves, men." "...that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor," (1Th4:4) Once you notice the beautiful woman, what do you do with what you just saw? Do you merely admire, or do you "take her home with you" in your thoughts? If you did, you might as well have done the physical deed...as far as your own heart is concerned. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (Jas1:14-15)

To what lengths should we go to keep from sinning? Whatever it takes! Are you just NOT ABLE to control yourself? It would be better to be without sight, than for your lusts to take what you see, and bring it forth to sin.(vs29) It would be better to be minus a limb, than to go fully-functional into destruction.(vs30) While we tend to "catagorize" sins as being more or less "bad" and thus, feel we could just "sneak a peak" without getting caught...it's "not so bad." Jesus says, sin is sin. It is ALL "bad."

"Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."(vs31-32)

"The two shall become one flesh."(Gen2:24) What makes a marriage? The wedding ceremony? The license from the courthouse? No. It is when the two come together. Thus, we have a society full of adultery. In God's eyes, the first person you were with, is the one you "married." (Gen49:31b) If you are with anyone else, it is adultery. The only exceptions are death, and an unequal yoke. (Rom7:2-3,1Cor7:15)

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all...but let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No', 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."(vs33-37)

With all sorts of testimony and evidence against her, Harry Smith (2/17/98) asks Tanya Harding words to the effect, "Can you look me in the eye and tell me you had nothing to do with the attack on Nancy Kerrigan?" Tanya looks him in the eye with words to the effect, "On everything holy and sacred...I did not do it." (She had some expressions I had not heard

before, so don't remember it verbatim.) As she was, obviously, "lying through her teeth" ..!! Her words, "from the evil one."(vs37)

How can a person make a "solemn promise" based on some holy object? Does a person have control over that object? Only God does. Can a person swear by their own existence? God has control over that, too, and can say, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you.."(Lk12:20) ...and what are you going to do about it then?

Just be straightforward and honest. "Yes..Yes" "No..No." Anything else is sin.

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person.(vs38-39)

In the law, if a person injured another such that they lost a body part, the one who perpetrated the crime was to receive to his own person in like manner as he had done.(Ex21:24) This was a "judicial" ruling. Is Jesus saying that criminals are no longer to be held accountable for their crimes, as is presently the case in the US? No. He is speaking of "vengeance." God says, "Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.' "For the LORD will judge His people And have compassion on His servants, When He sees that their power is gone, And there is no one remaining, bond or free. (Deu32:35-36)

In other words, be willing to suffer wrong.(1Cor6:7) While we are given the right to use the legal system to receive restitution (1Cor7:21, Acts22:25,25:10-11), we are not to take matters into our own hands. To "make them pay." If things don't turn out the way you know they "should" just remember that "their foot shall slip in due time." They will get what's coming to them.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you...that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."(~vs43-45)

How would we be "sons of [our] Father?" Peter expresses it with Jesus' own example, "who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.."(1Pt2:23) If we are nice only to those who are nice to us, we are no different than the world. But to be "perfect"(vs48) is to love them anyway; remembering God's love for us "when we were still without strength"(Rom5:6)(or goodness or merit) "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."(Jn3:16)

No. No "new" commandments. Just, the "real intent" of the Law as was already given. "Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old

commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. (1Jn2:7)

Sermon on the Mount: to be seen by men? - (Mat 6:1 & 16)

"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven."(vs1)

Charitable deeds ("alms"). Not a specific commandment given through Moses. But, something, nonetheless which Jesus is commenting on. In the O.T. God made many passing comments about treating widows, orphans and the poor with compassion. To "not afflict" widows and orphans.(Ex22:22) That God sees their cause.(Deu10:18) To treat foreigners well. (Deu10:19) And furthermore, that "gleanings" should be left for the poor and the foreigners. (Lev19:9-10)

In more urban societies it would seem that people simply gave money to the poor. e.g. When Jesus instructed Judas that it was "time" (to go betray Him) the other disciples thought he was perhaps supposed to go give to the poor.(Jn13:29) Zacchaeus promised to give "half" his goods to the poor.(Lk19:8) And in the early church they made efforts to "remember the poor."(Gal2:10) But you will notice, it is not a specific command. Nor is a method of giving, nor an amount or percentage dictated. This was something people would do out of the goodness of their hearts.

But, as today, so it was then. Those who gave, received notoriety and recognition for their beneficence. Today we have the "???? Foundation/s" where "?????" is somebody's "name." Just recently the "overnight millionaires" from MicroSoft were featured on CBS News for their philanthropy. So, now we know "who" they are, and "the fact that" they are learning how to give.

In Jesus day, apparently, they were even more brazen...sounding trumpets before themselves. Thus the expression about "tooting one's own horn." Jesus said, "they have their reward."(vs2)

But, what is the "purpose" in doing "charity?" To gain a name because of one's own philanthropy? Or is it to benefit the objects of that charity? Jesus said, "you have the poor with you always."(Mt26:11) As long as the world is in sin, there are always going to be the "have-nots." While welfare needs to be reformed to encourage the dead-beats to get back to work and stop being free-loaders, there is truly a need for welfare. There will always be people in need. Whether they receive aid from the government ('not going to get into political discussion here) or from private charities, it is necessary to care for the truly destitute. That is a Godly principle.

Is it wrong to have wealth? (Some give to charities out of guilt for their own wealth) No. Peter said to Ananias, "While it remained, was it not your

own? After it [the property] was sold, was it not in your own control?"(Acts5:4) Furthermore, is it wrong to spend for "quality" for special occasions? No. Before His crucifixion a woman anointed Jesus with expensive perfume/oil. And the disciples became indignant over this "waste" when it could have been sold and given to the poor. (Mt26:7-13) And Jesus said that she had done a "good work" for Jesus, in preparation for His "burial." After all, remember that Jesus is Deity. The very Son of God. Is He not "worth" the very best we can give!

If giving to charity is for the benefit of the needy, there is no need for recognition of the donor. The purpose is to help those in need. "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."(vs3) Do it in "secret."(vs4) Rather than appearing on TV, how about leaving several bags of groceries on their doorstep from time to time "anonymously." If you know they can't afford new tires for their old car, pre-pay for a set, and swear the dealer to "secrecy" as to "where" it came from. Your Father in heaven knows your heart, and will reward you appropriately.

"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting."(vs16)

As we considered in a recent commentary, "fasting" is not something God specifically commanded. He said that during certain times Israel should "afflict" their souls.(Lv16:29) It would seem apparent that Israel adopted "fasting" as there are subsequently many O.T. references to "fasting" in connection with humility and repentance before God.

So, you notice, Jesus does not say, "I command you to fast." But rather, "WHEN you fast." In other words, when you are in a mode of humility and contrition before God, don't announce it to the world. If you are truly humbling yourself before God, what does anybody else matter? As Jesus was gently, pointedly, bringing Peter back from his denial of Christ, Peter pipes up with, "what about this man?"(Jn21:21) And Jesus replies, "If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."(vs22) Don't worry about your "fellow servant." (Rom14:4) He is individually answerable to God, just as you are. You follow [Me] and don't worry about "him."

When you fast, do so "in secret" (vs18) before your Father. To the world, go about your life "as normal." If you were scheduled for a lunch appointment; keep the appointment and "eat" at it. Your spiritual relationship is "personal" with your Father. And He will be sure that the necessary people know what they need to know.

See also Addendum: "Prayer and Fasting?"

Sermon on the Mount: praying hypocrites? - (Mat 6:5-8)

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men."(vs5)

Oh, the "spirituality" ...to be able, at a "moment's notice" to be called upon by the leader on the platform to stand from within the congregation to "pray." Oh, the flowery words and better yet, if the person can pray in "King James-ese." Such a person surely "must" be a terrifically wonderful "Christian." Or when a group is eating in a restaurant, the "spiritual one" will raise his voice ten times the normal conversation level...as a "testimony" to the unregenerate, you understand...and "pray" for 10 minutes to "bless" the food.

Or, during "prayer meeting" the person didn't get a chance to "show-n-tell" so, "Lord, thank you for letting [me] have the opportunity to do these wonderful things for You." Like the pharisee, "God I thank you [that I'm so wonderful]..."(Lk18:11) Or, if there has been a heated discussion with great animosity, the parties decide to "pray about it" and their "prayer" becomes a "santification" of each's position before the other, making it "right" ...because they are "praying" about it "before God." ...or so they assume.

Jesus calls such rubbish "hypocrisy!" Such people who boost themselves up "have their reward."(vs5b) But not from God!

Prayer is a "secret" thing with our Father. As we "abide" in Christ (Jn15) and are "one" with the Father and Jesus (Jn17) we are a "family." Families typically don't go broadcasting their personal matters to the world. When a married couple are intimate, they do not advertise and describe their relationship with everyone else. The relationship of the Christian with Jesus Christ is like the marriage relationship(Eph5:32) where "two..become one"(vs31) as we are "one" with God.(Jn17:21) The Believer goes "into the room and [shuts] the door" and communes with God "in secret."(vs6)

Yes, there are times when a leader will formulate a "corporate prayer." Solomon did so in dedicating the temple.(2Chr6:13) Jesus did so in breaking the bread.(Mt15:36) In raising Lazarus.(Jn11:41) Paul before the unregenerate in the storm.(Acts27:35) Many of these "public" prayers were as much for "testimony" to the observers as they were true "communion" between the ones praying and God; and were more an outward manifestation of the communion that already existed...as Jesus prayed, "And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." (Jn11:42)

Furthermore, "when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.(vs7)

"Now I lay me down to sleep..." or "God is gracious, God is good, now we thank Him for this food." These are the ones people teach their children. There are some cults called "christian" that use the heathen practices of "prayer beads." Each bead another "prayer." As though, somehow we must multiply words before God for Him to hear us. The reason people are not heard by God is "sin." "...your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He WILL NOT HEAR."(Is59:2) Understand this clearly. There are many "prayers" that God "refuses to" hear. And no amount of multiplying of words, repeating mantras, raising the voice...will avail anything.

Many "prayers" are with wrong motives(Jas4:3) and are not answered. The other day I was riding along with a friend and this music tape was playing...the "ol' favorite"; "Sweet hour of prayer...make all [my] WANTS and WISHES known." To most people this is what prayer is. "God, get me out of this mess I got myself into. I'll promise to do ANYTHING You ask, if you'll just get me out of this bind!" Do you think God "makes deals?!" This prayer is not originating from a desire for fellowship with God, and is not from a pure heart! Or, "I really need that new car, Lord."

What prayers does God answer? Those that are "according to His will." (1Jn5:14) But how do we know what His will is? We need to be in fellowship; abiding. Our heart attitudes must be of submission to Him, as Jesus prayed, "not My will, but yours be done."(Lk22:42) Rather than my "wants and wishes" it is "what will you have me to do?"(Acts9:6)

And as for our "needs" ...it isn't really necessary to ask, because "your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."(vs8)

So, don't be like the hypocrites.(vs8a)

Sermon on the Mount:

how to pray - Mat 6:9-15)

"In this manner, therefore, pray:"(vs9)

Jesus was in the habit of praying a lot. 'Would sometimes spend all night in prayer.(Lk6:12) And on one occasion the disciples asked Him "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.."(Lk11:1) His reply there was essentially the same as here, on the Sermon on the Mount.

"Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name..."

When Isaiah saw the Lord "high and lifted up"(Is6:1) the seraphim continually cried to one another "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"(vs3) When we are "in secret" with God, we do not approach Him as if He was our "buddy." The "man upstairs." We come before Him in awe and fear (Ps89:7) as Isaiah wailed "Woe is me..I am undone!"(Is6:5)

Also, let us be sure we pray to our Father "in heaven." Some modern perversions of Scripture, in some parallel passages will delete "in heaven." For the unregenerate there is [another] "father." As Jesus said, "you are of your father the devil.."(Jn8:44) And as he imitates God as an "angel of light"(2Cor11:14) his "spirit-filled" children pray to [their] father. But he is not of "heaven!" He is of the "pit" (Rev20:3) and the "lake of fire."(vs10) The Most High is "in heaven."

"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven..."(vs10)

Once we have recognized and praised God's holiness, we also acknowledge His authority and rulership. The word "kingdom" does not only refer to a "place" but also the "royal power and dominion" of our Father in heaven; the "Most High."(Is14:14,Dan4:17) His "right" to rulership. If we do this, coming from the foundation of knowing His holiness, we will not be running around pretending to be "little christs" and mouthing off to the "dignitaries."(Jude8,2Pt2:10) We will realize that such belongs to God.

And naturally, then, we will not try to conform God to our wills; misapplying Jesus promise, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (Jn14:14) As though to "force God" into doing things at our beck and call. Our desire is that God's "will be done." We are, but, "ambassadors"(2Cor5:20) and represent [God's] kingdom.

"Give us this day our daily bread..."(vs11)

This part almost seems redundant and "unnecessary" somehow, doesn't it; since Jesus had said, "your Father knows the things you need before you ask."(vs8) And yet in this simple sentence we find the "only item" we request on behalf of ourselves. "Daily bread." The simple "necessities" of life. That which is necessary to sustain us. In this sentence is not included all our "wants and wishes." It is not our purpose to acquire in abundance, "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. (Rom14:7-8)

And the necessities are for "each day." He says, "give us THIS DAY.." As God led Israel through the wilderness, the manna fell "each" non-sabbath day. And it says there was nothing over; nothing lacking. "Every man had gathered according to each one's need."(Ex16:18) It was always "just right."

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors..."(vs12)

What is a "debt?" Something owed. A payment due, a recompense unmet. What is the debt we owe God? Death. We are sinners and the "wages of sin is death."(Rom6:23) Now, if we are Believers and we sin, we "confess" our sins and receive forgiveness. (1Jn1:9)

If someone has wronged us, we are to forgive them. If we refuse to do so, God will not forgive us, either.(vs14-15) Why not? Let's think about this a minute. If we come to God in TRUE "repentance" it indicates abject humility. "God be merciful to me the sinner."(Lk18:13) We understand our total inability to "cover" the debt.(Mt18:25) We understand God's "grace."(Rom5:20) We understand that forgiveness has nothing to do with us acquiring it on our own behalf.(Rom5:6,8)

So, if we have been "forgiven much" we also "love much."(Lk7:47) If we have been forgiven, and understand God's grace, we can do nothing BUT to forgive one another. To not do so is to not truly understand God's forgiveness of us. And thus, it is not given to us. We know our own frailties. We must also realize the frailties of one another.

Do we begin to understand Jesus' ability to cover our sin? It says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb4:15) For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (Heb2:18) The "full depth" of Jesus' atonement for us was not only that He was righteous, and died for us substitutionally. But He also was fully "man" (Heb2:14) and as such, He could UNDERSTAND "as a man" the frailties which lead us to sin. He was not "just" God "up there" Who didn't know "how we have it down here." He "truly knows" experientially why we sin and fail; even though He did not succumb,

Himself. And so, His "forgiveness" of us becomes even more "personal" and precious! Since He "humbled Himself" to do so.(Phil2:8)

If we refuse to forgive another, knowing our own frailties and the mercy we desire from God, He does not forgive us. We have not truly humbled ourself. We are holding ourself "above" the other, judging them.(Rom14:4)

"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one..."(vs13)

Let us remember that God does not bring evil upon us. He only gives "good" things.(Jas1:17) But He allows Satan to buffet us as an "adversary." He "opposes" Christ.(Zec3:1) Seeks to "devour" whomever he can.(1Pt5:8) Jesus promised that "tribulation" would come (Jn16:33) and also that He has "overcome." We have "victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."(1Cor15:57)

Many perVersions also eliminate the word "one." And people will go on to say that the evil that befell us was something that God brought upon us. But the "person" of the "evil one" is very real. He is the "deceiver."(2Jn1:7) The "father" of lies.(Jn8:44)

Again...when we know God and His character, this part of the prayer is almost redundant, as well. But when we understand that "prayer" is a situation of "abiding" in Christ, then we realize that these things we "pray about" are part of the fellowship and assurance of knowing what is already there. While satan comes against us, we have the assurance and security in Christ. "You've got this taken care of, too, Father, don't You. I rest in You."(Ps37:7) To "rest" is to be "silent." "Position yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, Who is with you..."(2Chr20:17)

You will notice there is nothing here about "me", "power of prayer" or "prayer warfare." Nor is this a "prayer" to be repeated as a fetish or mantra to generate an atmosphere during "worship." Knowing that all power, authority and glory belong to God...forever.(vs13b)

Sermon on the Mount: about survival - (Mat 6:19-34)

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."(vs19-20)

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness." and "...how great is that darkness!" (vs22-23)

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."(vs24)

These three thoughts, while possibly seeming to be separate, are really one and the same. Talking about the HEART, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."(vs21)

People bustle about; working, scavenging, stealing...to acquire wealth. Whether they acquire little or much, whatever they have is never "quite enough." God originally put man on this earth to care for it.(Gen1:28) As the "preacher" goes about to evaluate life he concludes that "nothing is better for [men] than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor--it is the gift of God."(Ecc3:12-13) And yet for all Solomon's wisdom, Jesus says about the flowers which God cares for, "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."(vs29)

As this lesson is being prepared, spring is attempting to arrive, and outside my door the sparrows are making a fuss over some little nooks and crannies of this building, in anticipation of building nests. Who gives them their "wisdom" in what they do? God does. So "will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"(vs30)

The crux of the matter gets down to our focus. Our hearts. Whom do we trust? Whom do we follow? Of what does our life consist? Are we merely "earthly-minded?" Or do we live to follow God? If we are seeking earthly advancement, our focus diverts away from God. The things of this earth will be "burned up."(2Pt3:10) And then what will we bring before God to show for ourselves?(1Cor3:10-15)

The KJV renders vs22 better. If your eye is "single" the whole body will be full of light. James says the "double-minded man [is] unstable in all his ways."(Jas1:8) If a gun were being aimed at a target, having two sighting mechanisms, each calibrated differently, and the person was trying to site down both, he's going to miss the target. Paul was "single-minded" as he was "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to

those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil3:13-14)

As Jesus said, "no one can serve two masters."(vs24) It simply cannot be done. A person can ride the fence for a time, but ultimately a decision must be made. Not like the perverts that appear on the "Jerry Springer" show "...I love you, but I want to go on seeing this other person, too."

This is one of the greatest delusions of the devil. Sure, go ahead and say you love God. But also, why not include all these other beliefs, too. After all, in the end, how do you know "which" one is right? This way, if you have them all..."one of them" is bound to be right and will get you there, right? Like; another person who has been corresponding to VW recently...believing in "post-trib" but hoping and wishing for "pre-trib" rapture. But "hedging the bets" just in case the one was wrong. This is NOT true Faith!

If a person claims to love God, but also "trusts" in the world, his "love" of God is a lie. Many claim to believe the Lord is coming for the Church...but they also are stock-piling food and stores, "just in case" it is REALLY a "post-trib" scenario, and they go through the Tribulation.

"After all these things the [unregenerate] seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."(vs32-33)

The ministry of VW is a testimony to this. As many of you know, I am self-employed, running a sign business. It is a life of faith, being dependant upon customers coming with orders, to survive. The ministry of VW is carried on "in addition to" this career. However, VW has grown to an extent that the time spent with it is beginning to approach "full-time" with regards to writing, correspondence, and website maintenance. So, I now use a Zip-Disk to carry VW stuff back and forth between home and work. And most of these studies are prepared at "work." As VW has been busier, the store has become "slower." As the need is there to write or correspond, the phones are slower. But as bills need to be paid, the Lord brings in the work orders to meet those needs. To an outsider it would probably appear that the business was "failing." But the Lord has given me a "Job" to do...not necessarily making money. But He knows the "needs" to sustain me. He knows my single-mindedness to serve Him as my first (and only) desire is the "kingdom of God." So, He sees to the rest.

And so, to those who worry about things; the times of "Jacob's Trouble" that are about to come upon the unregenerate, Jesus says, "do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things."(vs34) If you are "left behind" when the Rapture occurs, and you then "call upon the name of the Lord" (Joel2:32) do not worry how to survive. You will most likely glorify the Lord by being martyred, anyway.(Rev12:17,13:15) Do not worry about what to say when that time comes, "whatever is given you in

that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit."(Mk13:11)

Don't try to pre-plan for "tomorrow" .."for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."(vs34)

Sermon on the Mount:

don't judge - (Mat 7:1-5)

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.(vs1-2)

This word "judge" means to "pass judgment, condemn." There was a person who used to condemn just about everyone in sight. A sibling who had divorced a wife with children in order to be with another was condemned as not being "fit", even, to read Scripture or pray publicly in a family gathering. Many were the sermons against immorality. If young people even looked at each other, it was automatically assumed that friendliness represented impure thoughts. Dating by anybody less than college age was forbidden.(ed. possibly not a bad idea, actually) This condemnation carried with it the "airs" that this person was "above" all that. That his own life was pure, and such thoughts or deeds would never ever enter his mind. That these "other" people thus defiled were required to "bow" at his feet in confession and repentance. They were answerable "to him."

Many years later, as this person's life was proven to be futile, the truth became known. He had had an affair earlier in his life. When confronted with the facts, refusal to acknowledge, and an angry frustration that such should even be mentioned publicly.

"Indeed you...rest in the law, and make your boast in God...are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish...you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? ...you who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery?"(~Rom2:17-23) The "judge" pretending to be righteous, was actually hiding the big "railroad tie" in his own eye, as he was busy poking around in other peoples' lives, making public display of their "tooth picks."(vs4) As Paul continued, "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles [unbelievers] because of you"(2:24) this person's life of "ministry" was ineffectual.

Peter had been at grievous fault. He had bragged how he would "never" deny the Lord, and then had done so, just as Jesus predicted he would. Jesus is "now" confronting Peter, "Peter, do you love Me?"(Jn21) And through a whole conversation, Jesus pokes around inside Peter's heart, and brings him along the path to restoration. But pride is still in the way, as he is doubtless feeling very humbled before the rest of the disciples, since he had so openly bragged how strong he would be, and Jesus is now "openly" confronting him as to how it had all "gone down." And so he points to the disciple who actually had not denied Jesus in the same circumstances he had been in (Jn18:16), and asks, "what about

him?"(21:21) And Jesus rather retorts back with, you never mind him; "you follow Me."(vs22)

People who set themselves up as judges, do so with the attitude that they, themselves, are "untouchable." That nobody DARES to even suggest that they might not be pristine. But Jesus says, "Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops. (Lk12:3)

And while we are to exhort one another daily (Heb3:13), be a well-functioning body (Eph4:16) and restoring one "overtaken in a trespass" with "gentleness"(Gal6:1); that word "gentleness" is obviously at odds with "condemnation" as the person is admonished with "considering yourself.." Paul asks, "who are you to judge another's servant?" (Rom14:4) Anyone who is a Believer is a servant of Christ. We are ultimately answerable to Him. It is "the Boss" who hires and fires, gives promotions or reprimands.

Do we think we see "something" about somebody? But it is not obvious to ferret out; nor are there "two or three witnesses?" (Mt18:16, 2Cor13:1, 1Tm5:19) Or is there an "attitude against" somebody? Against such Paul responded, "...it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you..in fact, I do not even judge myself..He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts."(1Cor4:3-5) It is Christ Who "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" before Whom "we must give account"(Heb4:12-13) Therefore, "why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." (Rom14:10)

Recently I was "judged" by someone as though I was a "biker" (hoodlum) because of his assumption that "motorcycles are associated with drugs and gangs." Jesus said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." (Jn7:24) This person did not even judge by "appearance" but by mere word-association.

But this leads us to a common "abuse" and misinterpretation of this passage. What about the Christian "look-alikes." The "pretend-christians?" The false prophets who gad about as "wolves in sheeps clothing?" Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.(Mt7:15)

When a Christian is "[testing] the spirits, whether they are of God" (1Jn4:1) the wolves immediately retort back with "judge not that you be not judged." Or, the wishy washy Christians who are trying to straddle the fence will wring their hands in dismay and whine, "Well, we're not s'pposs' to ju-u-udge..." Representatives of the wolves will complain against exposes (Eph5:11) about their false doctrines and wickedness with, "you are not following 'protocol' of Mt18:15-17 as you are judging your brother." Trouble

is, that passage is talking about Believers in the "Church" ...of which they are not a part. They are not "brothers."

Jesus is saying to not condemn what you don't know about; and be sure of yourself first. Whereas, testing/discerning wolves from sheep is an investigative process to determine the truth or falsehood of the matter or doctrine in question. We cannot know if something is good or bad, unless we investigate, and make a "determination." Or... "judge" it.

If we find a thing to be of the evil one, there is no cause to compromise by convening a "council" to discuss "what shall we do?" We must say, "Away with you, satan!"(Mt3:10) He and his emissaries will keep coming back, hoping your answer will "soften" a bit, so they can gain entrance, but we must "put away" the evil.(1Cor5:13, Ec11:10, Deu13:5) "Put away" means to "get rid of it, alienate, burn it up." Totally eliminate it.

But to judge (condemn) a fellow-Believer is like self-righteous Susie, who notices Jimmy's eyes are open during prayer. After the "Amen" piously proclaims, "Jimmy's eyes were open during prayer!" Well, Susie, if "you" were obediently closing your eyes, how would you even know that Jimmy's eyes were open? With the "judgment" you hoped Jimmy would get "it will be measured back to you."(vs2)

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord... Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy..." (~Jas4:10-12)

Sermon on the Mount: pearls before swine? - (Mat 7:6)

Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.(vs6)

There is an Old Testament principle that holy things of the temple were to be handled and eaten only by priests and those who were purified. (Lev6:18,26-27) An "unclean" person could not come into the temple without purification.(Nu19:13) Even the Passover, no "foreigner" was allowed to partake(Ex12:43) unless he was circumcised.(12:48)

Furthermore, to the Jew a Gentile was considered a "dog" and "unclean." (Mt15:26-27) Nehemiah was quite forceful about Sabbath observance as it related to Gentile merchants at the gates.(Neh13:19-22) There was to be a "distinction" between Israel and non-believers, because they were a "holy nation."(Ex19:6) While Israel was set in the center of the nations as a "light to the Gentiles"(Is60:3) through God's law, and the coming of Messiah; and will be when Jesus comes to reign from Jerusalem; they were to be different from the nations. They were not to mingle and learn the ways of the heathen around them; but were, rather, to be "teachers" of the surrounding nations.(Jer12:16) They were warned that interest in foreign gods would be a "snare" to them.(Ex23:33)

So, what do we have today? A "church" with decades of the unregenerate "ministering" within its ranks. As a former church choir director I can attest to the whining arguments; "the choir is so small, we need more singers, and here, John and his wife, Jackie are good singers. Let's get them into the choir." If it was mentioned that they were not "Believers" "...well, what better way to BRING THEM TO THE LORD?" Get them "involved." Get them under the hearing of the Gospel. Youth ministries are run the same way; get the unregenerate "involved" to hold their interest...keep them coming. Or music albums recorded with unregenerate studio musicians. And the list could go on...

The unregenerate will no more be drawn to the Lord through "ministry" than any food would become "holy" because the "holy meat" touched it.(Hag2:12) And furthermore, if a "holy" Church is intermingled by the defilement of the world--the unsaved "ministering" in church, it will make the church "unclean."(Hag2:13) That which was "holy" was the sacrifices, which the purified would eat. It was done in worship before God. Such cannot be participated in by the unregenerate. Keep ministry and worship only amongst Believers. This means preaching, teaching, choir, special music, ushering, serving communion, janitorial work, etc. ...everything.

So then, "pearls before swine." The "gems" of God's Word. The precious "nuggets" of Truth. Given to the "unclean."

What happens when a Believer gets into a debate with the unregenerate? Can the Believer impart "deep truths" or "intricate doctrines" to the unsaved? What happens, for instance, when you try to share Scriptural principles with the scoffers of the world on your favorite "religion forum?" At CompuServe (where I had experience in the past) you will be censored off the board; as the perverted have free reign, and blaspheme the holy name of Christ. You cannot discuss the subtleties of "free will vs. sovereignty" because they don't know the Lord. These things are "foolishness to them; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned."(1Cor2:14) They would like nothing better than to drag you down into their "wallowing in the mire."(2Pt2:22) And typically, if you try to force-feed them, they will often be more scholarly educated, and will "rip you to shreds" totally ignoring or discrediting any Scripture you might have given them. Paul exhorted Timothy, "...avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge."(1Tm6:20)

In other words, there are some with whom we should not waste our time. When the girl called out, "these men are servants of the Most High who proclaim to us the way of salvation"(Acts16:17) Paul did not thank her for "helping further the Gospel" but rather got rather annoyed and cast the demon out of her.(vs18)

So, as you are having that "exchange" with someone, and it finally comes to a certain point where you know you are "banging your head" against the wall, the Holy Spirit will direct you to severe communication with that person. Yes, they will become hostile, and lash out at you. And will, no matter what you do, get the "last word" in. In such a case, just let them go. You have faithfully given them God's Word. They have rejected. "Shake the dust off your feet"(Mt10:14) and trust God's Word to do its job, remembering, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isa 55:11) ...whether they eventually repent, or stand before God without excuse... (Rom1:20)

Sermon on the Mount:

good gifts - (Mat 7:7-11)

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.(vs7)

Unlike the person in responding to Jesus' knocking (Rev3:20), who makes a choice as to whether to let Jesus in or not; Jesus promises the supplicant with a response. Even when one has gone astray God promises, "Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. and I will be found by you..."(Jer29:12-14) You notice the qualification; "with all your heart."

The psalmist responds to God, "When You said, "Seek My face," My heart said to You, "Your face, LORD, I will seek." (Ps27:8) This is how we "ask according to His will."(1Jn5:14) ..because we are "seeking [His] face."

We cannot go about asking God to satisfy all our cravings for selfish purposes. He won't reply favorably.(Jas4:3) If we harbor sin in our lives which we jealously hang on to, He refuses to hear.(Is59:2) But even if we have sinned, and confess (1Jn1:9) and seek Him, He will [let us find Him.](Jer29:14) Because our desire is to seek Him, and His holiness and His will.

What does He promise as a response? His response is just like a "daddy" doting over his children. "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." (Ps103:23-14)

Once we have been cleansed, His gifts upon us are only "good" things. (vs11) If He had to chasten us, He does so with greater wisdom than earthly fathers know.(Heb12:10) As He sees to our daily sustenance, He knows our "frame" and our needs (Mt6:32) as "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.."(Jas1:17)

There are some who suppose that God brings calamity upon us. Well, no. We bring calamity upon ourselves. Please pardon a "personal" example. When my unequal yoke left, those who were counseling/comforting me suggested that God "caused" the divorce and all the hurt I was experiencing, because of Rom8:28 in order to bring about good. Well, no. "I caused" the divorce by having been disobedient to God in marrying her in the first place. I was merely "reaping what I had sown."(Gal6:7) As God says, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings. (Jer17:10)

But...now...since I was/am a child of His, when I had "hit bottom" as she left, THEN Rom8:28 came into play. As I was "now" humbled, and cleansed due to confession (1Jn1:9) I was "seeking His face." He answered with His love like I had never known. The "Comforter"(Jn16) picked me up, got me back on track where my desires had always been...to serve Him...but now, without the impediment, I was useable. And it was only after that, that VW could start. I had failed Him and brought upon myself the consequences; but everything that came about, He worked for His glory. And what God works out, when we get out of the way and allow Him free reign in our lives, is nothing but "good."

"Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from [wood and clay -- dishonor], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work." (2Tm2:21)

Sermon on the Mount: as you would be treated - (Mat 7:12)

Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (vs12)

The "great law" was recited by Jesus when asked, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" (Mt22:37) This, quoted from Deu6:5, was the basis for all the Law given to Israel. If they "had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments."(5:29)

As we have learned in our studies from 1Jn4:20, If someone says, "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" So Jesus continues, "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"(Mt22:39)

If we look at the passage that comes from, we find ourselves coming full circle to the beginning of "this" chapter in Matthew 7 about "not judging" (condemning). "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." (Lv19:17-18)

You notice here the difference between "love", "hate" and "justice." We have a society plagued by "love without justice." Because people suppose themselves to be "loving" they refuse to bring just retribution to perpetrators of crime. Scriptures are quite clear that there should not be "partiality" in favor of the wicked, nor to falsely accuse the righteous (Pr18:5) That those who do so "are an abomination to the LORD."(Pr17:15) And "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. (Ec8:11) It is the blight of our society which allows criminals on death row to gobble up millions of tax dollars for their sustenance for MANY YEARS, and then, sometimes, due to politics and appeals, they never are executed. And that others (who should be executed) are released, unrepentant, to re-commit their crimes.

The expression "eye for an eye, tooth for tooth" had nothing to do with vengeance. It had to do with "justice." As a person had perpetrated, so it was to be done to him.(Ex21) And the judgment was to be carried out "immediately." If the condemnation required a "beating" it says, "the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows."(De25:2)

Quite a deterrent to crime, wouldn't you say... If a person knows, as he contemplates committing a crime, "if I get caught, what I'm about to do will be done to me" ..he's likely to think twice before doing whatever he's planning.

And then, on the more "positive" side of this matter... If a person wants to be treated fairly, he should treat others fairly, as well. Considering that it will be "measured back" in "same measure."(vs2)

Does a person want "good things" ...then give out good things. To be treated with respect? ...treat others likewise. If a person wants friends, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Pr18:24) And in this we have our Ultimate Example, as Jesus says, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you...if you know these things, happy are you if you do them."(Jn13:15,17)

Sermon on the Mount:

narrow way - (Mat 7:13-14)

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.(vs13)

We see "two choices" here. Jesus says there is a "narrow" way and a "broad" one. The world would have us believe that there is a multiplicity of paths to "enlightenment." It doesn't matter what you believe. Just, that we are all united in our differences. They call it "unity in diversity."

Jesus gives different labels. The one He calls "life" and the other "destruction." Whether a person chooses to believe other passages in Scripture or not that talk about "lake of fire"(Rev20:15) or "hell"(Lk12:5) or "outer darkness" and "weeping and gnashing of teeth"(Mt25:30) or the unquenchable fire where the "worm does not die"(Is66:24); this word "destruction" is an "utter destruction, perishing, ruin with misery." And the word "perish" ominously includes the idea of "being destroyed in a violent untimely manner." Much as Sodom and Gomorrah were "suddenly" destroyed with fire and brimstone. (Gen19:24) Or as He brought upon Egypt the plagues which devastated it, in order to redeem Israel out of bondage.

Notice that the way to destruction is "broad." Wide and spacious. It is the "easy" way. No apparent obstacles. And it garners the "approval" of the masses, because "many" go that way.

"Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."(vs14)

This narrow gate only allows "one-at-a-time" to enter. While the throngs followed Jesus, it was the same throngs that cried out "Hosanna to the Son of David"(Mt21:9); scarcely four days later were blood-curdling with "crucify Him! crucify Him!"(Lk23:21) One would have thought they were all "Christians" the way they were "praising Jesus" on "Palm Sunday." But that was not their true heart. Anybody Jesus "converted" He called on, on an "individual" basis. Nicodemus (Jn3), woman of Samaria (Jn4), Zacchaeus (Lk19:5), Peter (Jn21), Saul/Paul (Acts9).

More and more, this reality makes me seriously question the masses of people who "go forward" at large crusades. And the so-called "great revivals" of past decades and centuries. If those people were truly coming to Christ in the numbers claimed, why is the world not "turned upside down" as it was in Acts?(Acts17:6) Why does sin remain on the rampage? Why is there no better understanding of God's Truth than there is? It is because the reality of things is that there is a "remnant" only.(Rom9:27) While that was said of Israel, to Elijah God said that there were, "...seven

thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1Ki19:18) We see the same regarding the "Church." While there is a large collection of people who label themselves as "Christian", just as there were how-many "million" in Israel's population; just as Israel's history is recorded as an "example" to us(1Cor10:6); sadly the same is true of the Church. There are "millions" who belong to "church clubs" and even gather for great rallies. But the "True Believer" who has not "bowed to Baal" are a mere "remnant."

This is because the way is "difficult." "Difficult" meaning, "constricted, hard pressed upon, compressed, full of affliction and distress, confined."

When "great multitudes" were following Jesus it says that He turn to them and said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it; (Lk14:26-28) Such talk does not "go over" very well with a society that believes in "fa-a-amily" and traditional "family values."

And furthermore, Jesus said there is only "one way" to eternal life. He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."(Jn14:6) And the disciples, when on trial, echoed this, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts4:12)

"...and there are few who find it."(vs14b)

Sermon on the Mount: wolves in sheep's clothing - (Mat 7:15-20)

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. (vs15)

This is a warning. "Beware" means to "pay attention to, take heed, be on guard against, take great caution" along with the idea of being "very diligent" in the matter.

"You will know them by their fruits."(vs16) If your garden had potatoes; and thistles came up, too... In the fall of the year, the thistles will be all brittle, and when you dig under them, there are "no" potatoes, and they can be rather "stickery." If you are unfamiliar with trees and vines, when the fruit starts appearing, you are sure of "what" the plant is. If a wolf went about with a sheep pelt covering its body, and it gave birth to offspring, the little one is not going to "bleat" ...it's going to whine, growl, howl... like a wolf.

Christian...this is why "they" attack you for your beliefs and firm stance upon God's Word. They "growl" at you, because they are "wolves." (1Jn3:13,4:5-6)

The "broad way"(vs13) is filled with wolves and pups. They are on their way to "destruction." It is not possible for them to yield "sheep." We have a generation that is tending its "garden" ("churches"). These beautiful lush-looking plants are growing. They carefully water them, and weed around them...thinking they are going to get a fine crop of potatoes. "My, how BOUNTIFUL the crop will be this year!" But at the end of the harvest, the Lord (Rev14:16) gathers the good produce into His "barns"(Mt3:12) and the thistles are "cut down and thrown into the fire."(7:19)

Notice something else He says, which we have spoken of OFTEN in the past. "...nor can a bad tree bear good fruit."(vs18) If a "thistle" is preaching from the podium, his "converts" are NOT "Christian." Take good heed to this statement!! Neither the unregenerate, nor the ways of the world, will yield "Christian converts."(2Cor10:4) Mark this well!!

And, notice something He does NOT say to do. He does not give the Believers the responsibility to go about "weeding" in His "garden." He says, "No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. (Mat13:29) We are not to engage in "prayer warfare" in order to "tear down strongholds."

We are to "beware." If one finds himself confronted by a mad dog, he cannot attack it, lest he be torn into shreds.(Acts19:16) We are not to turn tail and run, either. "...having done all, to stand"(Eph6:13) But be "beware." We see "who/what" they are, and "let the sleeping dog lie" ...slip on by,

and warn others, that "that sheep is actually a wolf." We don't "have fellowship" but rather "expose" them."(Eph5:18)

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."(1Pt5:8-9)

Sermon on the Mount:

I never knew you - (Mat 7:21-23)

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.(vs21)

Not all preachers and evangelists will be in heaven. Not all "christians" will get to heaven. Being of a certain denomination or church affiliation will not guarantee a "spot" beyond the pearly gates. Doing wonderful deeds will not get you there. Performing miracles and engaging in deliverance ministries is no assurance. Being "spirit-filled" will certainly not be effective. Nor will being a "prayer warrior."

There are many who claim that doing or saying something "in Jesus' name" will guarantee the desired results. After all, didn't Jesus, Himself, say, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.(Jn14:14)? So they vehemently cry out "In Jeeeezzus' Name...I COMMAND...!!!"

Oh, the UTTER HORROR!! Those who thought they "had it made -- in Jesus' name" ...to hear from His lips "in that Day"(vs22) -- "I NEVER KNEW YOU; DEPART FROM ME!"(vs23)

What is the judgment? "...you who practice lawlessness!"(vs23) Lawlessness is "iniquity." A condition of being without God's Law. God's Word. Jesus IS the "Word."(Jn1:1) They are without Christ. What is God's Law? His command? To "believe in Him Whom He has sent."(Jn6:29) While they bandy about the "name" Jesus, they do not know Him. They have something which LOOKS wonderful on the outside, but "inside [they] are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (Mt23:27)

This condition of lawlessness includes being in that state both, out of ignorance and also knowingly. Either way, all their "good works" Jesus labels as "lawlessness." But again, "many" will be in this camp(vs22) going down the "broad way...to destruction."(vs13)

But the "few who find" the way to the kingdom of heaven are those who "[do] the will of My Father in heaven."(vs21) To "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."(Acts16:31) Ones who have been made "the righteousness of God in [Christ]."(2Cor5:21) To those so possessed Jesus promises, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life...

"...but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (Rev3:5)

Sermon on the Mount: doing His teachings - (Mat 7:24-29)

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: (vs24)

Jesus is the "Word."(Jn1:1) So, as He spoke and taught, He was teaching of Himself. James exhorts, "be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."(Jas1:22) As, the "doing" of what one claimed he possessed was "proof" of that faith he claims to have.(Jas2:14~)

If we are built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ (1Cor3:11), this "Rock" upon which Christ's "Church" is built (Mt16:18); then when the storms assail us from the enemy the "house" will stand firm. The Rock will not budge.

However, if a person is building on some other "surface" he may build something quite beautiful and spectacular. People may be quite impressed and flock to be under its shadow. He may build something which even "looks like" a "church" called "christian." But without Jesus as the core, when the storm hits, that building will fall flat. As the world will lament, "Babylon is fallen" and mourn "alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple...and adorned with gold and precious stones.."(Rev18:2,16)

But you notice "who" rejoices when the pretend-church has fallen. "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"(Rev18:20) The false prophets castigate you, True Believer, and ridicule you for not being like their "splendor" and presumed "holiness" and "spirituality." But they will fall. Where they claimed to have the "real thing" ...they will be made to "come and worship before your feet, and to know that [Christ] loves you"(Rev3:9) as He "confesses" you before the whole universe.

As we might expect today, were Jesus personally teaching this set of lessons, so it was then; "the people were astonished at His teaching."(vs28) As it was then, so it is today. This is not what the preachers are preaching.(vs29) But it is God's Word. It is not popular amongst those with other man-made agendas. But it is Truth. Because Jesus said, "I AM the way...the TRUTH.."(Jn14:6)

Jesus spoke these things by the "authority" given Him. He came speaking those things which "pleased" the Father. "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. (Jn12:49)

I am willing: be healed - (Mat 8:1-17)

And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing: be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. (vs2-3)

One subject which stirs up controversy almost as much as "tongues" is "healing." The "gifts" of healing. There are those who claim that it's God's will for "all people" to be healthy and wealthy. And at the opposite end of the pendulum are those that don't believe God heals today. Both extremes are in error. There are some interesting things we can come to understand from this passage.

This series is the "teachings" of Jesus. If we understand the concept "let us not love in WORD or in TONGUE, but in DEED and in TRUTH" (1Jn3:18) ...that speaking "words" is not the only method of imparting truth, that showing "by example" is often more effective, we find ourselves looking at what Jesus "did" as well as "spoke," to learn His teachings. He has just spent "three chapters" speaking on the mount. Now He is coming off the mountain, demonstrating that which He has been speaking. Being a "doer of the word."(Jas1:22)

First of all, when God heals, He does so "willingly." Jesus answers the leper, "I am willing." When the centurion came to him about his servant, he comes, explaining the plight. And before he even gets to the part where he would say, "Will you please heal him?" Jesus is already volunteering, "I will come and heal him."(vs7) As if to say, "OK, let's go..lead the way." When He enters Peter's house where his mother-in-law is sick, He doesn't wait for a request, He simply "touched her hand, and the fever left her."(vs15) He saw the need, and acted. "It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer; And while they are still speaking, I will hear." (Isa65:24)

Later in the evening He was casting out demons "with a word." And He healed "all" the sick people who came to Him.(vs16) Jesus had come, not only to "[bear] our sins in His own body on the tree"(1Pt2:24) but also to bear the burden of the "symptoms" of sin, "our griefs and..our sorrows" as it is "by His stripes we are healed"(Is53:4-5) of our sin as well as the results of sin. As we perhaps recall the studies in James 5, that the prayer for a "sick" person results in that person's "salvation" and cleansing from sin. People in Jesus' day understood well the relationship between sin and sickness. As He would say to a sick person, "your sins are forgiven."(Mt9:2) As they asked, "who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"(Jn9:2)

If we understand the passage that He is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"(2Pt3:9) we would also understand that it is not His will (or "desire") for anybody to be sick, either. But then,

we equally understand that sickness is one of the results of sin, as begun in Genesis 3. And if a person continues to rebel against God, they cannot expect God's healing upon them.

And here we come to "attitude." When the leper came to Jesus, he did not come "naming and claiming." He "came and worshiped."(vs2) "Worship" is not the act of standing up, wiggling around to sensuous music and raising ones hands. Rather, when one worships the Lord, he comes and "bow[s] down" and "kneel[s] before the LORD our Maker."(Ps95:6) In these cultures when a person came bowing prostrate, it was with the attitude "that I may find favor in your site, my [L]ord.."(2Sam16:4)

And so, the leper came, making a "request." Not a demand, as we usually see in (so-called) "healing" services. Jesus said, "if you ask..in My name."(Jn14:13) And John clarified, "according to His will."(1Jn5:14) In the leper's request was an "unspoken understanding." Quite possibly he had sinned and incurred his illness..? (see: Num12:10,2Kg5:27,15:5) And he had had a while to consider the consequences of his sin. No doubt, realizing his "unworthiness" to receive cleansing. Hardly "daring" to even be in the "presence" of one such as Jesus!

When he was healed, Jesus instructs him to go make the appropriate sacrifices.(vs4) The whole sacrificial system was in anticipation of Jesus' Own death which would ultimately pay for "sin."(1Pt2:24) And He tells the man, "see that you tell no one.." This is not something to boast of. There was sin. The sin has been cleansed away. Now, go make the appropriate offering... for sin.

And then, we come to the "faith to be healed" (Acts14:9) concept. Jesus has offered to "go to" the Centurion's house to heal the servant. And immediately the commander humbly illustrates his own "unworthiness" to even have Jesus come under the roof of his house.(vs8) Understanding Jesus' "authority" to be able to just have the matter "taken care of" through the "chain of command." He understood that words did not need to be recited, nor special "wands" waved. That, if Jesus could heal, He could do it from "anywhere."

Jesus says, "as you have believed, so let it be done for you."(vs13) And people take this sentence, and teach a doctrine that says the sick person must have "enough faith" to be healed. That, if somebody prays "over them" and they remain sick, it was because the sick person didn't have enough faith.

But you notice something. Remember..? Jesus is "willing" to heal.(vs3) Jesus was saying to him "let's go..I'll do it" BEFORE there was any indication of "how much" faith he had. Jesus expresses the man's "faith" as an explanation of the conversation which just transpired. Because, even faith, itself, is a "gift of God."(Eph2:8) People who think they must have "enough faith" are not truly believing in God and His ability to heal.

Somehow, they must "help God along" with their own faith. But it must be like the man who cried out, "Lord I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk9:24)

So.. how does healing take place? How does one cast out evil spirits from people? I've seen video's of Bob Larson having these long, extended conversations with demons, "negotiating" with them. Taking hours to finally "convince" the demons to leave a person. What would you guess those demons were absolutely rolling around in laughter over such nonsense? Or; there are those who believe certain rituals and paraphernalia are necessary in order to effect "exorcisms."

What did Jesus do? "With a word"(vs16) "Go." (vs32) the spirits were gone. How does satan leave? when we say, "Go!" Earlier Jesus had said, "Away with you!"(Mt4:10) "Be gone!" "Get out of here!" We are told, "resist the devil and he will flee from you."(Jas4:7) Any "exorcism" is going to happen in the same manner. But it is with Jesus' "authority." (Acts19:13-17)

And finally, when it was "Jesus" who was doing the healing, you will notice that "all" were healed.(vs16) And He did it right the first time. "And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." (Mk7:37) Mark this well. If someone claims to have the "gift of healing" and they are doing so "in Jesus' name," then "all" those they "heal" had better be truly healed. If they are not, you know it wasn't Jesus who did the "healing." And if it wasn't Jesus, there is only one other source it could have been.(2Cor11:13-15) And remember that he, too, has the ability to do "signs and wonders" to deceive. (2Ths2:9, Mt24:24) As we know that even now there are "many antichrists." (1Jn2:18)

When Jesus ministered healing, He did not amass fortunes at the expense of His followers. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." (2Cor8:9) And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (1Jn5:20)

Following Jesus: perilous - (Mat 8:19-34)

Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."(vs19-20)

Scribes were the scholars of Jesus' day. The ones with the seminary degrees and PhDs. If anybody wanted to know an "interpretation" of the Law, all they needed to do was to look up the scribe at the local synagogue. But, like today, people looked to the "scholars" instead of God's "plain truth." The scribes, also, in their emulated lofty position, took it upon themselves to "add" little "nuances" to God's law. As Jesus would say, "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' (Mt23:16) Nit-picking the fine points, "Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (Mt23:24)

Such a one as this wants to "follow" Jesus. Ooo! What a "plum" this would be! Follow Jesus around, and get the "real scoop" on God. Just think of the prestige he could "thumb his collar" with to be able, when sitting around the table discussing "points of doctrine" to say, "Well, [I] was with Jesus...and He says... 'blah, blah, blah'...therefore you have to listen to me, because I [KNOW] what I'm talking about."

These are the ones, "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. (Mt23:13) Much like those who today would presume to "own" God's Word with their copyrights...thereby deciding "who" they are going to allow access to it. (Like the Catholics of years past.)

Jesus cuts him right down. Today He might have said, "We never know where we're sleeping from night to night. Sometimes at Motel-6, sometimes under a freeway overpass. Our meals come at all sorts of weird hours. Sometimes we're starving. There are some women who bring us hotdishes periodically.(Lk8:3,Mk15:41) Other times, farmers let us nibble as we pass by their fields. (Lk6:1) If a storm comes, we don't always have shelter. In fact, I happen to know that as we're getting into this boat right now (vs18), it's gonna give the disciples a real scare. They're gonna think we're going to sink in this storm that's going to come.(vs25) We're barely gonna make it out alive! So... you still wanna come?"

Another person says, "Well, it's not real convenient at this moment. Let me go put some things in order first. After all, my father is about to die, and I want to be around...(maybe?) make sure I get my rightful share of the inheritance."(vs21)

"Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."(vs22) Jesus said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Lk9:62) "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (Lk14:26)

Following Jesus is not a glib matter. One cannot do as many try to: have life continue on as it always has, and simply "add Jesus" to the mixture. After all, my life is finally getting comfortable now. I'm finally getting things paid off. I have job security. A good retirement plan and health insurance. So, now I need a "hobby" of something to do with my spare time. An "interest" to take on. Yes...here we go...Jesus seems like a pretty good "cause" to support and get involved with. And just think how my friends will look up to me when I tell them I'm on the "Jesus committee."

No, dear reader. It doesn't work that way. When we follow Jesus into that frail fishing boat, the sudden storms will come up and threaten to do us in.(vs24) It will seem rather bleak as the waves are washing in. But that's the deal. If we are a true disciple of His, we must understand that "a servant is not greater than his Master."(Jn13:16) Whatever Jesus experienced, we will experience.(Jn15:20) Jesus left His earthly family to do His Father's will. His family even thought He had "gone nuts" and followed Him around, trying to bring Him back home, to "sanity." (Mk3:21,31-35) But if we follow Him, we must even lay aside "family values" and traditions to follow Him wholly.(Lk14:26) After all, if we do follow Him fully, our spiritually-dead "family" will not accept us anyway. (Mt13:57) Thus, Jesus said, "let the dead bury their dead."(vs22)

When we follow Christ, things change. Family will ridicule and try to "straighten us out." Our economics will change, as our time will not be so engrossed in worldly pleasures. And as we change, things and people around us will change. They won't all accept us, even though they see the change is for the "better."

Jesus did a "good thing" for the demon-possessed man, casting the demons out. One would have thought that his friends and country-men would have been happy for him, because he was now "healed." But, no. They asked Jesus to "depart from their region."(vs34) You see, the good done to the man was not good for the economy. The market tumbled that day the large herd of swine were drowned. It didn't matter that swine was on the illegal ("unclean") list, and was a business they shouldn't have engaged in in the first place. It cost a great deal for that man's life. "But we just can't afford any more of these kind of set-backs."

If we truly follow Jesus Christ, we can hope to find fellowship with others of like precious faith (2Pt1:1) and fellow-disciples. But we cannot count on it. The possibility is very real that family will ostracize us, after having tried to first lure us back out of Faith in Christ. We may have to give up that career which requires "professionalism" ...meaning; engaging in "all aspects" of

that career, even those things which are contrary to God's law. You may be faced (as this writer was one time) with "Make up your mind; are you going to drive bus or play church?" This...after the situation has been purposely contrived against you, because they don't like Christians.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant...humbled Himself and became obedient to death."(~Phil2:5-8) We must "[die] with Christ"(Rom6:8,Col2:20) ...daily...(1Cor15:31)

Sins forgiven: sinners to repentance - (Mat 9:1-13)

'..they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." (vs2)

Now wait a minute, Jesus! What are you talking about?! We've got two bones to pick with You here. First of all, can't you see that the poor boy is "sick?" He's paralyzed. Can't move. What he "needs" is "healing" so he can get up and about, and not be such a burden to the taxpayers and the welfare system! So he can become a "productive member" of society.

And then... Just Who do You think You are, anyway?! "Forgiving" sins! Really now!! Don't you know what's written? God told Moses that He, God, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious...forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." (Ex34:6-7,Num14:18) And You claim to "pronounce" upon this poor boy that his sins "are forgiven"? That's not going to make him "feel" any better!

Just "Who" indeed..! The PhDs were challenging Jesus' authority.(vs3) So Jesus appeals to their sense of "reason" and "intellect" after first labelling their thoughts for what they were... "evil."

First of all, Jesus proves to them His authority by "knowing their thoughts." Remember, it is "Jesus" Who is the "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb4:12) They might have thought their reasonings were "private" to themselves, not realizing that "there is no creature hidden from His sight.."(vs13)

So, having gotten their attention in this manner, He now reasons with them. "Which is easier to say, 'sins are forgiven you' or to say, 'Arise and walk?'" Think about it a minute. Even in our day of advanced technology where doctors can connect people to machines to keep body "parts" functioning; they have not yet learned how to actually "heal" people. They can treat symptoms, perform corrective surgery. But when it's time for a person to die...there is NOTHING that man can do to stop it. Death is an "appointment" (Heb9:27) when the creature meets his Maker. (Job32:22) So, as Jesus' reputation preceded Him, they were expecting Him to "heal" the boy. So He reasons about the process of healing. The very fact that He could heal, that this "power" flowed from Him (vs20-22,Lk8:46) meant that He is the "Source" of life. "..in Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts17:28) And so, as He healed people, He was fulfilling part of His "purpose" in coming, "I have come that they may have life.."(Jn10:10)

But He didn't come "just" to "heal" people of their physical infirmities. He came that "they might have [life] MORE ABUNDANTLY." That's where the "forgiving" of sins comes in. Abundant life comes from the "fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."(Jn4:14)

So Jesus reasons with them. "How easy do you think it is to SAY 'be healed'?" It's no easier than to say "you are forgiven." The authority for both comes from the same Source. From God. And so, Jesus "authenticates" His authority to "forgive" sins, by then saying, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."(vs6)

This, then, brings us to Jesus' "purpose" in coming to the world. The crowd "marveled and glorified [God], who had given such power to men." (vs8) They saw Jesus, a "man," performing with God's power. And He continues along, calls Matthew to follow Him, and goes to dine with him. Trouble is, Matthew was a despised "tax collector." A "sinner." So now the legalistic "list makers" grumble, "How come He's gone in [THERE]?!" (vs11) That was about as bad as our "young lady" in church who was seen going into a tavern on the arm of "a man." (a study some time ago) The "man" happened to be her "unequal yoke" to whom she was being a "wife" in order to "win him." (1Cor9:22-23)

And here, Jesus gives His whole purpose in coming, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick...for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."(vs12-13)

If the ambulance worker were to snobbishly refuse to go into the middle of the accident scene, "because it is such a mess in there...let them get things cleaned up first, and then I'll go" what kind of emergency worker would he be? Jude writes about "sav[ing] with fear, pulling them out of the fire..."(vs23) A fire rescue worker gets dirty, grimy, and smoke inhalation...rescuing people from a burning building. This is what Jesus came to do. He came to "die" doing it. (Mt20:28)

Now, He did not go frequenting the local tavern as a regular place of fellowship, did He. He knew the heart. Remember Heb4:12. He knew Matthew's heart, that he was to be a disciple. Of the paralytic boy it says He "saw their faith."(vs2) Remember? We've talked about the relationship between sickness and sin. Jesus healed people. He also forgave sins. And He went "where they were" in order to change them (repentance), make them "better" than they were, and then to send them "to his house." (vs7) To bring them "out of" the muck and mire, into His light. "...out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1Pt2:9) In clear distinction to today's message from the pulpits which says, "God loves you JUST AS YOU ARE." Meaning..."you don't need to change. You are ALREADY worth so much to Him. He accepts you JUST AS YOU ARE. You don't NEED to change." No, dear reader. Jesus did not leave the paralytic on that "bed." He got him "off" the bed, and the streets begging...to "go home." The tax collector, known for cheating people out of more than they really owed, to following Him in a life of "poverty" ...but honesty. And...eternal life.(Jn10:28)

But of the self-righteous scribes and pharisees, who thought they had it all, "I never knew you; depart from Me.."(7:23) To Peter He said, "If I do not

wash you, you have no part with Me." (Jn13:8b) In other words, if Jesus hadn't gone to where the sinners were, to save them "out of" their condition, there would be no salvation. If a person thinks they are already "worth so much" to God and are righteous, and thus refuse to humble themselves and receive His cleansing, they have "no part" with Him. They are NOT "Christians."

But if we recognize and confess that, "..in me...nothing good dwells" (Rom 7:18) and "receive Him" (Jn1:12) and the "washing" of His "cleansing" (Ps51:2,Tit3:5) then we are able to proclaim...

"He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps. (Ps40:2)

Old/New wine/cloth: appropriateness - (Mat 9:14-17)

Q/A -New Material/Wineskins? © 1999

QUESTION:

I know you are busy, but one of the things I don't understand is the thing about sewing a new piece of material on a new garment, and putting new wine into old wineskins. What is this an analogy for? I've been thinking about it for several years.

ANSWER:

Well, I must say, this one has puzzled me a bit, too. Never have really taken the time to study it before. Never really felt "right" about explanations I've heard in the past, and since they never settled, I can't say as I remember them, either.

But in looking -now- at the three passages on the matter (Mt9, Mk2, Lk5) one notices that the cloth and wineskins are tied to John's disciples coming and asking Jesus why His disciples don't fast. And Jesus responds, "Can the sons of the bridechamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast." (Mt9:15)

I think Jesus is talking about "appropriateness". Acting according as the occasion dictates. The "preacher" spoke that there is a "season, and a time for every purpose under the heavens" (Ec3:1) and goes into "time to be born, time to die, time to plant, etc.etc."

Fasting [and mourning] should not be done, just because it's "the thing to do." Or "to be seen by men" (Mt6) If one is going to fast, there should be a reason 'why' one is doing it. And it should be done when it's appropriate.

Jesus was the Lord of the universe, visiting the world 'personally'. Why should His disciples fast? They are following, day-in day-out, for three years, the Lord of Glory. Why should they be sorrowful? That is not "appropriate" behavior.

But later, He would be taken up into heaven, and they would experience trials and testings. And then, it would be the "right time" to fast.

And so He uses the cloth and wine as object lessons of "appropriateness". It is not appropriate to patch in a new piece of cloth to fix an old garment. It will just rip out. Putting new wine into old [brittle] wineskins is not smart. As the wine ferments and expands, the brittle skins will crack. New wine needs to be in new [supple] skins, while there is still "stretch".

And then, just a little 'bonus' here. He does not even mention putting 'old' wine into new skins. But..."new" wine into "new" skins. A picture of the New Birth. (Jn3:3) "If any one is in Christ, he is a NEW creature; old things have passed away; behold, ALL THINGS have become new." (2Cor5:17)

Shepherd's heart: laboring in the harvest - (Mat 9:35-38)

But when [Jesus] saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.(vs36)

Are you a "people watcher?" Have you ever just sat someplace and observed? Couples, children, frolicking, sappiness, contemplative, self-assured, forlorn, angry, proud, etc. Have you ever gotten past the exterior facade they want the world to see, to see into the eyes and into their souls? The deep-set "lostness." Have you ever noticed those traffic "bunches" where it seems everybody in the clump would like somebody to "follow?" Nobody wants to strike out and leave the "pack." They are like sheep.

As you contemplate what you know to be Truth regarding God and Eternity do you ever well up with tears, knowing they are all crowded together, following each other along the "broad way" to "destruction"? (Mt7:13)

Jesus was "moved" with compassion. To be "moved" is what we often call "gut-wrenching" emotions. That which, if a person ponders for a while, brings on that "knot" in the stomach. "Compassion" is to be "aware" of the suffering of people and a deep-seated desire to relieve it.

In modern society, we have so-called telethons or fund raisers, where celebrities are brought in, and will appear on TV or at some "gala event." The idea is to persuade people to give money for certain "causes." So, when they have raised some hoped-for pre-determined amount, everybody goes home, "feeling good" that they have just helped some "needy" people. Or if a "scout" member builds a foot bridge in a park, he proudly proclaims on TV that doing so "made him feel good" at having done it. But these people are not necessarily inconvenienced to do their "good deeds." And in the mean time, the needy are still suffering, while the committee pays all the various expenses incurred to raise the money, and then some "token individual" receives benefit, on TV. These things are not so much "moved with compassion" as they are, "I felt good doing it, so therefore I'm wonderful."

But you see, Jesus was busy "doing." He went from village to village, preaching, teaching, healing. Often so busy there wasn't time to eat or rest. (Mk3:20) And His healings cured "EVERY sickness and EVERY disease."(vs35)

In "preaching" He was presenting the "gospel of the kingdom." As He commanded that we should do, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel."(Mk16:15) This is how we "make disciples."(Mt28:19) With the

goal to "open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in [Jesus Christ]." (Acts26:18)

He "taught" in their synagogues. "Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you."(Mt28:20) Once a person has received the gift of eternal life, then they need instruction in "how to" live. They start out on the "milk of the Word." (1Pt2:2) As they grow, they become strong as they learn, then, to battle and "overcome the wicked one." (1Jn2:13) As they continue in the Word (vs14,2Tm3:14-17), knowing that the Scriptures are "everything needed" for living faithfully before God. Hiding God's Word in our hearts helps keep us from evil and sinning (Ps119:9-11) and shows us the path to take. (vs105)

And then, He also healed people of their infirmities. In the case of Jesus these healings were sometimes as a result of "sins having been forgiven" (9:2,Is53:5,Jas5:15) and at other times, simply, to manifest the power of God and authenticate His ministry as the Son of God (Jn9:3) in fulfillment of prophecy. (Is53:4)

But you see... Jesus did not get network TV to broadcast His wonders, as he stood on the platform, looking earnestly into the camera, making promises to those who would put their hands on their TV sets. He went "about all the cities and villages" dealing with MANY "individuals."

And, He also shot down another modern notion. Jesus did not subscribe to the theory of "that's what we pay the preacher for..." People come into the meeting place, drop their offerings in the plate, go home, and expect the "church" to "grow" because they have paid the pastor to "do it for them."

No! He said the "harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few." (vs37) So, rather than praying, "Lord, make me healthy and wealthy...so we can pay somebody to do it" He prayed, "Send out laborers into His harvest." He commanded "Go YE...into all the world" (Mk16:15 -kjb) [YOU] go...and do it. [YOU] shall receive power...and [YOU] shall be witnesses. (Acts1:8)

There is no "bench" to sit on the sidelines. The Believers are in the arena. We are "surrounded by...a cloud a witnesses"(Heb12:1) who are in the grand stands. The wild beasts are running wild, goring and trampling everything they can. (1Pt5:8) We fit into one of several categories: We are bringing others into the arena for the conflict (Mt28:19); training those who just came in on "how to" become strong against the wild beasts (Eph4:12); are picking up and assisting those who have fallen and are injured (Gal6:1-2); are getting up, ourselves, from having fallen (Ps51:12); are resisting a charging beast (1Pt5:9, Eph6:14, 1Cor16:13); and in the midst of all this conflict, we are also running a race towards the goal to receive a prize (Phil3:14); etc. If we are not "active" the only other option is that we

are being hopelessly trampled and devoured, as we are then "disqualified." (1Cor9:27) There is no vacation. It is a continual battle.

This is the nature of the "harvest." If the lost are not brought into the arena, they will suffer eternal doom. When they are brought in, they must "count the cost." (Lk14:28) But if they do, Christ promises as the "end of your faith; the salvation of your souls." (1Pt1:9)

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. "But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. (Jn10:11-12)

The LORD, Who is "my shepherd" (Ps23) leads through that "arena." In this warfare (1Tm1:18,2Tm2:4), He sees to the "success" of the mission (1Cor15:57). He provides the necessary sustenance and rest in the midst of the fray (vs5) "all the days of [our] life;" and ultimately the promise is, "[we] will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."(vs6)

Prophets in Service: cost of faithfulness - (Mat 10:5-40)

At the end of Mark, Jesus says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."(Mk16:15) In this study Jesus sends out the disciples and says, "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"(vs5-7)

We know that God appoints different Believers to various tasks. Some are prophets, some evangelists, some teaching pastors.(Eph4:11) An "evangelist" is one who proclaims the gospel to those who have not heard. While "teaching pastors" are those whose specialty is to train and nurture the believers within the flock.

And then, we have the "prophets." Whom do they minister to? And what is their message? We have a complete Old Testament full of "prophetic" books. To whom did Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, etc. minister? To Israel. Who was Israel? God's chosen people. Those who supposedly "knew Him" and were "saved and on their way to heaven." What was the message of the prophets? "Repent...and return to God...why are you rebelling and insisting on the path that leads to death?" (Jer25:5,Ez33:11,etc.)

If a person has been called as a prophet, is it the duty of the evangelist to tell him he's doing wrong because he's not evangelizing? (1Cor12:14-18) Oh, the stories this writer could tell of condemnation from the "evangelists" for not following "their" footsteps! You see, my whole life, the Lord has had me ministering "to the church." Years ago, I thought it was for the purpose of exhorting "Christians" to live "more holy" and "increase their love and devotion" for God, etc. But in the last few years, I understand the prophet's message. "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand... BE SAVED!!" (Mt3:2,Mk1:15)

You notice, Jesus sends the disciples "to Israel." He tells them NOT TO go to others. They are going to the "LOST sheep." They have a "name that they are alive, but [they] are dead." (Rev3:1) The "church" today is the same. It has a "name that [it] is alive" but it is "dead." This is the great need today! To reach the church people with God's truth. The world knows they are lost. But the "church" doesn't. The world looks to the church. We've gotta get the "church" SAVED first. Which, it then, in turn, can reach the world.

Yes, evangelists...if the Lord has called you to that, keep to your work; the non-church people need reaching, too. But if the Lord has called you to be a "prophet" keep ever so faithful to that task! And don't be dissuaded by the ecumenists, that your services are no longer required! They are

needed "now" ever more as the apostasy is in a full nose-dive with after-burners full blast! There is a big "harvest" (9:37) out there which is "going to rot," and aren't going to make it into the granaries.

So, what is the characteristic of service as a prophet? Jesus said, "whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet."(vs14) Yes, you will be "in" and "out" of "churches." And you will not necessarily be leaving "quietly." Sometimes you will be announcing it at the business meeting, explaining "why" you are leaving. Sometimes, you will write a letter of resignation, or to cancel your membership. When you write that letter, be sure to send "copies" to all the key people...because, if you don't, you can expect the leaders to "hide" them, and lie to the rest of the congregation about "why" you left. Your departure needs to be a "testimony" AGAINST them. "Shaking the dust" off your feet..

And yes...you will feel "down in the dumps" over it, too. But take courage! Remember what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. God's justice will make their judgement seem mild compared to what is in store for those who reject God's message through you.(vs15) In addition, they will find themselves on their knees before you (Rev3:9) as God instills into their consciousness the fact of His love for you.

The company you find yourselves in will seem like you are surrounded by wolves. They will growl and gnash their teeth at you. They will call you before their "church" councils with false accusations. They will even inflict punishments and tortures upon you "in their synagogues." (vs17) You will even find yourselves before judges and governors as they drag you into court. (vs16-18) And we know Jesus wasn't talking about "just" the "twelve" He sent out that day, because He mentions "the Gentiles."(vs18) (Remember, He was sending them "to Israel.") He is obviously speaking prophetically of those who would "believe through their word."(Jn17:20) Even, us today.

When all these things start happening, Jesus says, "do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."(vs19-20) I receive e-mails periodically from people who are going through these experiences, seeking encouragement, or asking "what shall we do? ...are we doing right?" type questions. And I would expect there are many of you that I don't hear from, too. From personal experience, let me encourage you that, indeed, the Lord gives you "what you should say." You may not understand it at the moment it is happening...but afterward you will find yourself revelling, remembering how the Lord's hand was obviously in it all. And, if you are in communion with Him, He will often have prepared you ahead of time, so you are "primed" for the exact event.

Not only will persecution come from the "church/religious" leaders; Jesus said that even "family" would be against you.(vs21) And rather than "love" which they claim to have, the "love" will be for everybody EXCEPT CHRISTIANS. Believers are hated. If persecution comes from one place, leave and go somewhere else.(vs23)

Always REMEMBER... you are not alone. Remember what they did to Jesus. If we are obedient to Jesus, we are to expect the same treatment He received.(vs25) Jesus said, "I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."(Jn16:32) Jesus promised, "I will not leave you comfortless." (Jn14:18 -kjv) We have Jesus "in" us (2Cor5:17) through the agency of the Holy Spirit. (Jn14:26)

Therefore, "do not fear them."(vs26) They think they are getting away with what they do. But it will "be known." We are to continue faithfully proclaiming the message He has given. To "preach on the housetops."(vs27)

And if it should come down to giving your life as a martyr, do not fear that either. The same Father who knows each sparrow, and has a count of all our hairs, has us in the palm of His hand.(vs29~) He does not promise an easy road or peace. (vs34) The hardest thing to accept is the fact that even "family" will be the ones persecuting. That's the nurturing group under which we grew up. We "trust" them. We lean on them. How can anybody go against their own kin..."flesh and blood"? And so, as it comes, it will baffle us. We will be bewildered. Sometimes in a state of deep emotional trauma, because "my own father and mother, siblings and cousins are against me."

When that all comes...and COME it will! ...the decision must be made. Who are you going to follow? Your family? Your spouse? Your children? ...or Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, Savior, Shepherd and God? The decision will come. And you cannot have it both ways.

Jesus said, "he who loves [family] more than Me is not worthy of Me." (vs37) And "worthy" is what it takes to "walk with Him..in white" (Rev3:4) We must take our cross (instrument of death) to follow Him. If you try to "ride the fence" to appease your family, friends and acquaintances, to "get along" ...you will "lose [your life]" for eternity. (vs39)

Be assured of this one thing: whatever you receive, as you are faithful to Him, is not directed at you. If you receive praise, do not accept it; but rather redirect that praise to Whom it rightfully belongs, as Daniel did, "...there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known...[the king's dream]"(Dan2:28) If you are rebuffed, do not worry about it. It is not "you" they are in antagonism with, but Jesus.(vs40)

And ultimately, whatever they are reacting to Jesus, they are actually doing so to "Him who sent [Jesus]."(vs40) Jesus is the "express image of

[the Father's] person."(Heb1:3) Thus, any praise for a Christian, is praise to God. Any persecution of a Believer is rebuff against the Most High.

At judgment day rewards and curses will be measured out, not only according to one's acceptance of God in his heart, but also on his treatment of God's servants on this earth.(vs41-42,25:40,45)

But, whatever the treatment received, the servant is to be "faithful" (1Cor4:2) surrounded by the grandstands, laying aside any weight of sin, striving with "endurance" (Heb12:1) "...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..."(vs2)

John the Baptist: doubts and conflicts - (Mat 11:1-6)

But when John heard in the prison of the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples. And they said to Him, Are You he who should come, or do we look for another? (Mat11:2-3 -mkjv)

This is the same "John the baptist" who had confidently proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World!" (Jn1:29) Whose ministry (existence) was solely for the purpose of revealing The Christ to Israel, to identify Him to them when he "saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove and He abode on Him." (vs32) This was the sign given to him by God as the "identification" of Jesus, and John "bore record that this is the Son of God." (vs34)

Now, he is asking "are You He who should come?" What has happened? What has brought about this doubt?

Well, notice...John is "in prison." He had the temerity to suggest to the king that he was being immoral in sleeping with his brother's wife. (Mt14:4) He was much too "judgmental" and see what it got him! And eventually, it would be the cause of him being beheaded. (vs10) So, you see how it goes... "judge not, that you may not be judged...for with whatever judgment you judge, you shall be judged.."(Mt7:1-2) You see, John was just sticking his nose into other people's business, and he "got what he deserved." So, what does he expect. OF COURSE he's going to be emotionally distraught! He had been busy dishing it out with words like "generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? bring forth fruits worthy of repentance! ..the axe is laid to the root of the trees..!" (Mt3:7-8,10) So "harsh" and "legalistic" and "unloving" was he, it could only be expected that he would land in prison. He had been dishing it out...now, and not a moment too soon, he's getting back what he's been handing out! Phew! He's finally locked away...and GOOD RIDDANCE!! He was doing so much damage, ruffling up the status quo that everybody was comfortable with.

Well, before any of you "pretenders" start getting "smug" in this assessment, let me give you a little clue to the next lesson where Jesus says, "Among those who have been born of women there has not risen a greater one than John the Baptist." (11:11) When John had been thrown into prison, Jesus, even, was affected as it says "He withdrew into Galilee." (Mt4:12 -mkjv) "Withdrew" here, including the notion of being "secluded" for a bit...away from people. Perhaps, "heavy-hearted?"

So, if John was "so great" why was he in the dumps? After all, doesn't "victorious Christian living" mean that we are never in the dumps? That to be depressed is a sign of sin in ones life? Maybe we can take a clue...

Jesus said further of him, "this is Elijah who is to come." (vs14) (Mal4:5-6) So, let's look at Elijah a minute.

Elijah had just had a marvelous "victory." Had prayed fire down onto the altar. Had killed the false prophets as people were chanting, "Jehovah, He is God!" (1Kg18:39) Seemingly a "revival" was about to erupt. He had prayed further (Jas5:17-18), and a three-year drought was ended with a down-pour. (vs45) But he has "offended" the queen bee (Jezebel) who is now threatening to sting him. And so he has "run for his life" and is now dejected. They "have slain Your prophets...and I alone, am left. And they seek to take my life away." (19:14)

We can receive wisdom. The writer of Hebrews speaks of "[having our] SENSES exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb5:14) "Good" and "evil" are moral/spiritual values. And yet the "senses" are physical properties. When there are chemical imbalances (physical) a person's emotions (soul/spirit) are affected. We are created as "body, soul and spirit." (1Th5:23) All three elements make up our being/s. When one is put upon, the others are affected. Even Jesus, the "perfect human" cried out in despair "My God...why have you forsaken Me?" (Mt27:46) Intellectually He "knew" what was happening, but His emotions cried out...He was "alone" on that cross.

Paul wrote of his struggles in Asia, "we were pressed out of measure, above strength; so much so that we despaired even of life." (2Cor1:8) "Despair" is a human emotion. This, from the same person who wrote "Rejoice in the Lord Always!" (Phil4:4) And again, "Rejoice evermore... in everything give thanks." (1Th5:16,18) "...I have learned to be content in whatever state I am." (Phil4:11)

When Paul was in despair he says, "we had the sentence of death in ourselves, SO THAT we should NOT TRUST in OURSELVES, but IN GOD who raises the dead.." (2Cor1:9)

Now, let's go back to Elijah, John's "prototype." After Elijah whines to God about how bad he's got things, God says "Go, return on your way..." (1Kg19:15) I've got more work for you to do. No slacking off. Oh...and by the way, while you're getting back to work, just so you know, you're not the "only one left" ...there's still "seven thousand" who "have not bowed to Baal.." (vs18) OK...back to work with you! Get your mind off yourself...

Think about Elijah a minute. For this object lesson we can receive from his experience, we might be tempted to put him down for becoming depressed. But remember how God looked at him. Out of all of the world's humanity, next to Enoch, he was the only person to be whisked (raptured) away to heaven without dying. (2Kg2:11) And it was his "spirit" which announced Christ through John the Baptist. (Lk1:17)

So, how did Jesus react to John's depression? Did Jesus send a counselor to help lift his self-esteem? After all, "there-there" it's "not your fault" that you're in prison. All these mean people have treated you so badly. You dear, poor thing! ...let's get a prayer-chain going and petition the government to get him released...

"Go and tell John again those things which you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel proclaimed to them."(Mt11:4-5) In fulfillment of Isaiah 35:5-6,61:1-2a

Where John was experiencing low emotions, Jesus reminded him of "facts." Where he was feeling low, Jesus reminded him of "reality." Remember, John, you were telling your disciples as you sent them to Me, "...my joy is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." (Jn3:29-30) As Jesus was fulfilling His temptation from Satan (Mt4) John was imprisoned. He was now taken out of the way so that Jesus could have the people's undivided attention. To the one who felt "unworthy to unloose the thong of His sandals" (Lk3:16) Jesus reminds Him, as though to say, "Here's the EVIDENCE you seek."

John was a servant. He had fulfilled his mission. Now, Jesus was on the scene, doing what He had come for. As Paul says, "...that I shall be ashamed in nothing, but as always now Christ shall be magnified in my body with all boldness, whether it is by life or by death." (Phil1:20) Soon, John would give his life for his faithfulness...

"And blessed is he, whoever shall not be offended in (stumble, begin to distrust and desert) Me." (vs6) 'John, hang on. Don't loose your faith in Me.' And this would apply to others as Jesus would teach, "the one who endures to the end shall be kept safe." (Mt10:22) Trouble and temptation will come, but Jesus has been there ahead of us, has endured everything that might come to His own, and thus, is qualified to "RESCUE those who have been tempted." (Heb2:18)

So He comes to John's aid. 'John, you were told what to look for.' "Go and tell John [again] those things which you hear and see." (vs4) 'Here are the facts.'

John the Baptist: praised - (Mat 11:7-15)

But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say to you, and one more excellent than a prophet. For this is the one of whom it is written, "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who shall prepare Your way before You." Truly I say to you, among those who have been born of women there has not risen a greater one than John the Baptist. But the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. (vs9-11 -MKJV)

John was a rather unusual person. Were he on the scene today, he'd probably be labeled a redneck - hillbilly - hippy - survivalist, all rolled into one. He did not fit into what was considered "normal." He did not dress in designer suits, speak from the local coliseum, nor dine and wine (vs18) in style. Why, he didn't even eat at McDonalds. His clothing was pieced together with gunny sacks, and ate what he could find out in the wild.

But at his preaching "Jerusalem and all Judea went out to him, and all the region round about Jordan." (Mt3:5) Jesus asks His hearers, why did you go out to the wilderness? To enjoy nature and watch the wind blow? No. You also didn't go to see some upper society fashion statement. You went to hear the preaching, "prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight...repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (vs3,2)

You see, it doesn't take the right appearances and fashion to draw people to God. John had none of those things. But what he had was God's Word. The message from God, "repent." And the whole region went to hear him, even though he didn't have Rock band entertainment, nor "worship" times.

And how does Jesus praise him? This man was even "more excellent than a prophet." (vs9) Of any man born, he received the highest praise. We don't read of him getting married and having a family. Nor of writing books. His sole purpose was to present The Christ to Israel. Even in the womb, when he heard Mary's voice, the one who would give birth to Jesus, he "leaped in [Elizabeth's] womb" for joy. (Lk1:41) And lived "in the deserts" for 30 years, in obscurity, until "the day of his showing to Israel." (Lk1:80) But his title was "the prophet of the Highest" because he [went] "before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways." (vs76) What greater recognition, than to be known as the Messiah's announcer!

And yet, Jesus says, those who are "least in the kingdom of Heaven" are even greater. Why? Those who receive Jesus in faith receive "sonship" and an inheritance. (Gal4:5,1Pt1:4) As Jesus would also say, "I have called you friends.." (Jn15:15)

As it was time for Jesus' ministry to begin, he was removed back into obscurity, "into prison" (Mt4:12) where he was eventually beheaded. He fulfilled his own words, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (Jn3:30) As he maintained Paul's attitude, "..for [Jesus Christ my Lord's] sake I

have suffered the loss of all things, and count them to be dung, so that I may win Christ...being made conformable to His death." (Phil3:8,10)
"...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be shamed for His name."
(Acts5:41)

See Also Addendum: Q/A –Violent Take it by Force

John & Jesus compared: both rejected - (Mat 11:16-30)

But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the markets and calling to their playmates, saying, We played the flute to you, and you did not dance! We mourned to you, but you did not wail!

John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He has a demon. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man who is a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners. (vs16-19)

Fickle people! People as a rule do not complain about what REALLY bothers them. Years ago I knew of a pastor who taught the Scriptures about as well as any Bible school professor I had ever sat under. He taught from 1 Corinthians to a "carnal" church...faithfully. The accusations against him had to do with his "wife." Or.. matters of him voting at board meetings. 'Never once heard anybody complain... "he's not preaching the Word!" But that was the REAL problem. He did not point to any specific things or people within the church. 'Just taught the Word. But the Word was convicting the hearts.

You see, both John and Jesus preached "repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Mt3:2,4:17) John would say, "bring forth..fruits worthy of repentance." Don't just pretend. Don't just come down and get baptized and "join the church." Make a CHANGE in your lives. Make the confession...but REALLY MEAN IT in your hearts!

Oh, and then, we get to Jesus. People didn't ask Him "what" they should do. He was reading their hearts before they even opened their mouths. "Your sins are forgiven." And He would prove His "ability" by healing. (We've already addressed this.)

You see...this gets uncomfortable when somebody starts making the Message "personal." Oh yes, we can sit in the stands and watch all the "hundreds" of people "go forward" at a Billy Graham crusade and perhaps think... 'isn't it wonderful that THEY ALL are going forward. They are such sinners and need to do this.' But the minute somebody starts focusing in on "ME" ...now, just wait a minute! I'm not so bad!

John and Jesus were doing something like what happened to me as a 7th grader. I never needed to cheat. But this one time I wrote some of the more difficult spelling words on the edge of a text book, thinking I could slip little glances at it. Half-way through the quiz the teacher walked up to the front where I was sitting, from the back of the classroom where he was administering the quiz. Walked in front of me, grabbed the book, slammed it on the desktop and shoved it in front of my face..."What is this!!" ..in front

of the whole class. I was caught! And what was worse, on top of the fact that we had just barely recently moved to this town, and I was the "outsider" in this small farming community and was struggling with peer acceptance, I was also the "ex-missionary's kid," son of the farm boy who had left the farm to go to Japan, and was now back again. (a certain level of "status" you see) But the "evidence" was obvious. I was guilty. And in front of all the rest of the class... what humiliation!

When people were confronted with their sin, they could not deny it. So, what do they do? Make themselves feel better by dragging the other down. If the message is True, find something else to focus on. Anything but the message and my sin. 'Oh, John...he's such a hippy! Why, do you see how he dresses?! How shameful!' And then, of Jesus, 'He has these ex-convicts following Him around. Oh, and those women...did you know that so-n-so was a HOOKER?! And He lets them hang around Him! How disgraceful!'

Well, yes, Zaccheus did come to Jesus and repented of his swindling practises. (Lk19:8) And as for the hookers, well yes, He accepted them, after saying, "Neither do I give judgment. Go, and sin NO MORE."(Jn8:11)

Even though He was performing miracles continually, they were always looking for some "sign" as proof of His Messiah-ship. "What sign do you show us?" (Jn2:18,6:30) He would never "perform" for them, like a circus act. But He had plenty to say "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the powerful acts which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes!" (vs21) And goes on to say that even Sodom would have repented if His works had been done amongst them.

But then Jesus gets to the "simplicity that is in Christ." (2Cor11:3) Satan had managed to deceive Eve with all sorts of complexities of thought and emotion. But Faith in Christ is really very simple to those who perceive with honesty.

"I thank You, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the sophisticated and cunning, and revealed them to babes." (vs25) Jesus said, "Unless you are converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven. (Mt18:3) Children tend to take things at face value. They have not yet fully developed the "skills" to manipulate thought and contrive excuses. Jesus came saying, "Here I am, believe in Me." He would proclaim "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me...you are angry at Me because I have made a man entirely sound on the sabbath...do not judge according to sight, but judge righteous judgment...He Who sent Me is true, whom you do not know...but I know Him, for I am from Him, and He has sent Me." (Jn7) And judging by the "sight" they presumed that He originated out of Galilee as they rejected Him; not realizing He had been born in Bethlehem, just as prophesied.

To the intellectual snobs, He spoke in riddles and parables, IN ORDER THAT they would not believe. (Mt13:13) But to those "who labor and are heavy laden" (vs28) humbled by the reality of life and their own hearts, Jesus invited "come to Me." As we have seen in the past, Jesus knows the "thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb4:12) To those He knows to be "humble and contrite" (Is57:15) He "reveal[s]" the Father. (vs27) He does not reveal Himself to "all men" because He knows "what [is] in man." (Jn2:25) But to those who are willing to humble themselves before a "meek and lowly" Christ (vs29)(Mt21:5,Zech9:9), He offers "you shall find rest to your souls."

Legalism: Lord of the Sabbath - (Mat 12:1-21)

Behold, your disciples do that which it is not lawful to do on the sabbath day! (vs2)

The family is gathered around the supper table and just as soon as the "blessing" is said, Suzie chimes in, "Johnny had his eyes open during the prayer!" Ookay! How do you know? "I saw him!" If 'your' eyes were closed, how could you see that his were open? "Uhh! Weeell..."

"Have you not read what David (the man after God's own heart) did? (vs3) ..have you not read in the Law.. [what the priests in the temple did]..and are blameless"? (vs5)

What was the disciples' condemnation? They had partaken of food on the Sabbath, and had "worked" by rubbing heads of grain in their hands, blowing the chaff away, and eating. (They "harvested" and "threshed") According to the very strictest sense of the Law, they could not even gather sticks to build a fire to cook on the Sabbath. For the Jews, of all the laws, the "Sabbath" was likely the most significant, as they would condemn Jesus later: "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the sabbath." (Jn9:16)

While the items on the "lists" have changed, in the not-too-distant past a non-Christian was "evident" by the wearing of lipstick, the hemline being an inch or two too short, the hair (male) being over the ears. Now, as I understand it in some circles, those lists include matters of homeschooling, living in the country, growing one's own food.

However, the sabbath was also the most abused law. God had ordained certain things, but they had added to it with numerous traditions. As Jesus would say, "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, the dippings of pots and cups. And many other such things you do." (Mk7:8)

And while they adhered to the sabbath, they also contrived methods to "get around" the sabbath. For instance, they had the "sabbath day's journey." (Acts1:12) Not something God had commanded, but a man-made tradition which they adhered to "strictly." However, by contriving a "boundary" from which to calculate this distance, they could be just about any place within this area, and when they reached the edge and exited the boundary, "then" they calculated their "sabbath distance." So, what of all the travelling within that boundary, and all the running around to "plan" this journey? And, apparently, they had contrivances by which they could daisy-chain these "boundary areas" to one another, which would be within the "sabbath distance" from each other, and actually travel great distances by the time they reached their ultimate destination. But, they were

"Keeping the Law" by their man-made "traditions" ...and had not exceeded that "sabbath distance."

Along comes Jesus, Who calls it like it is...but was bucking tradition. Not God's Law. He starts out by informing them that "One greater than the temple [Himself] is in this place." (vs6) And reminds them of God's desires. When Israel had responded, "All that the Lord has said, we WILL DO." (Ex24:3) "...oh that there were such a HEART in them.." (Deu5:29) And that He "desire[s] mercy and not sacrifice."(vs7)(Hos6:6)

And then He makes a lofty claim, "For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath." (vs8)

So far He has been reasoning with them, and making claims. Will He back up His claim with authority and proof? He departs from there and goes "into their synagogue."(vs9) In the assembly was a man requiring His healing touch. But before healing the man, He makes one more point. If one of you has a sheep that falls into a pit, will not the owner "work" on the sabbath in order to rescue the sheep? (vs11) The assumed response..."Yes." So now, what's of more value? A sheep, or a man?(vs12)

To prove His point He calls for the man to "stretch out your hand" (vs13) and it was healed. And upon His performing this work, the Pharisees go out to plot to destroy Him. They have accused Him of breaking "their traditions", He has essentially said, "I'm the Boss around here" and performed a work to prove it, right "in their face" and they don't like it. He has shown them up, in front of all the people.

Let's look at this just a bit more. Remember His reasonings with them in (9:5)? There He was claiming authority to "forgive sins." And asks them, "which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven; or, be healed?" So, as "proof" of His authority to forgive sins, He healed the paralytic. (9:6) Here, He is flying in the face of their most cherished tradition, the "Sabbath." He is claiming "ownership" of the sabbath and of all things...and proves His "ability" as such, by healing the man.

As He is doing this "in-your-face" confrontation with them, He knows they are "lying in wait" for a reason to accuse Him. And in Mark 3 we get a little different take on the scene. They are slithering around hissing, waiting to pounce; He is reasoning with them, asking them, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill?"(vs4) But they were silent. They don't want truth. All they want is an excuse to get rid of Him. And it says, "And looking around on them WITH ANGER, being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, Stretch out your hand!"(vs5)

Dear Christian, the list-makers will come after you with self-righteous indignation over your hem-lines or your use of "wrong" homeschooling

curriculum. While we are exhorted to not cause a weaker brother to stumble (Rom14:13), when it is a matter of "legalism" there is an aspect where the Lord may call us to be "in-your-face" against man-made traditions. To such types, the same Paul who wrote about "not offending"..."[did not] yield in subjection...even for an hour"(Gal2:5) He exhorts, "...let no one judge you in food or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbaths. For these are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. Let no one defraud you...being vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind...these things indeed have a reputation of wisdom in self-imposed worship and humility. Why...are you subject to [the world's] ordinances?" (~Col2:16-23) When they condemn, they do so to those "who are not guilty." (Mt12:7) "Therefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days."(vs12b)

One final thought: when the Pharisees went off to plot against Him, did Jesus organize an offensive against them? Gather His troupes to do battle? "Cut them off at the pass?" No. "He withdrew Himself from there." (vs15) Did He cower around in fear? No. He continued His work, and as the crowds of people followed Him, "He healed them all." (vs15) He did not change His ways to compromise and conform to the "hypocrisy" (Mt23:23) of the Pharisees. But neither did He flaunt Himself. He just continued doing what He knew to be His Father's will (Jn8:29,5:30,6:38) as had been prophesied of Him. The Pharisees distorted God's law with their traditions. Jesus came to "fulfill" the "law and the prophets" (Mt5:17) to do God's will (Ps40:7-8) and to "magnify the Law and make it honorable." (Is42:21)

Unpardonable sin: blaspheming Holy Spirit - (Mat 12:22-32)

Jesus said, "All kinds of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven to men... whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this world or in the world to come." (vs31-32)

When a Believer talks with an unbeliever about the things of God, quite often the unbeliever will think, "I'm much too AWFUL a sinner for God to be able to save someone like me!" And they will list off the "bad sins" they have done; prostitution, drugs, murder, swindling; and this list can become rather involved. Paul looked upon his past as though he had been the "chiefest" of sinners, because he had persecuted the Church. (1Cor15:9) But understood God's "faithful Word" that "Jesus came to save sinners" such as him. (1Tim1:15) Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Mt9:13) Even if a person is vile like Hitler, and has killed millions of people, with torture and every cruel means, if that person comes to Jesus in repentance and faith (Acts20:21) He promises that He "will in no way cast [them] out." (Jn6:37)

So, what is this sin which "shall not be forgiven.."? What we present here is likely going to arouse the indignation of the theological "scholars" who have spent years trying to figure it out in their seminaries, and when we make application to what we see today, another major segment of you will rise up in arms in anger. But the explanation is actually quite clear and easy to understand.

We are seeing the very core and essence of Who God is. And the very "heart" of the person who either receives Christ's salvation, or rejects. We are seeing the realm of the "spiritual." Many people dabble around in it. But there are others who pierce right to the heart of the matter.

Jesus had proven His ability to "forgive sins" (9:6) and His authority as "Lord of the Sabbath." (12:8) Now, we get to the core of His essence, since "God is Spirit." (Jn4:24) He heals a demon-possessed person. (vs22) This healing was of such a nature that "the people were amazed and said, 'is not this the son of David?'"(vs23) In so saying, they were understanding, in reality, "Is this not the Messiah!" He has proven His authority in the "spiritual realm."

However, the ever-present "list-makers" the Pharisees are there to chime in with their two-cents worth. He's doing this because He's of "Beelzebub the ruler of the demons." (vs24) Many theologians take this passage and say that the "unpardonable sin" is the act of "attributing a work of the Holy Spirit to satan." And then, an offshoot of that teaching is the power-hungry fear-mongering the charismatic practitioners foist upon anyone who would

condemn the demonic experiences they engage in, of being "spirit-filled" and jabbering in "tongues", since they claim those activities are from God. "If you haven't experienced it, don't condemn what we're doing, because to do so is to 'blaspheme the Holy Spirit'," they say.

As Jesus is saying this, He is speaking to "Jews." To "Israel." In a little while they are going to crucify Him; as He says, "whoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him."(vs32) And as He is being crucified He prays to the Father, "...forgive them for they do not know what they do." (Lk23:34)

Time passes, Acts 2 comes along, and the Holy Spirit arrives, indwells Believers, and the Church begins. As these same leaders resist the message, eventually Stephen is brought before the council. (Acts7) His closing comments to them before being stoned to death is, "O stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the HOLY SPIRIT." (vs51) As other Jewish leaders are rejecting the message, Paul proclaims "well did the Holy Spirit speak through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers.."(Acts28:25) ...as he closes by saying that God's message has been taken from Israel, and sent to the Gentiles, as he writes in more detail in Romans 11. One of the applications of this statement was to Israel, the "specific" people to whom Jesus was saying these things. And it was a "one-time" condemnation, for that generation.

And then, just as we have spoken in the past how a person cannot "lose" their salvation, but can "purposely walk away" from the Lord... after very deliberate thought, meditation and rejection, because they have (among other things) "insulted the Spirit of grace" (Heb10:29) a person can very "purposely" reject God's Holy Spirit, initially. This is not some flippant "casual" rejection, where they "don't know" what they are doing.

To reject Jesus is to deal with something one can see "physically" or read about in Scripture or history books. Jesus said to Thomas that he had "seen and believed." (Jn20:29) Something he could touch, look at and handle. (1Jn1:1) And as a person looks at Jesus he might see, simply, another "human being." But to understand the Holy Spirit, and then reject...that is another matter. Romans 8 speaks of the "Holy Spirit" in the life of the Believer. The Holy Spirit "dwells in" (vs9) and "bears witness" (vs16) to sonship in Christ.

To truly understand the "Holy Spirit" and reject, is to truly understand "God" in the fulness of His essence (Jn4:24,1:16,7:38-39) and reject. At what point has a person crossed that line? We are told that Jesus Christ is the "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" that He knows the division between "soul and spirit." (Heb4:12)

Now, the "scary" part of all this, is what we see so much of today. Let me hastily insert a "disclaimer" here. What I am about to suggest is not to label any "specific people" by name as fitting what we are about to consider.

Only God knows individual hearts (Heb4:12) and only He knows "those who are His." (2Tim2:19) I used to consider that this passage applied ONLY to Israel, and the "one-time deal" when they, as a nation, rejected the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the days following.

But...

What about these people who have been "saved" out of demonism and satan worship? Are they truly saved? Some, possibly, are. Those in Ephesus who had been in the occult came to the Lord and burned their books. (Acts19) Thus far, my observation of any I've known; they come out, but continually make references back to their black magic and occult "wisdom." One such man, whose mailing list I'm on, spends his time referring us to satanic numerology and terminology as supposedly being of some merit, and recounts all the "prayer warfare" he is engaged in as he "prays" for destruction of many thises and thats, because "prayer works." Others I have known, claim to be Christians, but can never seem to "quite" get their "other foot" out of the realm of darkness. Remember, Jesus said, "you cannot serve two masters (Mt6:24) a kingdom cannot be "divided against itself." (12:25) "the one who is not with Me [totally] is against Me." (12:30)

Now let's "leave off preachin' and get to meddlin'." There are practitioners who raise an arm to the heavenlies, stretch out the other...imparting the spirits to the congregants. They get people twitching demonically, and uttering verbal gibberish. This is the stuff Isaiah spoke against, "the mediums and wizards who peep and mutter.." (Is8:19) ("Peep" is to "chatter and/or chirp." "Mutter" is to "roar, growl, groan.") They tell people that it is the "power of God" and that they have just received an "anointing" of the "Holy Spirit" which they can "feel." If the one application is true, that of "attributing the Holy Spirit's work to satan"(Mk3:30), then is the reverse also true? "...attributing satan's work as being of the Holy Spirit!" Folks: what these people engage in, from Isaiah's words, even hundreds of years before Paul's exhortations against it in 1Cor14 & 12:2, calls this activity as being from the "mediums and wizards." Stuff which God condemned. (Lev19:31) As He says, "I will even set My face against that soul..and will cut him off.."(Lev20:6)

Is this activity "blasphemy" against the Holy Spirit? "Blasphemy" is "slander, detraction, speech injurious to another's good name." The name of God and Christ is "wonderful." (Is9:6,Jdg13:18) Is not the activity of satan through his conjurures, subsequently labelled as being "of the Holy Spirit", a "slander" to God's True Holy Spirit?! To lower the Holy Spirit's ALLEGED activities to the level of barking, growling animals, is what Paul condemns; who have "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things." (Rom1:23)

For such blasphemy to be NOT FORGIVEN is Not "just" following the crowd in this matter in "ignorance" (Acts17:30,1Ti1:13), but fully knowing what they are doing/saying... Is it possible that these practitioners, thus engaged, can never be saved; because they've "sold themselves" to satan?

Now, the scarier part!! It certainly must be possible for people who have participated in such activity to "BECOME saved" and come out of it. The people in Ephesus did. But how many of these people have "babbled/barked/growled" (peeped/muttered) and "slain" themselves into a place, having done so with such militancy and dedication of their "hearts", rebelling against God's repeated warnings to them against it, of no longer being "able" to be saved!

In this is an understanding of God's warning to Israel. "Take heed to yourself that you do not become snared by following them...do not ask about their gods, How did these nations serve their gods that I too may do likewise?" (Deu12:30)

This same warning I relay to you, dear reader! These charismatic experiences appear enticing. People get all carried away in their emotions, "feeling good." And thus, there are many well-intentioned people who go to these meetings "to investigate what's going on." They ask, "what's with all this stuff, anyway?" So they go. Sometimes, they actually "hope to" have the experience, themselves, to help them "understand" what it's about. But if you do so, you are dabbling with "Hell FIRE." How do you know, before going into it, at what point your heart will be "snared" into the devil's clutches...and it's "too late!" It's like a local college student recently on trial for participating in a riot last spring where people were injured. It seems as though he is being acquitted on some of the charges, because he was so fallen-down drunk at the time, that he can't remember what he did. Or, the drunk driver who doesn't remember killing multiple people. You see...these people had the "choice" BEFORE they got drunk. Once they are drunk, it's too late. They're "out of control." These charismatic practitioners boast of "being drunk in the spirit." You see, folks; by the time you get to that stage, it's too late. Satan the Serpent hisses, "Gotcha!!" The one who is of God is "in control" as his "spirit is subject" to him. (1Cor14:32) One of the characteristics of a Believer, ("fruit of the [Holy] Spirit") is "self-control" (Gal5:23, 2Ti3:3, 2Pt1:6)

Isaiah continues... Don't go after the mediums and wizards, but rather, "to the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because no light is in them." (Is8:20) You see, another characteristic of these charismatic experiences is that they place the experience above God's Word. And in many occasions, the pastor will even say words like, "We won't have Scripture today...we've had the spirit." They are in darkness!

Here, again, in my own personal observations, I have yet to meet a person who was "saved" out of it, who didn't have "one foot" still in the "emotionalism" that goes with it, and the "heart" which didn't tend to "lean" in those directions. (This does not necessarily include people on the e-mailing list who have written, saying they were saved out of it. I've not met these people personally, so have no way, at present, of verifying their testimonies one way or the other.)

This kind of thing certainly makes the heart "shudder" to see all that goes on in the (supposed) "name of Christ" but is, in actuality, "locking" the participants into a permanent state of no longer being able to be saved! Remember, after Pharaoh had hardened his own heart enough times, then, God said, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart and multiply My signs..." (Ex7:3) And again, Jesus predicted of those who were doing so many things "in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons" that He would say to them, "I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!" (Mt7:22-23)

You see, it is easier for a "vile sinner" to be saved, than for a "spirit-filled christian" to come to saving repentance. The sinner has no intimate knowledge of God, only his own conscience. (Rom2:15) But the one who has been dabbling around in spiritual matters comes under the judgment of the "knowledge" he had. As Peter says, "it would have been better for them not to have fully known the way of righteousness" (2Pt2:21)

And here we get to a "fine line" for some people. How many of these people "knew" the way of righteousness, and "turn from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2Pt2:21b) They've "walked away" from God, towards dedication to satan in these experiences? How many of those Pharisees of Jesus' day had believed in God at one time? ...only to have Him say, "it shall not be forgiven him" (vs32) And how many of them are "revealed that they were not all of us" in the first place? (1Jn2:19) How does a person know when they've crossed that line? Only God knows.

Perhaps this study has raised more questions than it has answered. But we are exhorted to, "examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith, prove your own selves. Do you not know your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are reprobates?" (2Cor13:5) "Reprobate" meaning "unfit, spurious, not passing the test." Let us diligently "examine [ourselves]"(1Cor11:28) so that we might not be "rejected." (Jer6:30) because "now is the accepted time" (2Cor6:2) if we wait, or insist in rebellion, at what point will God say for any of us "the time is at hand"? (Rev22:10) Whatever your state, there you remain...(vs11)

"It is a fearful thing to fall into [the awesome power of] the hands [punishment] of the living God." (Heb10:31)

See Also Addendum: Q/A "No Hope for Charismatics?" & Q/A "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit & Tongues?"

Known by its fruit: out of the mouth - (Mat 12:33-37)

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit" (vs33)

Just as Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other.."(Mt6:24,Lk16:13) and "the one who is not with Me is against Me, and the one who does not gather with Me scatters"(12:30) so also is there no fence-straddling regarding "quality." There is no such thing as "MOSTLY good" or "not TOO bad."

The boldness with which we proclaim God's Word, recently prompted a reader (who happened to be in agreement) to jokingly suggest I had never read the book, "How to Win Friends and Influence People." When we forthrightly expose certain false doctrines, invariably the whining retorts will come in, of the order, "Don't criticize the WHOLE LOT because of JUST a FEW rotten apples...I know such-n-such, and FOR THE MOST PART they're GOOD."

Salvation is NOT "for-the-most-part." Isaiah's vision did not include the seraphim crying out, "Holy, Holy, Holy is more-or-less how you could describe God." (Is6:3) Not hardly!! God [IS] holy! There are not "shades-of-gray" to God's righteousness. There was "Abraham's bosom" and "hell" (Lk16:22-23) with no "in-between" stages. The two were separated by a "FIXED great chasm" (vs26) so there could be no mixing. It's an "EITHER/OR" situation.

If one sees something labelled a "church" ...how does one know if it's good or not? If you meet a person who claims to be a "Christian" how do you know their true state?

The Gospel message is the "word of faith." (Rom10:8) The individual "act" of salvation involves two things. The "mouth" and the "heart." Simply put, a person "believes in" the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. (Acts16:31) And when a person has done so, as the Ethiopian did, he confesses "I believe." (Acts8:37) As Paul continues, "if you confess the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses unto salvation." (Rom10:9-10)

Some people say that the "eyes are the window to the soul." By looking into one's eyes, you can tell of what sort the person is. If that is true, then the "mouth is the window to the spirit/heart." "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (12:34)

James speaks in this manner, "Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing...does a fountain send forth at the same hole the sweet and bitter? ..so no fountain can yield both salt water and fresh." (~Jas3:10-12) The "good man" out of his "good treasure" produces "good." The "evil man" brings forth "evil things." (12:35)

If you know someone who speaks out of "both sides of his mouth" ..WHICH side do you believe? Jesus asked, "How can you, being evil, speak good things?" (12:34) Even satan PRETENDS to be good. (2cor11:14) And his ministers are also good at pretending. (2Cor11:15,Lk20:20)

The thing is...EVENTUALLY...the truth comes out! If you sin "against the LORD...be sure your sin will find you out." (Nu32:23) Remember, He is the One Who "knows" the heart. (Heb4:12,Lk16:15,Ps44:21) And eventually, the mouth WILL "slip" and give you away. It may take years of faithfully concealing the truth, but ultimately, at some moment, the mouth will tell what's in the heart. Furthermore, if lies have been proclaimed for years, eventually, the mind will "forget" what has been said on which occasion; and eventually the disparities will be evident to others.

This, among other things, is one reason to not appoint brand new converts to positions of Church leadership. (1Ti3:6) Typically, baptism is given to a person based on their verbal "confession of faith." A person can proclaim, "I believe" and is then baptised. While God knows the heart, to fellow-Believers the person's true heart is not always as apparent. Thus, Jesus says, "by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned." (12:37) It is not the "words" themselves which save, but the words show what's in the "heart" in the same way that the "works" illustrate one's faith (Jas2:14-26) since our salvation is "unto good works." (Eph2:10) Thus, as the person is in the fellowship for a time, there is time for the sum of his "words" to prove a "consistency" in one direction or another.

To look at this from another angle, when Isaiah was presented with God's holiness, his first reaction is, "Woe is me! I am undone; for I am a man of UNCLEAN LIPS."(Is6:5) As the "preacher" exhorts, "Do not be rash with your mouth, and do not let your heart be hasty to say a word before God. For God is in heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few." (Ecc5:2) At the Great White Throne judgment is meted out based "according to their works." (Rev20:12) "In the multitude of words, sin is not lacking; but he who holds back his lips is wise." (Pr10:19) Restraining one's words is an indication of a person whose spirit is characterized by "self-control." (Gal5:23) But those who are evil, they are "without self-control" (2Ti3:3), which usually manifests itself in blustering talk.

In worship, "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools. For they do not know that they are doing evil." (Ecc5:1)

Finally, as we have studied in the past, our Faith in Christ manifests itself in our "confession" of Him. The final stage of our salvation occurs when Christ presents us to the Father (Mt10:32) and the "angels of God" (Lk12:8) after we have received our "incorruptible" bodies. (1Cor15:51-54) If our speech denies Him "before men", He promises that He will also deny us "before the Father." (Mt10:33) Denial due to torture does not count, as He also says, "the one who endures to the end shall be kept safe." (10:22) You see...the mouth proclaims what is in the heart...

Thus, the conclusion...

"..every idle word, whatever men may speak, they shall give account of it in the day of judgment." (12:36)

Seeking for signs: condemnation - (Mat 12:38-42)

Certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, "Master, we want to see a sign from you. But He answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. And there shall be no sign given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." (vs38-39)

When John the baptist, in despair in prison, asks "are You he who should come, or do we look for another?"(11:3) Jesus replied, "Go and tell John [AGAIN] those things which you hear and see: 1) the blind receive their sight, 2) the lame walk; 3) the lepers are cleansed 4) the deaf hear; 5) the dead are raised 6) the poor have the gospel proclaimed to them." (11:4-5) As was prophesied of Him. (Is 35:5-6)

To the Scribes and Pharisees Jesus has now authenticated Himself to 1) forgive sins (9:2) 2) be Lord of the Sabbath (12:8) 3) have authority over demons (12:22~) He has done so in a manner fulfilling what they read regularly in the Prophets.

But they are not accepting Him. They also ask him about the "kingdom" and He says, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'see here' or 'see there!'" (Lk17:20-21)

You see...what they want is something "spectacular" like Moses or Elijah. Lord, let's see you "part the Red Sea" or "call fire down from heaven." Then...we'll believe You! Or be like Joshua, and have the "walls of Jericho fall" flat, and restore the kingdom to us out of the hands of Roman occupation. Be "thunderous" and go "Zap! Zap! Zap!" Then...we'll follow You!

But you see, they missed the prophecy "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He shall not break, and a smoking wick He shall not quench." (Is42:2-3) His coming at that time was not to make a "big splash" with trumpets and fanfare.

His true purpose for coming at that time was the "sign" He proclaimed. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the huge fish, so the Son of man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (vs40) CRUCIFIXION! DEATH! RESURRECTION! ...is what He came for.

When He was DEAD and buried, that was not something "glorious" to behold. Humanly speaking, it was a great "defeat." As a couple disciples spoke back to Him when they didn't recognize Him after His resurrection, "the rulers...crucified Him. But we had trusted that He was the One who was about to redeem Israel." (Lk24:20-21)

But you see, He [HAD] REDEEMED Israel. He had conquered death (Rom5-6, 1Cor15:54-57) He HAD restored the "Kingdom" to Israel, and to the world.(Jn3:16) But it was not the earthly "descendents-of-Abraham" kingdom. It was the kingdom which is "not with observation" ...the one "in your midst [in your soul]." (Lk17:20-21) Instead of the kingdom requiring the Levitical priests, and blood of animals; He shed His own blood. (Heb9)

Just as the unbelievers wanted something they could "ooh and aaah" over at Jesus' first coming; as the world now hastens to "That Day" of His second coming, again, unbelieving practitioners and congregants seek for "signs and wonders." They know they don't have the Holy Spirit (Rom8:9) and rather than trusting God's Word to mean what it says, and repenting before Him, they lust and whore after idolatry which gives a false spirituality. They are not content to 1) believe in Jesus Christ and His self-sacrifice on the cross (Acts16:31), 2) confess and repent of their sins (Acts3:19), and 3) rejoice in sins forgiven and names being written in heaven (Lk10:20). They lust after "feelings." They whore after the spectacular sensationalism of being thrown to the floor, and babbling like insane assylum idiots! And if they are not engaged in such behavior, they flock to the Hollywood-style glitz and glamour of the huge stage "production" concerts and other similar entertainment, and engage in fleshly sensual euphoric "feelings" where they can get all "pumped up" and get their "batteries charged."

Remember that when the disciples came back, all euphoric that "even the demons are subject to us through Your name" (spectacular stuff) is when Jesus said, "Don't rejoice in this, that the evil spirits are subject to you, rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven." (Lk10:17,20)

Jonah went to Nineveh preaching "this place is going to be destroyed." (Jon3:4) They repented. The queen of Sheba came to hear Solomon's wisdom; by context, God's wisdom.

Jesus was/is "greater than" either of these two. (vs41-42) Jesus proclaimed that these who came to faith in God through these men would "rise in judgment...and condemn" their unbelief. Even as He proclaims through John that the the pretend christians from the "synagogue of Satan" will "worship before [the] feet" of "Philadelphia" to "know that [He has] loved [them]." (Rev3:9)

Empty heart: invitation to Satan - (Mat 12:43-45)

The last several lessons began when Jesus cast out a demon, healing the "blind and dumb" person. (12:22) The scribes and pharisees have accused Him of being "of" satan.(vs24) Have sought for a "sign" from Him.(vs38) At every turn, they have been rejecting Jesus, His teaching and purpose. Jesus has answered all their slanderous comments, questions and innuendo and given them truth. Now, He's giving a brief little lesson about the spirit world.

When a demon-possessed person has been exorcised, what happens to him? Where does the demon go? It would seem that they require/need/desire a "host" in which to live. The spirit is out "loose" looking for someplace to "rest." (vs43) Recall, when "legion" was cast out of the man "in the mountains and tombs" (Mr5:5) they desired for Jesus not to send them "out of the country."(vs10) But the whole group of demons requested to be able to enter the herd of pigs. (vs11)

Demons roam about, seeking something/someone to inhabit. Peter expresses, "...your adversary the Devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking someone he may devour." (1Pt5:8) And recall, when God asked satan what he'd been up to, the response, "from going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." (Job1:7)

What is a person's defense against satan or demon-possession? As Christians we are instructed to "be filled with the [Holy] Spirit." (Eph5:18) The primary spiritual definition of a Believer is one who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. (Rom8:9)

You see what the demon looks for? He returns to check out the "house" he left. (vs44) If he gets there and finds it "vacant" ...what does he do? He enters...and takes along some of his "buddies."

If a person is demon-possessed, is it enough to "cast out" the demon? Will that save him? Many purport to conduct exorcisms in the "name of Christ." Is it His will for us to be thus engaged? ...always? Perhaps a question needs to be asked..."Why is the person thus possessed?" Is he never going to receive Christ? If he is exorcised, and doesn't repent before God, he can expect to become inundated next time 'round; as the demon "takes with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and live there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first." (vs45)

Do you understand why we don't want to "Empty yourself, forget about yourself and praise the Lord"? (One of the "worship mantras" popularly used for many years) Why we keep saying, here, that such experiences open the heart for demon-possession? The "empty" mind/heart is a "vacant house" for wandering demons roaming about, to indwell. Do you now begin to understand why we call these mindless experiences and

their accompanying "manifestations"... "demon-possession"? Do you understand??? Please say you do!!!

What about Christians? Is it possible for a Christian to be demon-possessed? Did you notice...the demon comes back and finds the house "empty and clean." Nobody's living there. In the context of what Jesus is saying, it seems obvious that if the house had been "occupied" the demon would not have re-entered. Since the defining characteristic of a "Christian" is one who is indwelt by the "Holy Spirit" ...a demon is going to come along, find the house occupied, and move on. Furthermore, if we recall "legion's" reaction at seeing Jesus, "Have You come here to torment us before the time?" (Mt8:29) ...it ought to be obvious they are not going to be streaming to, and beating the door down to "get in" to a Believer. They will want to be as far from the Holy Spirit as possible. This is why the Believer is exhorted to "Resist the devil" and the promise.. "he will flee from you." (Jas4:7)

Now...do you also understand why we say that people engaging in these experiences are NOT "Christians"? By definition...they CANNOT BE!!

The Christian life is of "Christ in you" (Col1:27) as we are instructed to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom13:14) so when Satan or his demons come along, all they see is Christ. They won't stick around!

See Also Addendum: Q/A -Jesus Appearing in Visions - Sex with Angels

He's gone mad: a new family - (Mat 12:46-50)

Along about now, some of you reading this series have long-ago labelled this ministry as crazy, stupid, really "out there" in left field some place. Gone astray from the "main stream" of theological wisdom and "accepted" doctrine. The list makers have labelled it as "liberal" for not parroting their "lists." Liberals have concluded that we are much too legalistic and judgmental in not "accepting everybody" in love and tolerance... because, after all, we're all going to the "same place." We're just getting there maybe a little different way. But in the end, we're all christian "brothers." So, let's not condemn those who perhaps view things a little differently than you do, as if they are "wrong." And then, there are likely those who would like to take me aside to "instruct" me better. Get me off into a calm setting and see if they can't "work on" these problems I have. After all, it must be the abuse I received as a child, which makes me the way I am now. I just must never have received "love" and "acceptance" and I'm lacking terribly in self-esteem, and I just don't love myself.

And, besides being "too American" ...'anybody got any other ideas to add to this litany?

Well, guess what! This is what they thought about Jesus. (It's Jesus' teachings we are simply relaying here) "While He yet talked with the people, behold, His mother and His brothers stood outside, desiring to speak with Him." (vs46)

Were they getting "homesick" for their "number one son" to be home because He's been away so long...? "Oh, Jesus, we love you... [smother, kiss, hug] We've missed You soo much! It's good to see You! How have you been?" Not quite!!

We get a better picture from Mark ch3. He has "ordained twelve" to be His apostles. (vs14) You see, He's starting this "cult" with all these teachings based on "Himself." He's claiming to have more authority than the Law and the Scribes. And so, "those with Him went out to take hold of Him; for they said, He is insane." (vs21) We need to do a "CULT RESCUE" here! The religious leaders are giving their "expert opinion" and saying "He has Beelzebub" (vs22) He's demon-possessed. He doesn't accept our traditions. He's crazy. 'Needs to go to the loony farm. And his family is called into the whole thing, "if You won't listen to us, maybe you'll listen to your mother and family." So the crowd says, "behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking for You." (vs32)

For having grown up in His "family" for 30 years, it says that "His brothers did not believe in Him." (Jn7:5) And His hometown people rejected the "prophet that is not without honor" as they said, "is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brothers...and sisters...where does this man have all these things?" (Mt13:55-56) (Joseph must have

died as he doesn't "appear" once Jesus' ministry begins) So, Jesus is the "eldest son" and instead of taking care of "faaaam'ly responsibilities" He's off running around the countryside like some sort of big shot, starting this new cult. He's "delusional."

The Mary who said, "let it be to me according to your word" (Lk1:38) and "pondered in her heart" (Lk2:19) all the marvelous miraculous things concerning Jesus; as He was beginning His ministry, tried to continue "mothering" Him. "Jesus, they have no wine." (Jn2:3) In other words..."DO SOMETHING about it." He had to be rather firm with her at that point as He exemplified what He would teach later "if anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother..he cannot be My disciple" (Lk14:26) and "let the dead bury their dead" (Mt8:22) as he says to her, "Woman, what is that to Me and to you? My hour has not yet come." (Jn2:4) "Woman" instead of "mother." In other words, 'there is a distinction in our purposes and identity.' In other words, "I am no longer 'officially' your 'son'."

You see...everything He taught, He had already "practiced what He preached" before He preached it. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted (tested/tried) just as we are..." (Heb4:15)

He concludes this reality by asking the crowds, essentially, "Who is my family? Who am I related to? ..and they, related to Me?" (vs48) He motions to His disciples, "whoever shall do the will of My Father in Heaven, the same is My [family]." (vs50)

Christian: you will find this to be true. Blood relatives will fall by the wayside in anger when they see Christ in you, and see that you are truly committed to following Jesus. Remember, Jesus said, "I did not come to send peace, but a sword" (Mt10:34) as He continues to describe the family disputes that would arise due to Faith in Him. And the hardest to accept will be the ones who claim to be "Christian."

For a True Believer, his Family is with those who are fellow "sons of God" (Rom8:14,Gal3:26,Phil2:15) through "faith in Christ Jesus" by the leading of the "Spirit of God." Those who are named by the name of Christ "of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named."(Eph3:14) We are "one" with the Father and Jesus Christ. (Jn17) We are the "bride" of Christ. (Eph5:32)

So, everybody thought Jesus was "mad." But He has authenticated His authority to forgive sins; as Lord of the sabbath; as Lord over demons; His purpose to die, be buried and rise again; His authority and knowledge about spiritual matters. And now, announces ...not a new cult... but a new "Family" ...as He would call us His "brothers" and "children" (Mt28:10,Jn20:17,Heb2:11-13) and "friends." (Jn15:15)

Parables: lest they be converted - (Mat 13: 1-23a)

"And He spoke many things to them in parables....

"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not; nor do they understand...for this people's heart has become gross...they have closed their eyes, lest at any time they should see...and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." (~vs3,13-15)

Parables are conundrums. On one hand they are full of mystery, which myriads of people wrestle with, hidden from the "sophisticated and cunning." And on the other hand are "revealed to babes." (11:25) Simple to understand.

By definition, a "parable" is a simple story designed to "teach a moral or religious lesson." It is intended to be "simple" in the telling, and in the understanding. It is not designed to wax complex in deep theology. Nit-picking into a parable's details is not necessary. The teaching is right on the "surface" ...that which is readily seen "at face value."

Up through chapter 12, Jesus has done some teaching of heavenly/godly principles. He has debated the scribes and pharisees. He has provided the credentials for His Person and ministry. He has given a clear-cut separation between His "family" and His purpose. The rulers and family have rejected what they see Him to be... and now He begins to be really specific and pointed in His teachings. We are going to have parables and "kingdom of heaven" narratives. He is going to more clearly denounce the leaders for what they are, so that the common people will see clearly. He is going to explain the difference between being a pretend-believer, and what it really takes to get into heaven; the "cost" to be His disciple. What the kingdom of heaven truly is at its root and core. He is going to explain the judgment to come, and God's triumph in the end.

While it might seem that Jesus is repeating much of what He has already taught in the first section; in the Sermon on the Mount He teaches, as though, for the first time...to people who, perhaps, don't know. By ch13, they have heard, and are rejecting. He continues teaching, but now it is "veiled." (2cor3:15) They had been blind to Moses, and they are still rebellious. As Ezekiel did, so Jesus does, "you shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they will forbear, for they are rebellious." (Ez2:7)

But there is a distinction now between "them" and "you." To "them" the parables are intended to give truth, but not be understood. As when Pharaoh hardened his own heart enough times, then God hardened it further to reveal Himself with signs and wonders. (Ex7:3) But to "you" (the disciples) Jesus says, "blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears,

for they hear." (vs16) ...as Peter expressed, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn6:68) On that occasion Jesus had been teaching about Himself being the "bread of life" (Jn6:35) and how, in order to have eternal life, a person needed to be one with Christ, had to partake of Him. As He later would say, "I am the way, the truth and the life.." (Jn14:6) The fact that Jesus was not some new cult guru; but, in fact, the VERY WAY TO GOD, Himself. And on that occasion, the people (they/them) were not accepting; but rejecting and leaving off following Jesus. And Jesus asks, "do you (you) also wish to go away?" (6:67)

You see, in "foreknowledge" the "Lord KNEW those being His.." (2Tm2:19 -litv) Jesus foreknew, and chose (appointed) those who followed Him and were His disciples. The unregenerate "rattled around" in ignorance, hailing "Hosanna! "Blessed is the King of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Jn12:13) ...and scarcely four days later, "Crucify! Crucify Him!" (Jn19:6)

So it is today. Many are "of Israel" (church members) and rest "in Moses" (great men of God) and the "law" (creeds and traditions) as the "scribes/pharisees" (pastors/TV ministers) tout themselves for everybody to admire. But when God's Word is presented, showing that the "church" is supposed to be DISTINCT from the world, and that true repentance (apart from self-esteem and self-worth) is necessary to become a follower of Christ, and that True Biblical Doctrine is necessary for true Unity in Christ (Rom16:17) "they/them" follow the path of world-religious-unity. The "broad way" they follow leads to destruction. (Mt7:13) And because of "their" rebellion, the things of God become hidden to "them." And if "you", as a True Believer, try to explain it to "them" you often find yourself talking to a "blank wall." While they engage in "dialogue" they simply do not understand; nor do they WANT to! Don't let them fool you with their words to the contrary...

But "you" who KNOW Jesus Christ, having been washed in His blood (Rev1:5), understand the things of the Spirit of God.(1Cor2:14) They are revealed by the Holy Spirit. (Jn16:13, Rom8, 1Jn2:27)

To "you" Jesus says, "...many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them; and to hear what you hear, and have not heard them. (vs17)

Therefore hear the parable of the sower....

Parable of the Sower: seed and soils - (Mat 13:1-23b)

"Behold, the sower went out to sow...hear the parable of the sower" (vs3,18)

Typically, this parable has been approached from the standpoint of the "various kinds of seed." The seed by the wayside being devoured by the birds. That which sprung up immediately in stony places, and dried up by the sun. The ones that were among the thorns and were choked out. And finally the seed in good ground. Somehow, many people think the "seed" is the "people." That the "good seed" that yielded crops is the "fruitful Christian." (Gal5:22-23) People are then exhorted to be "100-fold Christians."

Others, "more spiritual" ones will gloat in their "deeper" understanding of this parable. Scorning such a "simplistic" approach of the "seed"; when "actually" the parable is about the "various soils." After all, isn't it the rocky places that has "no root in himself" or the good soil that yields abundantly..?

Well, Jesus explains the parable: He says that it is a parable "of the SOWER." (vs18) The Sower goes forth to sow, and the seed is the "Word of the kingdom." (vs19) In MKJV/LITV notice "Word" is capitalized. "In the beginning was the Word (logos)...and the Word was God."(Jn1:1) "The seed is the Word of God."(Lk8:11) This is a parable about the Sower AND the Seed, through the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that "convict[s] the world..." (Jn16:8) God's word "goes out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall certainly do what I sent it to do." (Is55:11) Jesus is speaking of Himself, spreading forth His Word, His very essence. He offers Himself as the "bread of life" (Jn6:48) and stipulates that a person must "partake of" Him. (6:54-56) And in the end Peter summarizes what He has just taught, that they were the "words of eternal life." (6:68)

When some are presented with Jesus Christ, Satan immediately snatches the Truth away from their heart/s. This one is never saved.

Others, immediately are joyful (vs20) and say, "Oh, yes, I want to be a Christian." They dance around, being all jubilant. But there is no "depth" to their understanding. They are not taught doctrine.(2Tm4:2-4) They spend all their time being "joyous" and "praising the Lord." There is no basis for their "faith." Their emotions wear out. Since they sprouted, there is a dead carcass sitting there that looks like a Christian, but there is no life, because there was no teaching. They were not by the "rivers of water" (Ps1:3,Jn4:14) that could cause growth. This one was saved (it sprouted)

but "falls away." "Stumbled" or "offended"(vs21) meaning: "to desert one whom he ought to trust."

Many see too many choices. They try to serve too many masters. The world surrounds them with its enticements. Jesus just does not have enough significance to them to forsake all to follow Him. But he appears to be a Believer. He sprouted. But is "unfruitful." (vs22) When he is received into God's presence it will be "so as by fire." (1Cor3:15)

The faithful ones receive Him (vs23,Jn1:12) and "bear fruit." Fruit bearing is at each individual's level, according to his ability which God gives. (1Pt4:11) The Master gives to one "five talents" and to another "two" and to another "one." Each who is faithful receives a "Well done, good and faithful servant.." (Mt25:21,23)

But remember, this is a parable of the "sower." It is Christ Who is the "image of..God" Who created all things and holds them together, is the Head of the Church, and to Whom the Father has given the "fullness" of all things. (Col1:15-19) This parable is not about "different kinds" of seed and how they faired...the seed all came out of the same pouch, from the same Source. Nor is it about the soils. Rock is rock. The pathway is always beaten down from foot traffic. The tilled soil is intended for raising crops. The rock will never become fruitful soil. But God's Word goes out into all the world, because "He is not willing that any should perish." (2Pt3:9) "Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." (Rom10:18) Christ presents Himself to all mankind. All mankind is "without excuse." (Rom1:20) It's just that there are different "vessels." Some to "honor" and some to "dishonor." (Rom9:21) But, remember, God "knew" (past tense) those who are His." (2Ti2:19) "whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son.." (Rom8:29)

Thus, this parable illustrates the workings of God and His Word in the hearts of the various "vessels." Thus, knowing those who would reject, He introduces His explanation of the parable by saying "..lest at any time they...should be converted and I should heal them." (vs15) But also, knowing His own who were chosen and appointed, He says, "..it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven.." (vs11)

For the fruitful ones, let us not forget that it is not "our efforts" which bear fruit. As we "abide" in the vine (Jn15) the branches don't "DO" anything. We sit there...allowing Christ to "flow through" us. "..no longer I, but Christ lives in me.."(Gal2:20) As warfare is engaged, the warfare is not ours. (Eph6:12 -litv) Anything we do, even the "good works" we do is "His workmanship...in Christ Jesus."(Eph2:10) "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." (Phil2:13) ...bearing fruit "a hundredfold..sixty..thirty."

See Also Addendum: the Seed

Look-alikes: at the harvest - (Mat 13:24-30)

He put another parable to them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed darnel among the wheat and went his way. (vs24-25)

Here, again, notice the parable is about the "man" who sowed the seed. While we can learn about the seed, the parable is about the MAN and what HE does.

First of all, let's evaluate the story. Wheat has been planted. This is the same Seed of the Word of God of the previous parable. It is "good" seed. But now, rather than looking at how the Word works in various kinds of people who are presented with Christ, we see what the enemy does amongst the 100-60-30-fold seed; and what Christ, in turn, concludes.

"While men slept."(vs25) We are exhorted "knowing the time, that it is already time to awake out of sleep.." (Rom13:11) The one who is "stand[ing]" (Eph6:13) on guard is not supposed to sleep. Jesus chided the sleeping disciples "watch and pray that you enter not into temptation." (Mt26:41)

The INFILTRATION into the Church of the "pretend christians" ... the "changelings" of whom we speak much, did not happen BY CHANCE! It was NOT that it COULD NOT BE HELPED ...that the "church" is in the state it is today. That there was NO CHOICE! NO!!! "Men slept." It started with pastors and teachers ALLOWING new converts (1Ti3:6), and others who had not been thoroughly checked out (1Jn4:1) to "minister" amongst the flock. The constitution and by-laws, which stated that a person could not teach or minister until they had been in attendance for some specified amount of time, were not adhered to. Those accepted into membership were not thoroughly examined; if they gave half-hearted answers in their testimony-of-salvation, the membership committees filled-in-the-blanks for them, to move them along into membership, even though, perhaps, they were not true Believers, and didn't REALLY KNOW what a Real Christian is. And then, "tolerance" became the norm. Non-judgmentalism. Adherence to the "Standard" of God's Word was called "judgmental" and "unloving." And so anybody and everybody was allowed to become "part of" the "church." The firm Scriptural standard of "be not unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2Cor6:14) was not obeyed!

You see, the "good" seed was "wheat." The infiltration was "darnel." Lexical definition of KJV's word "tare" yields "a kind of darnel, resembling wheat except the grains are black." American Heritage Dictionary calls "darnel" a kind of Eurasian rye grass. Part of my youth being spent in N.Dakota farm country, I'm more familiar with "wild oats." When oats and

wild oats is growing up together, they look alike. Even the heads are similar. But wild oats has "black" kernels.

First of all, let us understand that the original source of this infiltration did not come from the Church. It came from the "enemy." (vs25) Who is Christ's enemy? Satan. He is the "accuser of the brethren." (Rev12:10)

And then, although men did sleep, some have been "waking up." (Rom13:11) They have come to realize what has been happening, and are sounding the alarm. Some are "com[ing] out of her, My people..." (Rev18:4)

But you notice, while the alarm is to be sounded, are the servants called upon to go into the field and forcibly root out the darnel? Jesus says, "No, lest while you gather up the darnel you also root up the wheat with them." (vs29) As anyone knows, who has ever had a garden; when it comes time to do some weeding, the task is often quite difficult. Particularly if there has been procrastination getting to it, and the weeds are large. Pulling the weed disturbs the soil so much that the good plant right next to it is often in peril of also being uprooted. When everything is smaller, it is often impossible to distinguish between weed and good plants, so both are allowed to grow. If a person does like I did one year, thinking the thistles were merely the "other variety" of potato I had bought and planted when I ran out of the previous-year's seed, since they had grown right in the rows where I had planted potatoes; and so I had weeded faithfully "around" the thistles, letting them grow strong and healthy. But at harvest time when the shovel went digging for the fruit, it became apparent "which" were thistles and which had actually been potatoes.

As a person might observe a congregation seated in a building, not knowing the hearts as God does (1Sa16:7,Heb4:12), he is not able to go down the row "you-you-you are Christians" but "you-you-you are not." And as such, cannot herd up the non-Believers and usher them out the door, and remove them from the membership list. He might accidentally usher out a True Believer. If the local Body is believing, and an unbeliever comes along, they have the ability to not put them into positions of leadership. (1Ti3:6,5:22) But if one finds himself in a body that is predominantly unregenerate, we are not called upon to stir things up and create a "church split." We are exhorted to "come out of her, My people." (Rev18:4)

While "those who sin" are to be rebuked "before all" (1Ti5:20) as Paul did to Peter (Gal2:11) we do not "judge" (condemn) one another. (Rom14:4) God is the Judge. (2Ti4:1,Heb12:23) When we "try the spirits" (1Jn4:1) to discern those who are Believers or not, we do not judge them. But those who are NOT Believers, we are to NOT FELLOWSHIP with. (Eph5:11,2Jn1:10) The unbelievers who are known to be so, based on "the doctrine which you have learned" (Rom16:17) are to be "avoided." (You see: this is why they don't want doctrinal teaching, and why they are

"tearing down walls" of doctrinal differences... it exposes them as impostors!)

There are many who believe that as "soldiers of Christ" we are to be on the war-path. Rooting out with "search and destroy" missions. They don't understand that the "branch" simply "abides" in the vine. (Jn15) They don't understand that our warfare is one of "standing firm" (Eph6:13, Gal5:1) That "wrestling against flesh and blood is NOT TO US" (Eph6:12 -litv) That the "battle is the Lord's." (2Chr20:15)

Notice at the harvest "I will say to the reapers." (vs30) This rooting out of the weeds is not the job of the wheat. Notice WHO does the harvesting... "And on the cloud sat one like the Son of man, having a golden crown on His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying in a great voice to Him sitting on the cloud, Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth was dried. And He sitting on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped." (Rev14:14-16) The Lord is the Harvest Master, and the angels are His "crew." (vs30,41)

By the way, for those misapplying this passage together with (24:39-41) to say that the rapture removes the weeds in order to "leave" the Believer on the earth to rule with Him, notice "but GATHER the wheat into my granary." (vs30b) Jesus did not say, "I will come back, once you have prepared the earth for Me to rule over" but rather, promised, "I GO to prepare a place FOR YOU, and...I WILL COME again and RECEIVE YOU to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also." (Jn14:3)

Let us not try to do the Lord's work "for" Him! We are "vessels." (2Ti2:21) A vessel "contains" something-or-other. What are we to contain? "..be filled with the [Holy] Spirit.." (Eph5:18) as we "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom13:14) as "Christ lives in me. And that life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith toward the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself on my behalf." (Gal2:20)

See Also Addendum: "Sooo Many Weeds"

Pervasive evil: all-inclusive - (Mat 13:31-33)

"If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed..." (17:20)

The man takes a tiny little seed and plants it. It grows and becomes a large plant. As "flesh and blood" there is nothing good in us. (Rom7:18) We are diminutive. But Christ comes and saves us, and makes us "accepted in the Beloved." (Eph1:6) The early Church grew to where the rulers complained that they had "turned the world upside down" ...the Gospel of Christ had spread so much. (Ac17:6)

So what happens? That which was so tiny, grows into something big as the branches "abide in the vine." (Jn15) The birds come swarming around, ruining the fruit. They will peck holes in the fruit, never eating one whole, and leaving the rest. But they manage to go around and peck a little bit into all the fruit; thus, ruining the crop.

Satan's messengers come around into the Church; dabbling, playing, sampling. They never come to saving Faith in Christ and become born again (Jn3:3) as a "new creation." (2Cor5:17) They never will, and it is not their intention. But they peck away, chip away... pretending to be interested in the Kingdom of God. Often, you will find them taking up your valuable time, that might be better used helping someone who genuinely wants to know about the things of God. Perhaps you come to realize their true nature, so you "shoo" them away. So they flutter off to another fruit (Believer) and peck away. From one to the next...making a nuisance of themselves. And in many cases, where the fruit was not yet ripe for the picking, they damage the fruit. There become permanent scars.

Satan's evil also permeates "unseen." And that is a worse kind. In most cases in the O.T. leaven was typical of "sin." Passover was to be kept with unleavened bread, as everything about the celebration was to be holy and "clean." If even one speck of leaven is put into the dough, eventually the whole lump becomes leavened. Just one drop of food coloring will make the whole batch of that color. And it becomes "part of" the liquid. The color cannot be extracted back out once inserted.

Thus, John writes, "do not receive him into your house, nor speak a greeting to him." (2Jn1:10) Oh, so "unloving" and "judgmental"!! Yes! But the 100% surest way to not get HIV, is to "abstain"... at the risk of being called a "prude."

Satan's messengers are quite militant and insistent in their agenda to infiltrate and wear the Saints down. But at the risk of their taunts of being "unloving" ...because, after all, didn't Jesus say, "by this all shall know that you are My disciples, if you have [luuuuv]..." (Jn13:35) we MUST remain "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the

Lord.."(1Cor15:58) We must be "faithful" if we expect to receive His "well done!" (Mt25:21)

But, what we have just considered [IS] "part of the territory" of the Kingdom of Heaven. If you are a Christian, "expect" this to be the case...until the end of the age. If you want to be pure for Christ, never let sin gain even a finger-hold in your life. A local Body should be ever on guard against allowing even the slightest hint of the enemy into the workings of the group. It's better to be "without" help in some area, than to allow an unBeliever to "minister." Once they are in, you can't get them out, and they will bring more evil into the assembly, and ruin the whole lot.

The taunts will be that such diligence is "unloving." So "hateful" and "judgmental." But our duty to Christ is to OBEY. Today's generation supposes that the greatest service to God is to worship with "Praise and Love." And that, to exclude the unregenerate from the worship of the local fellowship is unlovingly dooming them to hell.

Saul was told, "Go and strike Amalek, and completely destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." (1Sam15:3) "..but Saul and the people spared..the best of the sheep and..all that was good, and would not completely destroy them." (vs9) And Saul said to Samuel, "..I have done the command of the LORD...the people spared the best of the sheep..to sacrifice to the LORD your God." (vs13,15)

Samuel says, "STOP!"(vs16) None of this nonsense!!! "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice! To listen is better than the fat of rams! For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idol-worship..." (vs22-23)

Isn't it interesting how "disobedience" and "witchcraft" are tied together in this account! What do we see today? The "church" has been disobedient about "do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." (2Cor6:14) And what do we see? Demonic, witchcraft, shamanistic charismaticism has essentially taken over just about every nook and cranny of christendom! This is serious stuff, folks! It is not simply "another way" of worshipping, and therefore we should "tolerate" it! No! "What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what part does a believer have with an unbeliever? And what agreement does a temple of God have with idols? For you are the temple of the living God..." (vs15-16) "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened...now I have written to you not to associate intimately, if any man CALLED A BROTHER and is..an idolater..with such a one not [even] to eat. (1Cor5:6-11)

There [IS] NO UNITY between a True Christian and the unbeliever. There never can be! To attempt to be in tolerance and acceptance, is to DISOBEY GOD! To disobey God is as witchcraft...obeying satan! Don't worry about their slithery taunts about you being so harsh, legalistic and judgmental...and so hateful and unloving. That is the ploy of the leaven...to sneak in, permeate, and... "GOTCHA!!"

For the Believer God says, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord, and do not touch the unclean thing. And I will receive you and I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2Cor6:16-18)

See Also Addendum: "Smooth Tongues" & "Chatrooms and 'Birds'"

Great treasure: seeking earnestly - (Mat 13:44-46)

What is your salvation worth to you? Of how much value is your Faith?

On this earth the most valuable "thing" is supposed to be one's marriage. "In sickness and health, through good times and bad, for richer or poorer ... FORSAKING ALL OTHERS..." Most parents get this wrong, as they try desperately to "hang on" to their children; as they presume that "blood bonds" of parent/child is greatest. Others, still, assume it to be the "sibling" relationship. You know... "faaaamily values." But God said of marriage, to "leave..father and mother and cleave..." to the spouse. (Gen2:24) The spouse is of such value and importance, that even that strong "blood-tie" is broken in favor of the new "two-become-one" relationship.

In many cases the new couple struggles with priorities as they leave the old behind, to cling to each other. The old boy-friend/girl-friend. But they "belong" to each other. (1Cor7:4) And "whatever it takes" to make the relationship work, is what the goal should be.

Marriage is a type...a "picture" of the relationship of the Believer with God. It was so for Israel. (Hos2:16,19,Eze16:7-14) And is so for the Church. (Eph5:32,2Cor11:2)

Before the modern era of one-night-stands, love songs used to say something like, "I love you and I'm never gonna let you go..." God's love for His own is such that He never lets go of His, as He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." (Jer31:3)

What level of commitment do you have towards God? That part of the marriage vow, "Forsaking all others..." is the part we have troubles with, isn't it. Most people want to have God, but also have the world.

George Beverly Shea wrote a song years ago, "I'd rather have Jesus...than ANYTHING this world affords..." Riches, men's applause, world-wide fame...

The "kingdom of Heaven" is a treasure. When a person "finds" it (Mt7:7) it becomes all-consuming. As the person who finds gold does not tell anybody else, for fear he might not get it, he sells EVERYTHING he has, in order to buy the property where the gold is. The merchant finds that one pearl he's been looking for, he abandons all other pursuits, to obtain it. When that fellow finds that one special girl, his eye no longer wanders to look at other attractions, and jealously guards her. God is jealous regarding our devotion to Himself. (Ex20:5) Paul was jealous over the Corinthian church, lest they would turn away the doctrine he taught them. (2Cor11:2) The Church is "espoused" to "One Man" ...Christ.

When a person finds God and eternal life, all else is abandoned to embrace God's gift. The old familial blood-ties of love become as hate, in comparison to one's devotion to Christ. (Lk14:26) Even that strongest bond of marriage must take a back seat to Christ. If a person cannot separate himself from material things, wealth and the other attractions of the world, it is well-nigh impossible to be Jesus' disciple. (Mk10:24)

Devotion to Christ must be a "singular" serving of but "one Master." (Mt6:24) Along with the apostle we must be willing to "gladly spend and be spent..." for our Lord and His Kingdom. (2Cor12:15a)

End of the world: good vs bad - (Mat 13:47-50)

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, that he also will reap. For he sowing to his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh. But he sowing to the Spirit will reap life everlasting from the Spirit. (Gal6:7-8)

I wonder if there has ever been a time in human history "quite" like these Last Days in which we live? Such a concentration of Relativism, Situational Ethics, A-morality, Pan-morality, and out-n-out perversion to where God says, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Is5:20) Pick your topic of choice, the world has some way to distort it to where the wrong is made into right, or, there is plain "apathy" as to any rightness or wrongness at all. Everyone can believe what they wish, do what they want; and nobody dare judge. After all, we have inalienable rights. And "who's to say what's right or wrong?"

And then, we are a "no-fault" society, as well. If as a child I never had to take responsibility for my actions, was never disciplined, and as I get older, I cut my finger off with the power saw because I refused to receive instruction and to learn common sense; it is not my fault. It must be the fault of the manufacturer of the saw. Or it might be the fault of my parents for not giving me enough love. But NOTHING is anybody's fault. There are no "Consequences" for actions. Somebody ELSE must pay...or not.

So, when issues of Eternity come to mind, the most "non-threatening" view to have is that there is NO GOD. If there is no God, then, the way I live will not matter. Or if I mess up bad enough this time around, I can simply come back as something/someone else, and try again. Or, if we must recognize "a" god of some sort; well, he/she is all-loving. And a "loving god" would never condemn anybody to eternal "torture." I mean... what kind of sadist would believe such a notion...that a mother in "heaven" would be forced to look down into "hell" and watch her son or daughter being tortured endlessly!! That's not loving at all!! I just can't believe in such a god!

Well, folks. Truth! There ARE consequences. There IS distinction between good and bad... between righteous and sinful. In this chapter Jesus is illustrating this matter several times from the things of nature that we can easily understand.

When a combine harvests wheat, the sieves sift out the wheat kernels from the weeds and straw. The wheat goes into the hopper. The rest gets blown out the back, and many farmers burn what's left in the field. (vs30,40)

In an earlier lesson we observed how the wheat or servants cannot separate the wheat from weeds while they are growing. One cannot walk

down the row of a church pew and point out the Believer from the unbeliever. But there is One Who can. God is the "judge of all." (Heb12:23) And He literally DOES SAY, "You, you, you...come with Me" and "the rest of you...OUT OF MY SIGHT!!" (7:23) In very much the same way a fisherman would sit there sorting the fish out of the net, keeping the good, throwing out the bad.(vs48) Much as a worker on an assembly line picks out the bad apples from the conveyor and throws them in the garbage. Much as a QA inspector tests the component, and the part not meeting spec is trashed.

"So it shall be at the end of the world. The angels shall come out and separate the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire. There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (vs49)

Folks, there is no such thing as "Ultimate Restoration." Many preachers preach that once all is said and done, that God will "restore all things." That "all things [will be] subjected to Him..." (1Cor15:27) They believe that God will wave some sort of wand over all sinfulness and corruption, purifying it, and all sinners and satan will be "restored" to original perfection.

But there are Two Categories at the judgement. Those gathered "into my granary" (vs30) and those "burned." (vs30,42,50) The picture of those burning is of "wailing and gnashing of teeth." (vs42,50)

Those gathered to God are the ones whose names were found "written in the Book of Life." (Rev20:15) To be found there is a work of Christ, the "Sower."(13:3,18) God is the One Who "shows mercy" (Rom9:16) and makes the (ugly, useless) lump of clay into a "vessel to honor." (vs21) It is [God's] grace through [God-given] faith that saves us. (Eph2:8)

See Also Addendum: *"Combines and Wheat"*

Godly teachers: unto understanding - (Mat 13:51-52)

Jesus said to them, Have you understood all these things? They said to Him, Yes, Lord. (vs51)

Jesus has done some rather "hard" teaching along through here. Some rather "harsh" statements of judgment and "wailing & gnashing of teeth." When on another occasion He insisted that Believers must "partake" of Him (Jn6) and many stopped following, He asked a similar question, "Do you also wish to go away?" (6:67) And Peter replies, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (vs68)

You see, the Master and Teacher is making sure the students understand what has been taught. Just as a good professor asks the class, after having lectured for an hour, "Any questions?"

In this case, Jesus has been teaching "in parables." (vs34) Uttering "things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." (vs35) And after He has sent the multitudes away, He spends quality time with the disciples, "Explain to us the parable of the darnel of the field." (vs36) You see, proper education. "Reduce the class size" and interact more one-on-one. To those Jesus had chosen, He would say, "Come aside into a deserted place and rest a little.." (Mk6:31) Learning cannot take place when there is the hubbub of people "coming and going." Intimacy with God cannot take place in the "wind, earthquake, and fire." (1Kg19:11-12) All the hoopla of dancing around, jumping up and down...even "praising the Lord" is not where nurturing takes place. It must be the "still, small voice." But when such is the case, then there is "understanding."

A good teacher does not "sleep" on the job, either. (vs25) He is ever on the alert for opportunities to teach, guide, instruct, clarify, warn.

Also, a teacher cannot teach that which he does not possess. Ahimaaz wanted to "run" to David and be a messenger when Absalom was killed. Joab said, "not..today...but some other day." (2Sam18:19) But Ahimaaz insisted that he wanted to "run." So Joab relents, "Run." When he outruns Cushie and gets to David first, he, essentially, has "nothing" to say, "I saw a great uproar, but I did not know what it was." (vs29)

In terms of appointments to ministry Paul instructs, "not a novice" (1Ti3:6) so pride doesn't get in the way. And also, "Do not lay hands [appointing to ministry] quickly on anyone.." (5:22) This he knew from his own experience. When he was converted, he debated exuberantly, but also got into trouble, and needed to be in the "wilderness" awhile first, learning from the Lord. (Acts9:29-30,Gal1:16-18) And THEN, was brought into the ministry. (Acts11:25)

A teacher imparts from "his treasure." (vs52) What is a "treasure?" Something of great value. What makes a thing of value? Quite often the "cost" at which it was obtained. What did he give up, to receive what he has? What was taken from him? What pain and suffering has he been through? What valleys has he traversed, and been led back out by the Lord? Just as Jesus "was in all points tempted as we are.." (Heb4:15) and as such WAS "touched with the feelings of our infirmities" so, too, a teacher MUST have experienced things, in order to understand God's grace. A man fresh out of seminary is not "fit" to be a pastor, if all he has is "letters" behind his name. That's what Moses had, but ended up running for his life. He had to be in the wilderness another 40 years, hearing God's voice, before he was fit to lead Israel out of Egypt.

When such an one has been through God's course of instruction, THEN, he has "something" to impart... "new and old out of his treasure." (vs52) And people will be taught...

Unbelief: withholding - (Mat 13:54-58)

Just who does He think He is!! Coming here, teaching all these "unloving" absolutes, as though He thinks He knows it all, and telling everybody that other beliefs are wrong!! Why, while I "tend to" believe THIS way, I would never condemn anybody for believing something else like THAT, like "He" does. After all, anybody can teach anything they want, and proof-text it from Scripture. We "shouldn't judge" so dogmatically in areas where Scripture "isn't real clear" and "makes allowances for interpretation."

And besides, He's a nobody! Just look at Him! Why, He's that illegitimate (Jn8:41) son of Mary. And we know all His brothers and sisters. All, a ne'er-do-well family. He's never even been to seminary, and disdains all the "great men of God" ...why, He even puts Himself above Moses! The AUDACITY!!! Doesn't have any commentaries, and claims to have some special message from God. And, He's not much of a "soul winner" either. When He could be "reeling in" all these multitudes, He chases them away with all His "hateful venomous attacks" about "burning in hell" and seems quite content with those paltry twelve "losers." Fishermen, tax collectors; and He's even got prostitutes following Him around!

"And they were offended in Him." (vs57)

Jesus responded that "a prophet is not without honor, except in his own country and in his own house."

And notice... "He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." (vs58)

Remember how in this chapter Jesus has been teaching "in parables." Do we recall "why" that was? "Because it is given to you [believing disciples] to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to them." (vs11) When He got to "His own" country, and they totally disbelieved Him, He did not "cram it down their throats." In fact, He WITHHELD any meaningful ministry amongst them...purposely.

There are people...well-meaning people...who believe every Christian is to be a "SOUL-WINNER." Translation: 1) talking at every opportunity, 2) giving a tract or Scripture passage in any way possible, 3) inviting people "to church" to hear some great evangelist during "revival meetings." Doing "whatever it takes" to get a person to "pray THE prayer" to receive the label of "Christian." To most of these people, the measure of personal spirituality, and thus...being worthy of Christ's "well-done"... is "how many people" they have personally "led to the Lord" in these various manners. They will typically look down upon anyone not similarly possessed of this same zeal, and will condemn such, conferring "guilt" on anyone who doesn't "measure up" to their level of "scalps on the belt."

As much as God is "not willing that any should perish" (2Pt3:9) we must understand that MOST OF HUMANITY will NOT come to saving Faith in Christ. "Many" go down the "broad way..to destruction." (Mt7:13) When produce and weeds are sorted out in a garden, the weeds are a "multiplication factor" greater in number, when compared to the desired vegetables and flowers. And, weeds will never become produce. All they are good for is pulling and burning. To waste time watering and fertilizing them is fool-hardy. In the early Church an interesting expression is used to describe those who came to Christ in repentant Faith. The Jews were rejecting the Message, and so Paul and Barnabas speak, "It was necessary for the Word of God to be spoken to you first. But since indeed you put it far from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the nations." (Acts13:46) And then, as the Gentiles were coming to Christ it says, "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." (vs48)

Just like in the parable of the Sower, Christ is presented to all mankind. But not all receive. God knows and selects those who are His through "foreknowledge." (1Pt1:2,Rom8:29,Eph1:5,11) To those He knows will reject, He presents Himself. But briefly. And once His foreknowledge has been proven to whoever needs to know, He no longer calls to them. And, in fact, often refrains.

So, a "soul-winner" who persists upon a person whom God has put in the "reject" pile, can actually be "disobedient" to God's will by continuing to witness to such a person. Remember how Jesus told the disciples to "shake the dust from [their] feet" regarding those who rejected. (Mt10:14)

In preparing writings for VW, each offering is read, re-read, read over again...many times. Has "this" been said correctly? Is "that" clear enough? Invariably, for each writing there comes a point where the Holy Spirit has clearly said, "It's ready." Then, sometimes a thought will pop into my head about some additional point that "I" think would help clarify something-or-other. I pull the writing up on the screen, and read through it again, with my "new thoughts" in mind, wondering how to incorporate them...and come to the end. "No. It's READY." (Just as the Lord originally indicated.) And then, the Lord reminds me..."Not everybody will Understand, or Receive it. But for those whose hearts are compliant...they will. For the others, no matter HOW CLEARLY something might be presented, they will NEVER 'get it'. 'For they are rebellious'.(Eze2:7)" With such communion with the Lord on enough occasions, I have now come to understand that sometimes, things presented are with "purposeful obscurity" for the sake of those who are hardened. And it's been deliberately written that way. (Understand...I don't write these things. I'm not a "writer" ...'never have been!)

So... How do we know "to whom" to witness? How do we know "how much" to say? When we've been dialoguing with somebody for awhile, and it becomes obvious they will never understand, how do we know "when to

quit?" How do we know that our "quiet presence" is quite enough for this occasion?

We must be in the center of His will. Abraham's servant praised God, "The LORD led me, I BEING IN THE WAY..." (Gen24:27) "AT THE COMMAND OF THE LORD the sons of Israel pulled up stakes, and AT THE COMMAND OF THE LORD they pitched. As long as the cloud stayed upon the tabernacle they rested in camp." (Nu9:18) When the Lord says, "Go." Go. When He says, "Stop." Stop. If we are moving along, and He says "Turn over here." Turn over here. If the Believer is "abiding" in Christ (Jn15) on a moment-by-moment basis, then we do not need to be concerned, because...

"...it shall be given to you in that same hour..." (10:19)

Cost of Faithfulness:

John beheaded - (Mat 14:1-13)

For all of Jesus' greatness, His teachings and miracles, He's still "small potatoes" in the political scheme of things. At this point the Roman rulers have only merely -heard of- Him. But He's making a "splash". Herod is noticing. Thinks He's "John the Baptist" whom he beheaded. Herod knows He's at least of "prophet" status, because of the miracles He is performing. But, could he be "John?"

Who knows how long John was proclaiming and "preparing the way" for Jesus' coming. Jesus, being the very Son of God, had a messenger to proclaim His coming. A very specially dedicated man, from the womb. Even in the womb, when he heard of Jesus' conception, it is recorded that he "leaped [for joy] in [Elizabeth's] womb." (Lk1:41) The sole purpose of his existence was to "bear witness concerning the Light." (Jn1:7)

But equally, when it was time for Jesus' ministry to officially begin, he was removed from the scene when Herod arrested him and put him in prison. John had proclaimed, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (Jn3:30) But did he have to be arrested?

Why was he arrested? For boldly telling Herod that his adulterous affair with his brother's wife was "sin." (Mk6:18) Let's face it... John was rather "abrasive" anyway. Such a cantankerous old coot. Getting in people's faces. Using such harsh language as "now the axe is laid to the root...you vipers, who warned you to flee from the Wrath to come!" You're all doomed, unless you repent. But he just "went too far" when it came to Herod! Herod had the authority, and used it... to lock him away in prison. You see, "what goes 'round, comes 'round." You be nasty to people, eventually, it will come back on you. Right...?

But there was something different about John. It says that Herodias (the brother's wife with whom Herod was sleeping) wanted to kill John, right on the spot. But Herod "feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man." He also feared political consequences from the mob. (Mt14:5) So, while he had imprisoned him, he "kept him safe." (Mk6:20) And another amazing thing, Herod was intrigued by John, and spent time with him while he had him captive...and "heard him gladly." Oooo! What an audience! You can be sure that, while John witnessed to Herod, the guards and palace servants also heard the message.

But, hearing -gladly- was not enough for Herod. His true heart became evident. It wasn't enough for him to sleep with his brother's wife, he also lusted after her daughter. When lust and pride rule, Herodias got her wish, and John was beheaded. (Mt14:9-10)

We already know that while in prison, for whatever period of time that might have been, John became despondent. For all his being anointed by the Holy Spirit, humanly he began to doubt what his ministry had been. Are you [really] the Christ, or is there someone else? (Mt11:3) He had proclaimed, "...I must decrease" but was now moaning, 'my ministry has ended up in failure!' Ultimately, it ended up in death.

But let's not forget Jesus' accolades about him. "...there has not risen a greater one than John the Baptist." (11:11) "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints." (Ps116:15) as the psalmist goes on to say, "O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your handmaid; You have loosed my bonds...I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people..." (vs16-17) John's vow was to serve, proclaim and decrease. He was taken in death. And when Jesus heard, "He departed (withdrew) from there by boat into a deserted place apart." (vs13) The same Jesus Who "wept" (Jn11:35) at the death of Lazarus, now attempts to find a little solitude. While we may be called upon to give our life for Him, He knows about it. After all, a sparrow doesn't fall without Him. (Mt10:29) And in fact, as He is -seated- at God's right hand, He -honors- those who are "faithful unto death" (Rev2:10) as He -STOOD- to receive Stephen the martyr. (Acts7:56) And the promise is that such receive the "crown of life."

Solitude of the Storm: meeting God - (Mat 14:14-36)

Jesus is attempting to retreat for a bit to contemplate and (possibly) mourn the death of John the Baptist. After all, not only was John His personal "herald". He was also a relative; a "second cousin".(Lk1:36)

But along come the crowds of people. They follow Him where He's trying to hide out, and it says Jesus was "moved with compassion toward them." (vs14) And spent the day healing the sick.

What is most important to you? Going for that afternoon of recreation, or if the Lord burdens your heart, to do service for Him? Not long ago during a little vacation time, there was a beautiful sunny day; a perfect day to go for an extended winter's day drive. But the burden was HEAVY from the Lord to write a commentary. And the words were physically uttered, even though living alone, "This is what I'm here for, isn't it..." And the commentary was written, instead.

A dear friend a few years ago had his beloved wife taken in death. Deeply in love, but now, deeply sorrowing at the loss. While I forget the details relayed to me, in proximity to memorial services and whatnot, there was ministry which was required of him. And he forged ahead to fulfill what was given him to do, as though nothing had happened.

Jesus lived what He preached. When someone made excuses for "why" they didn't want to follow Jesus -now- Jesus said, "Follow Me and let the dead bury their dead." (Mt9:60) As He would say later, "The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many." (Mt20:28) As Paul's attitude was expressed, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls.." (2Cor12:15) even though it is not always accepted, or is accepted, but with wrong motives.

And that brings us to the next section with the "famous" miracles. Let us remember that Israel is a nation for "signs and wonders." (Deu4:34) One of the notable miracles during Moses' tenure was the daily manna which Israel ate for 40 years in the wilderness. While Jesus has just spent the day healing -individuals- now it's time for a BIG miracle. Something on the scale of "Moses and manna." And so Jesus takes the meager loaves and fish that a young boy may have been trying to sell to aid in the family's paltry income, and feeds, likely close to 15,000 people, or more. That's like feeding a modest-sized town.

The day is not finished, however. He sends the disciples away in a boat. And then, the multitudes, "time to go home." And then, He goes for that solitary that He missed earlier. Up into the mountain, by Himself...to commune with the Father.

Now, it's time for the more important miracle. Remember how teaching is different for the crowds and the disciples? The crowds have been fed. Their stomachs are full. And they didn't even have to labor hard and scrape their coppers together for it. And as we will see in future studies, they are hoping for a physical, political leader to save them from Roman domination.

But the disciples: it is time for them to know "What" He is. They are caught in a lake storm again, and in peril. And Jesus comes to them. As Jesus calms their fears at seeing him (they think they're seeing a ghost!) He uses an interesting expression to identify Himself in vs.27. "Be of good cheer, -I AM-!" While the multitudes have full stomachs, the disciples are introduced to the "I AM" who had led Israel centuries earlier. (Ex3:14) These things are happening because of -I AM- the prophesied One, "God with us." The "son" born of the "virgin" (Is7:14) is "Immanuel" ...or "God with us." (Mt1:23)

Peter has a -personalized- lesson on "faith". We often criticize Peter for his "Little-faith!" (vs31) But you notice, the other disciples didn't bother to follow along out onto the water with him. Peter's out there, eager to be with Jesus; falls, and is picked up, as he is chided, "Why did you doubt?"

As soon as Jesus and Peter are back in the boat, the fierce storm is suddenly calm. Such wonderous events the rest "worshipped Him, saying, Truly You are the Son of God." (vs33) A different reaction from the previous time in a storm when they asked, "what kind of man is this..?" (Mt8:27) By now He has been authenticating Himself to them, and this time identifies Himself as the "Son of God."

They come to the other side, and the crowds see Him again, and gather everybody to Him to be healed. To "take" from Him. They have been filled and healed...physically.

But in the middle of the lake, IN THE STORM, away from the crowds... Jesus was the "shelter in the time of storm." With all the crowds around, solitude between Jesus and His disciples was not possible, so, the only way to have some "quality time" is in the -solitude of the storm-. As the psalmist learned "You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies.." (Ps23:5a)

We as people don't like the rough times. They are painful and often full of sorrow. But it is part of our "chastening." (Heb12:7) But He knows -just-what we need "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" and results in "peaceable fruit of righteousness" (vs10-11)

The multitudes went home -healed- and with full stomachs, to their warm houses. The disciples weathered the storm, and met the "Son of God!"

Phariseism: of the heart - (Mat 15:1-20)

"Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" (vs2)

"Why do you...transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"(vs3)

You see, the arguments and debates that go on today are nothing new. For catholics, if there is a choice between "church tradition" and Scripture, they choose tradition every time. Those of "protestant" persuasion are no better, relying on the writings of their "great-men-of-God." In fact, when presenting their particular belief-system will say that they 'study the Scriptures from the -perspective-of-...so-n-so'. What did Calvin teach? What does Swindol teach? The "clarion-call of the Reformers!" etc.

For the pharisees at that moment it was the ritual washing of hands prior to eating. You won't find their ritual in Moses' Law, given by God on Sinai. But they criticize the disciples for not keeping up "appearances". You know, "abstain from all appearance of evil."(1Th5:22)

Jesus turns the tables. God actually commanded "honor your father and mother" (Ex20:12) but you say, bring the money that should support your parents in their old age, to 'us' instead. (vs5)

Nothing new today! There are some churches that, one will hear a collective congregational 'gasp' if something other than KJV is read during a service by a visitor who doesn't realize they are 'KJV-only'. And yet, as happened in one of these particular churches years ago, if a woman is widowed, left with three small children to raise by herself, the pastor encouraged her to "sell the farm" so she could give the money to the church. There was the "appearance" of righteousness with their KJV, but what happened to "pure religion and undefile before God...to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions..."?? (Jas1:27)

Traditions which actually "void" the commandment of God. (vs6) Jesus calls them "Hypocrites!" (vs7) Something I'd like to say to the politicians who continually force people to protect themselves from themselves with seat-belt laws and such stuff, in order to "save lives"; who, on other occasions, legislate 'freedom' to commit -murder- of the unborn! More people die of abortions than from traffic accidents!

Jesus' verdict on the pharisees? Quoting Isaiah, "this people draws near to Me with their mouth, and honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." (vs8)(Is29:13)

In this passage there are two subjects under consideration. Tradition and the heart. And yet, with this particular tradition, the two were interrelated.

On one hand the tradition specified a hand-washing. It was 'ceremonial' in nature. As I've seen it demonstrated by those who know, if a person's hands were really filthy from working in the dirt, I really doubt that this ceremony would truly get the hands clean...of the dirt. This ceremony, like water-smudge 'baptism' and last-rights, had absolutely no value. It would have no effect on the health of the body as the food entered, was digested, and passed on through. (vs17) Nor, did it have any bearing on the eternal destiny of the soul and spirit.

However, what tells the true nature of the person is that which originates from within. And rather than New Age "goodness" claimed to come from within; according to Jesus, is "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemes." (vs19) As a current-events object lesson, the current US president is guilty of -all- these things; and as the 16-year old wrote, "character counts." Is it so much the adultery or blaspheme that is repugnant to God? They certainly are. But it is the -heart- which motivates these actions which God sees. Man sees the actions; the "outward appearance, but God looks on the heart." (1Sa16:7)

KJV-pharisees for years have preached their "appearances" (1Th5:22) and so things like make-up, hair styles, clothing styles had to meet certain 'traditions'; and they would judge, as being 'reprobate', anybody who didn't follow their dictates. And yet, as we have seen recently, they don't even preach the Gospel, leaving out the critical "repentance." We've noted their treatment of widows. They are like last week's -dream-, of the fine leather-bound Bible 'shells' lying around, with -nothing- inside. So busy with 'appearances' that they miss the fact that that word correctly translated actually means "form" or "kind." "...abstain from every -kind- of evil." God isn't so concerned about how "something might look" as He is in the "kind" of evil...OF THE HEART.

This wickedness of the heart is what defiles a person. You married man, clutching your KJV-only, who lears and lusts after young girls will be judged; where that young woman, dressed 'so-fine', on the arm of her unregenerate husband, going into the nightclub to be 'with him' as a submissive wife (even 'having fun' doing so), will hear "well done, good and faithful servant." Your heart is full of "evil thoughts". (vs19) Her's is obedient to her Lord and Savior.

OK...so now I've left off preachin' and gone to meddlin'. "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" (vs12)

Was Jesus worried? Not hardly! "...every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up" (vs13) because they pretend to be holy, but they "[teach] for doctrines the commandments of men." (vs9)

What is the verdict on these? "...remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent." (Rev2:5)

Oooh! But they are too busy believing in "faith only" and don't preach "repentance" anymore. 'Don't -need-to- repent. Just -believe-. Jesus condemns them...

What if your heart yearns for the state you see the pharisee in? You want to make them see their error, and come to the Lord. What is the likelihood of success? Jesus said, "Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (vs14)

I found out about this a week ago, in connection with the recent mailings on 'repentance'. 'Responded to one person at-great-length. In fact, I thought seriously of mailing it to the e-list, as it touched on the subject from another angle; of "faith". But the Lord seemed to say not to e-mail it, and I only sent it to the individual. The retort that was returned indicated a hard and closed heart. Those several hours writing the piece...as though, 'wasted'. The pharisees' attitude is like the proverbial, "I've got my mind made up...don't confuse me with the facts." In this case, the Truth (facts) of God's Word.

If you are coming out of 'traditional-conservative' -phariseeism- as you "come out of her My people" (Rev18:4) your heart will yearn for the hearts of your former fellowship/s. You will drag your feet to leave. Or, if they kick you out, you will yearn for them, wanting to "reach" them with God's truth as you have just become "free" in Christ.(Gal5:1)

"..seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not..for this people's heart has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and they have closed their eyes, lest they should see...and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." (13:13-15) Because they are not of God, they are past hope and will be "rooted up"! (15:13b)

Jesus says, "Let them alone..." (vs14)

See Also Addendum: Q/A –“Finds Fingerprinting Offensive”

Faith & Grace: to Jew -and- Gentile - (Mat 15:22-28)

A Gentile woman comes to Jesus, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, son of David! My daughter is grievously vexed with a demon."(vs22)

But He did not answer her a word. (vs23)

What a fascinating scene!!! Jesus, Who was usually "moved with compassion"(14:14) and would forego His own comfort and rest to heal people, now -ignores- the plea. What's the deal?

"I am not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."(vs24) "He came to His own..." (Jn1:11a) Ooooh! So Jesus is 'bigoted'!? So the Aryan Nations, Neo Nazis and KKK are right, after all??

It is not good to take the children's bread and to throw it to dogs." (vs26) Oh dear!! This bigotry even gets dirty and nasty into name-calling!! But, in actuality, this was a pretty -accurate- Jewish attitude which He proclaims. So, it -must- be right, after all, that some nationalities are superior to others, and others are meant, merely, to be slaves!?? After all, He was going to go -immediately- to heal the centurion's servant. (Mt8:7) He was a despised Roman. Maybe -politics- and -rank- make a difference..??

First of all, I believe we have an 'object lesson' against Israel. If we finish that verse in John ch1... 'He came to His own, but His own received Him not.' Jesus was born a "Jew" in fulfillment of Jewish O.T. prophecy. The woman rightly names Him "Son of David." In line to the throne to rule Israel. He spent three exhaustive years teaching, healing, and performing other miracles. But we know that they rejected Him and asked Pilate that He be crucified. But God has -showered- them with prophets, "rising early and sending them" but Israel would not "listen or bow down [their] ear to hear." (Jer25:4) And finally He has sent His Son. (Mt21:37) All this attention from God, and they reject; relying instead on their traditions of supposed -superiority- and teachings of man. You know...the 'pharisees' from the previous lesson. They are continually questioning Jesus as to His "authority" to teach and do what He does...not accepting the fact that He is God's Son.

Along comes this -foreigner-! To the Jewish mind, a "nobody." After all, hear the disciples, "Send her away, for she cries after us."(vs23)

This "dog" of less-than-nothing comes and calls Him, "O Lord, Son of David!" In that short phrase she has recognized His Deity and rightful lineage as promised by God. The Messiah. The Anointed One. God come-in-the flesh. Things Israel is not accepting.

Furthermore, she comes in her utter depravity. Her daughter does not have "multiple personality disorder" nor "schizophrenia". She admits an enslavement to satan. When called a "dog" she did not rise up in militant anger and object to such 'name-calling', and cruel treatment. She accepts her place as a "nothing" and pleads... "even us dogs get scraps, don't we?" (vs27)

The prophets were not sent to the Gentiles. Jesus was not sent to the Gentiles. And yet, this 'dog' came to Him with her "great..faith"(vs28) Seeking Him out.

The object lesson? Look Israel! In all your hoity-toity-ness, and having God's Word showered upon you, you reject. Look at this simple Gentile, coming in humility and faith. Of the Pharisees Jesus said, "let them alone. They..shall fall into the ditch." æ they are "rooted up." (vs13-14) To this Gentile He says, "So be it to you even as you wish." (vs28)

But the object lesson was possible because He 'pretended-to' reject her, causing her to become insistent, repeating her plea and raising her voice...creating a bit of a -scene- for people to notice.

You see, Israel, "God so loved the [whole] -world- that He gave His only-begotten Son..." (Jn3:16) You think you've got a -handle- on Truth with your traditions and separateness. But your traditions are man-made (vs9) and your separation is from the wrong things.(Mt23:23) Yes, Jesus was sent -to- 'Israel'. But the Jewish prophet proclaimed, "..WHOEVER shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved.." (Joel2:32) The Gospel of God might be to the "Jew first" but it is "ALSO to the Greek". (Rom1:16,2:10) To those who come with "ALL [their] heart". (De4:29, Jer29:13, Joel2:12, Acts8:37)

Beware the leaven: doctrine - (Mat 16:5-12)

"Take heed, and beware the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (vs6)

Hmm... Let's see. We didn't bring any 'food' along with us and we're starting to get hungry. Jesus must be chiding us for forgetting to 'pack-the-lunch'. Hey! Who was on KP duty today, anyway? -Where- are we going to get something to eat?

Oh you 'little-faiths' ..."why do you reason among yourselves because you took no loaves..?" (vs8) Don't you remember the multitudes that were fed from handfuls of loaves? Not only that...but how much was left over? Food is 'not a problem' for us.

After all Jesus had taught "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious..." (6:33-34a)

"How is it that you do not understand...?" (vs11) How long have you heard these exchanges with the Pharisees? The lessons about evil spreading like leaven and corrupting the kingdom of heaven? I'm not talking about 'food'. Here, let Me say it again, "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees..." (vs11)

Ooooh! The -DOCTRINE-! (vs12)

The Pharisees and Sadducees were at the top of the heap. They were respected (and 'feared') by the masses. They were the ones with seminary 'letters' behind their names. They were the -teachers- of doctrine. If anybody wanted to know something about God, these are the people they would seek out. But, as we have seen along the way, many of their teachings were based on man-made traditions. (15:9) Some of their teachings were actually contrary to God's law. (15:3) And as time goes on, Jesus is going to become even more vocal and forceful in His condemnation of them.

But, for now...disciples, "take heed." Pay attention. Listen up!

"beware" ..be on guard against. Be cautious of. Keep your eyes and ears open. Scrutinize and evaluate. Don't believe everything you hear from them. Later on the Bereans would be commended because they "searched the Scriptures daily to see if those things were so." (Acts17:11)

We already know that much of their teaching comes from 'man'.(15:9) Some of it even contradicts God's Word. (15:3) Thus, what is our standard by which to judge?

"All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work." (2Tm3:16-17)

Jesus, Deity:

Church's Foundation - (Mat 16:13-20)

"Who do men say Me the Son of man to be?" (vs13)

This question could likely be -THE- Key question, the most important question that anyone of humanity will face. Like the song asks, "what will you do with Jesus? neutral you cannot be." Who is He? What is He? What was/is His purpose?

When the disciples answered him with, 'Well, people are saying John the baptist, Elijah, this prophet, that prophet' He then narrows them down. What would you guess that He already knew that the 'other' people were saying these things? But He wants the disciples to face Him squarely, "But who do -you- say I am?" (vs15)

And here we get to the nitty gritty. It doesn't matter what the baptists, mormons, catholics, muslims or "our church" believe/s about God. What do -YOU- believe about Him? What do -YOU- believe about Jesus? The Ethiopian's confession of faith was, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts8:37b)

Peter proclaims, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."(vs16) Let's not forget that to most people Jesus appeared to be -merely- a prophet. A "man." A "man" He certainly was. (1Jn4:2) But He was more. The disciples saw and wondered "what kind of man is this?" (8:27) Then, as they were with Him longer, "Truly You are the Son of God." (14:33) Both of these were times of storm, however. There have been many "foxhole conversions" throughout history. You know... "Lord, if You'll just get me out of this predicament, I promise to serve You." Called "foxhole" because of wartime conflicts, the person hunkered down in the -bunker- ("foxhole") with death seemingly imminent as the shells and bombs are falling all around. "Deathbed conversions" etc. But things are relatively 'calm' right now. Jesus is conversing with them, with rationality. What is this -faith- you have? Is it just something to get you out of a jam? Or is it real?

And you notice the 'origination' of Peter's confession. "My Father in heaven." (vs17) Recall that the faith we have to believe is a "gift of God" (Eph2:8) And that we don't even come to this point without the Father "drawing" us. (Jn6:44) Our understanding/s do not come from our own intellect or reasonings, from "flesh and blood" (vs17), but are -spiritual- in nature as the Holy Spirit convicts (Jn16:8) as God reveals them to us by His Spirit. (1Cor2:10)

This that we have just considered is important to understand as background for the next topic which is -SO- misunderstood by catholics

and protestants alike. Remember, God is in charge. Jesus is His Son. And Peter was a -mere- man. His revelation was not his own, but came from God the Father. And notice also that Jesus and Peter are speaking. Two - distinct- entities, conversing with each other.

Jesus says, "You are Peter.." (vs18) (petros) Rock or stone. Something one might pick up and throw and skip across the water.

"..on this rock I will build My church" (petra) Cliff, ledge, crag, large stone. A firm rock (petra) base upon which a person can "build his house..." (Mt7:24)

Another logical consideration of why the "apostolic succession" did not begin with Peter and continue successively with the Roman popes; Jesus is talking -to- Peter. 'Peter, -you- are a skipping stone...and on -this- Rock I'm going to build My church.' What was "this rock"? What is the context? Peter's confession that Jesus is the "Son of God." 'Peter, you are a little stone, but your confession of -Me- being Deity... -THAT- is the foundation for the Church.' "for any other foundation can no one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1Cor3:11) Jesus Christ is the very "chief corner stone" (1Pt2:6) If Peter, even, proclaimed that Jesus was the corner stone, how can Peter possibly be it? He isn't. If he was, Jesus would have said, 'upon -you- I will build...' but He did not.

But now we get into a passage that has been, first of all, mistranslated for centuries; and also misunderstood and misapplied by both catholics and protestants, alike.

"..the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (vs18b)

Notice in Jesus' words -who- is on the offensive. What is going against what? The gates of hell are attempting to prevail, but they will never be superior in strength, nor overcome the Church. [Ed: let us remember that the "Church" is not the building or hierarchical organization, but the collection of 'people' scattered far and wide across the world, who are - individually- "in Christ"] Remember that -Satan- is the one who is on the prowl like a "roaring lion seeking to devour" (1Pt5:8) The Church is exhorted to "stand" (Eph6:11,13) If we "resist the devil he will flee" (Jas4:7) God does "not allow" more to come against the Christian than what he is able to resist (1Cor10:13) because the foundation is Jesus Christ. He's already been there (Heb4:15) so He is able to "rescue" those being tempted (Heb2:18)

He was -there- most specifically when He was crucified, and "bruised" the serpent's head. (Gen3:15) When He rose He was the "firstfruit" from among the dead. (1Cor15:23) Death and the grave has been conquered "through our Lord Jesus Christ." (15:55-56) If we understand that the devil has "power of death" (Heb2:14), and Jesus conquered death; that means He conquered satan. The victory has already been won. And so, as the

"gates of hell" tried against Jesus and didn't prevail, the Church also has "victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1Cor15:57)

Jesus in -NO-WAY- in this passage commands the Church to go on the offensive. To conduct "spiritual warfare" campaigns. To engage in "prayer warfare." Nor is it the Roman "crusades", nor -political- 'catholic vs. protestant' military campaigns for regions of Europe and Ireland where it was "onward christian soldiers marching as to war with the cross of Jesus going on before". Because the "weapons of our warfare are not fleshly" (2Cor10:4) ...not of this world. Jesus' kingdom is "not of this world", otherwise His "servants would fight". (Jn18:36) It is only satanic imagination gone awry that would even suggest such things!

And then...

"I will give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven to you. And whatever you may bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven, and whatever you may loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven." (vs19)

I paste this complete verse from MKJV in here (LITV is similar) so you can read it from whatever -other- translation you may have, and notice the -big- difference. Look at the verb -tenses- as you compare. While this may seem like a minor thing, it has -MAJOR- implications for proper understanding of what Jesus is proclaiming, and hopefully will help us understand CENTURIES of ERROR, for both catholics -and- protestants.

Who is 'in charge'? Heaven or earth? God or man? That is what a correct understanding of this verse boils down to. Most translations word it to the effect, 'whatever you do on earth will then be done in heaven'. Making man, the apostles, and most specifically -Peter- the 'originator' of the Church.

But you notice, what is done on earth by the apostles will be done -because- it was 'already' done in heaven. "...having been bound.." and "...having been loosed.." -Having- happened in heaven, it will 'now' be implemented on earth.

How would this occur? As Jesus was taken into heaven He promised, "you shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you." (Acts1:8) Which is what happened at Pentecost in Acts 2. It was the Holy Spirit by Whom the apostles conducted the affairs of the early church. When Ananias and Sapphira lied, Peter said it was "to the Holy Spirit" they had lied. (Acts5:3) When Barnabas and Saul were commission to a missionary journey, it was the Holy Spirit Who directed it. (Acts13:2)

Jesus -specifically- told the disciples to -wait- for the Holy Spirit to come. (Acts1:4-5) Notice what happened when Peter -decided- that "something needed to be done" to replace Judas. (Acts1) They chose Matthias. But

the Holy Spirit hadn't come yet. Peter was not 'waiting.' He made a decision to "bind" something on earth. But he disobeyed. We don't hear of Matthias beyond that incident. But we hear -much- of Paul who was - actually- Jesus' choice. (Acts9:15-16,Rom1:1,1Cor9:1,15:8)

And as for Peter's -leadership- well, he certainly was the 'mouth'. But when it came down to important matters 'who' -really- became chief among them? James. (Acts15:13,Gal1:19,2:12) Not even an 'apostle'.

Many, claiming the name of Christ, are busy "building" Christ's Church - FOR- Him. They 'name-and-claim' things "in Jesus' name" because they are "two or three" gathered and "agreeing" together.(Mt18:19-20) They are busy 'preparing the kingdom' -for- Christ to come back to. Their mentality begins with -man- and they suppose that God is listening to their demands and is catering to them. They believe that prayer -releases- God's power to do things; making God dependent upon man. Well, if you cling to the "Roman Scriptures" you may easily conclude such error.

But Jesus said, -I- WILL BUILD -MY- CHURCH. Thus, whatever Believers do, based on the leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit, -will-be- God's will and God's purpose, because it will have -already- been established in heaven...FIRST. It is not man-creating-heaven, but Heaven working - through- man.

But most people are blind to this. Notice how Jesus instructs the disciples "that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ." (vs20) Remember Jesus' -methods-. Teaching in 'parables' so that they would - not- understand nor perceive. (Mt13:13-15) In the first part of this chapter the Pharisees and Sadducees are again demanding a "sign from heaven." (vs1) And Jesus refuses after illustrating all the signs they already rejected. (vs4) On another occasion they would ask, "tell us plainly." (Jn10:24) It's kind of like "Doctrinal Statements." VW does not publish one officially. If the -teaching- is not understood and accepted, a 'statement' will not enlighten any further. People in general were not truly receiving Jesus as He presented Himself. A proclamation would do no more, until the -secular- ruler would so proclaim it over His head at the crucifixion. (Jn19:19)

See Also Addendum: "Gates of Hell"

Heading to the cross: cost of the soul - (Mat 16:21-28)

Jesus has just told the Pharisees off and stormed out of there. Has had a little chat with the disciples, warning them about the pharisees. And then has opened their eyes to himself and His 'Deity'. Has painted this picture of the coming 'Church' and victory over satan. I'm sure the disciples are likely feeling a bit 'pumped up' with exhilaration over what God is going to be working through them.

Now, Jesus starts talking about going to the cross. Suffering and being - killed-. (vs21)

Well...Peter now has a little 'piece of' God. God just revealed to him that Jesus was Deity. Ooooh, "God be gracious to You, Lord! This shall never be to You." (vs22) We luuuuv You, Jesus!

Whaaaapp!! "Go, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you do not savor the things that are of God, but those that are of men." (vs23) !!Ouch!!

See how easily this comes about? Jesus had just been warning them about the Pharisees. False teaching sneaking in. We often talk about false prophets and angels appearing as though in "righteousness." (2Cor11:15) We have warned, often, that satan tries to get at Christians. He is capable of communicating with Believers through dreams and visions. Others have experienced it; as have I. Just because a person is a Believer is no guarantee that satan won't come after us. As Peter had this sort of thing happen to him a lot and he learned from personal experience, hear his words, "Be sensible and vigilant, because your adversary the Devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking someone he may devour." (1Pt5:8) This book was written to the "elect sojourners". Believers. Warning Believers that satan seeks to devour...-them-.

Well, in our study here, Peter is beginning to learn about this. We may often shake our heads at Peter (in hindsight) or criticize him. Or think, "poor Peter...getting picked on so much." Well, he was always pushing, forging ahead, eager to follow the Lord. So, we get to see from his recorded example, the falls, scrapes, bruises as the Lord would then pick him back up, as he learned yet another lesson. Remember, "for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges [gives a whipping to] every son whom He receives." (Heb12:6)

A bloody, torturous, excruciating death on a cross is 'offensive' to refined human sensibilities. (Gal5:11b) It is so much nicer to consider gold-plated crosses with fancy intricate designs. Or shiny silver crosses as necklaces. Or 'heavenly' visions of -bright- crosses streaming rays of love, peace and tranquility to a person. The 'angel of light' -helped- Peter see how

grotesque this would be. Jesus, if You are the Son of God, this kind of thing can't happen to You!!

But you see, the journey to the "Son of man..[coming] in the glory of His Father with His angels.." (vs27) had to begin with the cross. We have spoken recently of human repentance, being at the 'foot of the stairs' leading up to God's holy throne. That we cannot be in God's presence until we come to that place, realizing our sinfulness and utter helplessness to save ourselves from God's wrath upon sin. We deserve God's wrath. (Rom1:18) If Jesus came to take man's place substitutionally, He -had-to-go through the cross. He had to experience God's wrath upon Himself. There was no other way. Yes, it would be torturous. It would become ugly. But it is recorded that Jesus "learned obedience by the things which He suffered." (Heb5:8) And it was -after- He humbled Himself in this manner that "THEREFORE God has highly exalted Him..." (Phil2:9)

There are many people, like Peter was, who abhor the notion of such humiliation. To wallow around with notions of "hell" and judgment is not 'enlightened'. (Remember -who- the angel of 'light' is -2Cor11:14)

But Jesus says, "If anyone desires to come after Me [and participate in the 'glory of His Father with His angels'], let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." (vs24)

Aunt Bertha has been so ill. Bed-ridden for so many years. This has been such a "cross to bear". Surely God will look upon her with favor. Or... the Joneses have been so disappointed in how Johnny turned out. He got into drugs, committed murder, and is in prison. He's been such a head-ache and burden to his parents. This has been -their- "cross to bear." Surely God sees, and has pity on them!

This is -NOT- the cross Jesus is talking about.

Spiritually, for every believer, when Christ died.. -we- died. Baptism baptizes us "into His death" (Rom6:3) When Jesus died on that cross, that was -me- hanging there. It was -you- (who believe in Him).

If you want a life of ease and comfort, and don't want to be associated with Jesus' death, you cannot be saved. It is not possible. If you refuse to recognize your sin-nature, and God's wrath upon you because of it, you will not be saved. "Salvation" is a -rescue- out of the clutches of God's eternal wrath against sin. If you refuse to "receive" Jesus (Jn1:12), and by implication and association, His label of "death" over you by His death on the cross, you -WILL EXPERIENCE- God's wrath.

What is your -soul- worth to you? If you go after everything of the world in its state of sin, you forfeit your soul. (vs26) And when God looks for your name in the "Book of Life" and doesn't find it (Rev20:15) what will you do

then? You have -nothing- to 'give-to-God' in exchange for your soul. He 'owns' your soul. "...and the soul that sins, it shall die." (Ez18:4)

But, if you follow the Lord into death, He will give you multiplied times - more- in return. Think of any earthly investment with such a 'yield'. There is none. It is glorious in the presence of the Father and His angels. (vs27a)

And Jesus says, ~stay tuned... some of you will see a promo of this 'glory' that I'm talking about next week~. (vs28)

Transfiguration: hear Christ - (Mat 17:1-13)

And..Jesus took Peter, James, and John..and brought them up into a high mountain apart. And He was transfigured before them. And His face shone as the sun, and His clothing was white as the light. (vs1-2)

When we look at a parallel passage in Lk9:28, we see that Jesus went into the mountain to 'pray'. To commune with the Father. And what were the three doing? Sleeping. (vs32) But they are aroused out of sleep, and as they are rubbing their eyes, they see this 'vision' ... and.. and.. there's Moses and Elijah, too!! Can this be real?? Wow! Awesome!!

Well, first of all... Jesus, Moses and Elijah are talking about that which Jesus had just been disclosing to the disciples a week prior, that He was going to die and rise again. Just as John the baptist had been killed, the "Son of man [would] suffer from them." (vs12) As He later explains further, "The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men. And they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised again.." (vs22-23) This whole concept of the "resurrection" is going to puzzle the disciples. (Mk9:10) As, they didn't understand the Scriptures regarding this. (Jn20:9) But let's continue...

Why Moses and Elijah? Moses, while he had killed an Egyptian, spent 40 years in exile herding sheep, and disobeyed God and didn't get to go into the promised land; was borne away and 'buried' by the Lord. (Deu34:6) Elijah, mighty in calling fire down to consume the offering, whimpered away, fleeing Jezebel's wrath, and moans "I'm the only one left" (1Kg19:10) But he did not experience physical death; was carried away in a whirlwind to heaven. (2Kg2:11) These were both very special servants of God.

Is it possible that these are also the "two witnesses" of Rev11:3? Moses was God's instrument to bring Israel out of bondage in Egypt. He appears just prior to their 'deliverance' as Jesus is about to die for the sin of the world. And for him to appear again as Israel experiences their final deliverance as they receive a new heart from God? (Jer31:31-34)

Elijah, who prayed down fire for sacrifice and on another occasion says, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from the heavens and burn up you and your fifty.." (2Ki1:10) ... the witnesses will "devour their enemies" with fire. (Rev11:5) When Jesus came the first time, His 'way' was prepared through the preaching of John the Baptist "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk1:17) Just as Jesus' coming was two times, could Elijah 'prepare' for Jesus' coming -two- times, also?

Whatever the case, the two are 'now' leaving Jesus (Lk9:33), and the disciples are spell-bound. And good ol' Peter pipes up, 'let's make three tabernacles'. (Mt17:4) 'One for -each- of the -three-of-you-.' This is the

same mistake John is going to make later as he "falls [to] worship" the -angel- who is showing him the things in Revelation 22:8. When sinful, finite man is given a mere glimpse of the glories of heaven, he is lost in wonder, fear and terror. The -difference- is SO VAST, that even angels and those who have gone before and are now in the heavenlies -seem-to-be- as glorious as God Himself. Recall how Moses' face shone after coming down from Mt.Sinai with the Law.(Ex34:30)

Let's take a little side excursion here. Let us remember that Satan still has access, (until Rev12:9) to the heavenlies. (Job1:6) When Paul warns that satan's ministers appear as "ministers of righteousness" (2Co11:15), they are appearing 'in light' just like Moses and Elijah did when they were talking with Jesus. And see how Peter wanted to erect a place of worship -to- Moses and Elijah... -along-with- Jesus. This, the same Peter who had confessed "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (16:16) Do we understand how it was God Who revealed that to Peter? He did not really know what he was saying, in and -of- himself, because 'now' he is wanting to also worship Moses and Elijah.

Do we also see the -nature- of the deception that satan and his demons find possible? They are appearing to people in visions, just like this transfiguration on the mountain. And for everything, to finite corruptible (1Cor15:50) humanity, they look 'just like' God. This is why Jesus would say later, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many will come in My name, saying, I am Christ..."(Mt24:4-5) And then, so that there would be no confusion, describes what His -real- coming will look like, when the time comes. (24:27)

Well... as Peter is running off at the mouth, God shuts him up. A cloud comes over this whole scene. And now it's time to really be afraid. (Lk9:34) And then GOD SPEAKS..! "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well please, hear Him." (vs5) And now their fear turns into 'great terror'!! (vs6) ..as they "fell on their face".

They experienced the same terror Isaiah did when he wails, "Woe is me! For I am undone..!" (Is6:5) Manoah, Sampson's father, shudders, "we shall surely die because we have seen God." (Jdg13:22) And later John is going to have a 'private showing' of Jesus, the One who 'loves' him (Jn13:23,20:2,21:20), and he is going to "[fall] as dead" (Rev1:17) at the glory. But Jesus will touch him and say, "Do not fear, I am the First and the Last."

[Ed: Somehow, in human wisdom, this seems like a contradiction. John is 'as dead' because of Jesus' glory. And yet, Jesus calms his terror BECAUSE OF and BY MEANS OF His 'glory'. As if to say, 'Don't be afraid of My awesomeness, because, truly, I am awesome. Yes, I am awesome.']

This is the same thing Jesus does to the three. (vs7) He touches them and says, "Arise and do not be terrified."

But you see God's mandate to "have no other gods before Me" (Ex20:3) extends to Jesus. Yes, the kingdom of heaven is full of glory. They got a glimpse of what John would teach later, "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1Jn3:2) You see, this radiance they saw on Moses and Elijah is the same thing the Believer in Jesus Christ has to look forward to when we have been "changed" and become "incorruptible" (1Cor15:52-53) when we see Him "just as He is".

But Whom do we worship? ONLY God. Whom do we listen to? ONLY Jesus, the Word. (Jn1:1) What do we follow? The 'great men of God' who have gone on before? ..as we build little shrines to "..Moses, Elijah, Calvin, Luther, Apollos, Cephas (1Co1:12)...?" No!! "This is My beloved Son...HEAR HIM!" How do we "hear Him" today? He Who is the Word, Who has the "WORDS of eternal life" (Jn6:68) left a 'piece' of Himself in written form through the Holy Spirit (2Pt1:21)... "All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfected, thoroughly furnished to every good work."(2Tm3:16-17) You see, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, Who teaches us. (Jn16:7,13,1Jn2:27))

The angel said to John, "Blessed are those who have been called to the marriage supper of the Lamb...These are the true sayings of God... Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev19:9-10)

Strangers: pay taxes - (Mat 17:24-27)

The collectors of 'tribute' (taxes) come along and ask Peter, "Does your master not pay the didrachmas?" (vs24) Peter answers, "yes".

Some commentaries suggest that this was the annual "temple tax" which was collected from every Jewish male. (Ex30:13,38:26) But I think what Jesus is about to reason with Peter will show that it could not have been. Whatever the case, let us continue...

When Peter replies "yes" I have a feeling he didn't -really- know 'for sure', because Jesus, knowing already what's going on, questions Peter. Whatever the situation was in those days, apparently 'foreigners' were taxed, but citizens were not. ...possibly, for -this- 'particular' tax? From Jesus' reasonings, it seems the logical conclusion was that they had the option (right?) to -not- be obligated to this particular tax. But then Jesus says, "but lest we should offend them..." go get the money and pay them. [Ed: notice that this payment does not come from the group's 'petty cash'. It is 'individual' .."for Me and you"(vs27b)]

This seems to be a little different argument from what will come up later. Should people of God pay taxes to rulers of this world? Jesus says, "...render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (22:21) Which Paul reaffirms, "...because of this you also pay taxes...therefore give to all their dues; to the one due tax, the tax..." (Rom13:6-7)

What about where a "religious organization" receives 'tax exempt' status? What about ministers who are exempt from income tax? (Not all countries share these laws.) As the powers of darkness little-by-little take over, attempting to destroy God's kingdom, they begin to enact laws to govern the activities of those who enjoy 'exempt' status, or forfeit their 'exempt' status for the sake of 'freedom'. What does the Believer do? Go gather up others of 'like-mind' and 'dig-in' to some heavily fortified compound, and trade gun-fire with authorities, and make bombing runs on public buildings?

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world...[if it were] My servants would fight." (Jn18:36) But in keeping with Paul's exhortation, later, "If it is possible, as far as is in you, live peaceably with all men." (Rom12:18 - mkjv/nkjv)

Jesus is making a point. He was -not- a "son" but a "stranger". (vs25) As believers we are "not of the world, but [He has] chosen [us] out of the world..." (Jn15:19) ..therefore we can expect to be treated as such. He could have asserted His 'right' of citizenship, because that's what He was, as a 'human'...but to 'make peace' and 'not offend' unnecessarily, in a

matter that was unrelated to right or wrong, righteousness or sin, He 'paid the tax' requested.

As the government begins to mandate things like 'fair hiring practises' on church staffs for the sake of sodomites, and will increasingly dictate doctrinal positions which are 'compatible' with the World Religion movement, it would behove Godly congregations to separate themselves from the government, due to their 'exempt statuses' by which they are "registered" with the government. If they haven't yet, they will eventually come after you, based on the manner in which you filled in the answer blanks on those forms. The questions, if you have ever seen the form/s, are designed to alert the government to your congregation's doctrinal proclivities, for easy "sorting" when it comes 'time' to come after those who are True Believers. Government control is based, in large measure, on "money". If they have a connection, in any manner, to your finances, they also have a 'say' in how/what you can proclaim.

As Christians, our mission is to be faithful to God and His Word. To - proclaim- His Truth. Not to become entangled with the affairs of this life. (2Tm2:4) Live peaceably, keeping the laws of the land, paying taxes when required. If we are digging in with weaponry to fight off the IRS, we are not busy about our Master's business.

Our minds are to be set on the things "above, not on things on the earth" (Col3:2) Knowing that our "citizenship is in heaven."(Phlp3:20) Remembering that we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth."(Hb11:13b)

Children: example of greatness - (Mat 18:1-5)

"Who is greater in the kingdom of Heaven? And Jesus called a little child to Him and set him in their midst, and said, Truly I say to you, Unless you are converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven...whoever shall humble himself...this one is greater in the kingdom of Heaven." (~vs1-4)

It would seem that the disciples had a real problem with pride. This was not the only time they were thinking of greatness. It seems that James and John (yes, the "beloved") hoped they could have seats of honor with Jesus. (Mt20:20-21) In Mk9:34 they were discussing amongst themselves as to who (amongst themselves) was "greatest". In that case, Jesus knew their thoughts, and used a -child-, again, to illustrate the point He makes in -this- instance.

Do we see this kind of thing today? In visiting a pastor recently, "How many are on the VW mailing list?" A lot. "How many?" A lot. I won't answer such questions with 'numbers'. (The website hit-counter is also 'hidden' from public view.) But pastors often have this "jockeying" game they play; sorta like kids playing in the school yard, bragging-up something to their friends. I've got XXX. Well, I did KKK. Oh, but my dad does AAA! Oh, that's nothing, I...???. And pastors will boast of their church membership size. "Soul winners" will proclaim 'how-many' people have prayed -the- 'prayer' at THEIR guidance.

All this is a desire for GREATNESS. Usually...to be seen -by-men- to be great. To be admired. To -feel- the 'power'. One preacher I knew years ago used to talk about "doing exploits". Doing the -big- and great things. I've heard of short-term missionaries working in a summer camp, and when the duties were passed out and they got "toilet" duty, would balk, saying that they came to win young people to the Lord, not to clean latrines.

"Unless you are converted and become as little children..." (vs3)

The word "convert" means a "change". From "one use to another." In actuality, it is the very definition of "repent." Change from one mentality/heart to another. From one usefulness to another.

Everybody wants to be the gold vase sitting on the mantle, or the crystal glass set. They don't want to be a cutting board or shovel. The potter takes that lump of clay and fashions it into the form He desires. (Rom9:21) He finds an imperfection, cuts it out, and forms the clay into a vessel to "honor". (2Tm2:20-21) In our "youthful lusts" we clamor to be sitting on the mantle; but have not learned of "righteousness, faith, love, peace...call[ing] on the Lord out of a pure heart." (vs22)

But you see...if we are 'already' sitting on that mantle, we cannot experience Jesus' molding and cleansing. He says, "unless I wash you, you have no part with Me." (Jn13:8b) Since He didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Mt9:13) What would you guess that the "little child" He called to Himself was not wearing designer sneakers, and color-matched clothes. His hair was probably dirty and his nose needed blowing. Not a pretty sight. Eeeewwoo, Gross!! But you see, what we -think- is a pretty gold vase is actually 'fools gold'. It's tarnished and crumbling. Whatever we consider to be so beautiful and 'worth' SO MUCH to God, thus making us of great importance, is like a "menstruous cloth." (Is64:6 -mkjv/litv) "filthy rags" (nkjv/kjv)

If we really want to gain entrance into the kingdom of Heaven, we must come to Jesus like that 'snot-nosed kid'.

In addition, we come to Jesus as a child "in intellect." We are told, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory." (Phil2:3) When people compete for prominence, what happens to the "lesser" individual/s? They are often 'hurt' emotionally. And for sure, they are put "down" aren't they. "Do not let each man look upon his own things, but each man also on the things of others." (vs4) We are not busy, busy, busy...doing the 'important' hosting, like Martha, because we are entertaining -the- important Guest. Guess 'who' was at MY HOUSE for dinner!! But as a young child, full of innocence and wide-eyed expectation of what the Lord wants to impart to us, Mary sat at Jesus' feet to learn of Him, Who is the way the truth and the life. (Lk10:42) And later, when she annointed Jesus' feet with costly ointment (Jn12:7) Jesus promised her a place of 'prominence' in the annals of history as people would remember her annointing Him for His burial. (Mt26:13) The 'important' people were reclining at the meal, and Mary annointed His feet, and yet we don't have a roster specifically listing -who- was around that table. But we have Mary's -name-.

And, more -directly- considering "intellect" of a small child; how much does a child understand complex issues, philosophy and theology? Not much. And yet, for all the sophistication and education of the adult intellect, Jesus says it requires the intellect of a child to come to Him. And, truly, after the Holy Spirit came to the early church and these same disciples were proclaiming salvation through Christ and were brought before the scholars, it says that the counsel "perceiving that they were unlearned and uneducated men, they marveled. And they recognized them, that they had been with Jesus." (Acts4:13) This is where the expression "child-like Faith" comes from.

So... is the act of picketing and protesting for the sake of the unborn an act that will get us to heaven? Is participating in ???-a-thons to raise money for "the children" going to win us brownie points? Surely, if we sponsor an orphanage for some poor starving children in whatever-the-country, that will help, right? After all, didn't Jesus say, "whoever shall

receive one such little child in My name receives Me."?? (vs5) ..and also, that such not only receives Him, but also God. (Mk9:37)

Notice again: "unless you...become -AS- little children" (vs3) "whoever shall humble himself -LIKE- this little child.." (vs4) And notice the quality of the little ones He's referencing.. "little ones who -BELIEVES-IN-ME.." (vs6)

In other words, for the sake of His illustration the "little child" was the -embodiment- of Humility, Simplicity and Faith. An example of such. When you think of a "child" you think of "simplicity". A child readily "believes" what is told to him. In similar fashion, a person coming to God in Christ must do so with these same qualities and mind-sets that characterize a "little child".

This kind of "foolishness" of the "preaching of the cross" is what keeps the educated mind from God. (1Cor1:18) We often think of "foolishness" being bound up in a child (Pr22:15), and the more sophisticated a person is, the less tolerance they have for the little "urchins". But in God's wisdom, He devised a scheme that intelligentsia would disdain, but which would "save those who believe" (1Cor1:21)

How "great" will a sophisticate be as he is rotting in the Lake of Fire for eternity? ..being "an object of disgust to all flesh"? (Isa66:24b) What kind of "admiration" and "respect"? Even among the early church there were those who had the appearance of being "pillars" amongst the rest. (Gal2:2,6) But one who comes in Saving Faith is the one who is "Great" because he "overcomes". Simple 'Salvation'. Therefore, Jesus promises to make such an one "a pillar in the temple of My God."(Rev3:12)

Children: offenses - (Mat 18:6-10)

"But whoever shall offend one of these little ones who believes in Me, it would be better for him that an ass's millstone were hung around his neck, and he be sunk in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For it is necessary that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!" (vs6-7)

I am one of these people whose emotions and thoughts are (what's the expression?) 'worn on the sleeve'. What's on my mind comes out my mouth. Sometimes I'm like Peter in that regard, speaking (writing) before thinking. I've been that way since a child. But what's on my mind is what is spoken. There are no hidden agendas 'behind' my spoken words. I am "honest" in that regard. Many people say what they think the hearer wants to hear; and the way society is, the hearer will take the spoken words and -interpret- them through mental 'filters' to come up with "what did he -really-mean- by that comment?" Not me. What I said was what I was -REALLY-thinking. "What you see (hear) is what you get."

But you see...I am almost POSITIVE that in being this way, I sometimes -offend- people. Something said in 'innocence' on my part, once run through the hearer's 'filters', becomes a point over which they are either hurt, become angry, or..."offended" and have feelings of animosity or 'reserve' where I'm concerned. When, perhaps, I did not intend for the person to take the comment/s 'personally'. In some cases, perhaps, the hearer simply has 'thin skin'.

Is -this- what Jesus is talking about? Or if I 'yell at' the children getting into things around my store's complex, and they become 'unhappy' over being told "no", and to ride their bikes/skate boards someplace else ...is -that- the "offense" Jesus is talking about? If you 'slipped' and made some wise-crack about -her- make-up or weight, or something about her house's decor...which -she- took 'personally' and became 'offended', are you in a condition of "woe"?

"Whoever shall OFFEND one of these little ones..." (vs6)

This word "offend" means: "to put a stumbling block in the path of someone; to cause to fall; to entice to sin." Our word "scandalize" comes from the same word.

With this understanding, what are some of the ways in which children are -offended-? Modern psychology tells us that "abuse" consists of excessive beatings, being too strict and not letting the child 'discover' himself, forcing them to read the Bible. Not being allowed to develop self-esteem. But "self" is the starting point for sin, isn't it. What is the result of sin? Death. (Rom6:23) So, in the most simplistic terms, we could say that psychology, itself, offers children a path to offense!

Fathers are exhorted "...bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Eph6:4) How many fathers neglect their children in this regard? They 'abandon' their children's daily upbringing (Deut6:7-9) to the day-cares and public school system. When Scriptures say "train up a child in the way he should go.." (Pr22:6) modern parents have become persuaded to let them "do their own thing" and "let them decide for themselves when they get older" where that verse continues, if you've raised your child properly "...when he is old, he will not depart from [the right way]." How many adults have 'faint memories' of childhood, occasionally going to Sunday School, VBS or CEF's "backyard Bible clubs". How many of those young children were -eager- to know more of Jesus and -enjoyed- singing the songs of God? These were "little ones who believ[ed] in Jesus" (vs6) to whatever degree a little child does. But because dad was more interested in going fishing, or running the boat, the "seed" once sprouted withered up and died or got choked out? (Mt13) And because the little sprout wasn't nurtured, when he grows up, he has no "pleasure" in his "Creator" (Ecc12:1) How many of these ever come (return) to the Lord, once an adult?

An even worse offense is one we have addressed in the past. (July,97 Commentaries: "Abortion: What's Really at Stake") In this case, a baby of non-believers is killed, even before it has a chance to "refuse the evil and choose the good". (Is7:16a) And not having that "umbrella of protection" the believing parents provide (1Cor7:14), the child is damned to hell before it ever sees the light of day!

These are but two situations of "offense" to "little ones." But what does Jesus say about the one responsible? It would be better that a large stone be tied around his neck, and he be sunk. The expression "ass's millstone" indicates a -large- stone. The grinding stone used to convert wheat into flour. So big it required a donkey to turn it. In other words...something so big (and heavy) the person cannot -swim- and get to the surface. No...to be sunk...for good!

Parents, -YOU- have a grave responsibility where your children are concerned, to train them up in the "fear of the Lord." (Ps34:11) Woman, if you have an 'unwanted pregnancy', you must not abort (kill) the child! If you don't want the baby, at least carry it to term and give it up for adoption...then, at least, he/she might have the possibility of hearing of God.

What if you've messed up in these areas? Are you damed eternally? Well, notice Jesus said "it would be -better- for him" to be sunk in the ocean. But He does not say such a person cannot come in repentance and receive forgiveness. These are not the "unpardonable sin". But, let's see some of the results to the perpetrator...

Notice, Jesus says, "..it is necessary that offenses come.." (vs7) As long as this world is in its sinful state, there WILL BE offenses. We cannot get rid of disease. There will always be 'the poor' who need welfare. (Jn12:8) As long as "the heart is deceitful above all things and desparately wicked" (Jer17:9) there will be "offenses". Crime, prostitution, drugs, gangs, thugs, etc. Things which will lead others astray to sin and death. That's satan's whole purpose as he "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking someone he may devour." (1Pt5:8)

But what is the result to perpetrators? They tend to reap the results of their actions. What is the expression? "They that live by the sword, die by the sword."

Often God's wisdom sees to it that a person will end up flat on his back. Perhaps the person needs "slowing down" so a diving accident will create a quadriplegic. They might lose limbs or other body parts. How many times hasn't God used such events, like the shepherd's crook breaks the lamb's leg, to slow a person down, and put them in a position to -hear- His voice. Or, such a thing will provide a 'permanent' reminder of what they did...so that they might mend their ways in the future.

Oh...but God is so "cruel"! Or...Jesus -surely- didn't -really-mean- to cut your own hand off. Next chapter Jesus is going to say, "..and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven's sake. He who is able to receive it, let him receive it." (19:12b) Such action would certainly help a person beset by 'uncontrollable' lust, wouldn't it. Paul does say, "each one has his proper gift from God.." (1Cor7:7)

While this is as far as I'm going to take this subject, notice Jesus' words, "It is better for you to enter into life" minus a body part, than to be physically "whole" and to be "cast into the hell of fire." (vs8-9) for having "offended" another...having led them into error and damnation. Yes, they may "die in their [iniquity]", but their blood is "required" at the offender's hand. (Ez33:8)

The most vulnerable to such offense is the young, 'innocent', easily-moldable -child-. Jesus gives another caution. "Take heed.." (vs10) Watch it! Be CAREFUL what you do! God knows each sparrow that falls, and each hair of one's head. The little ones have representatives standing before God constantly. God knows what goes on with each one of them...and -who- did it to them. These messengers are always keeping Him apprised as to their situation...and carrying out God's will on their behalf. (Heb1:7,14) Is this perhaps where the term "guardian angel" comes from? Won't it be fascinating to eventually understand who/what these angels have been all these years! Do they continue serving on our 'individual' behalf throughout life? So, even though satan comes against us, we have the Holy Spirit residing within (Rom8:9) and even as Jesus had angels come to "minister" to Him (Mt4:11) and helped Him in His hour of anguish (Lk22:43), apparently they do this for His Believers, too..?

So, to sum up... Jesus speaks of children, of offenses and of the ones who bring about the offenses. That the term "offense" here is related to causing a child or young Believer to be turned away from God. And, because children are small and helpless does not excuse an adult taking advantage of them. To count them as nothing. Abortion calls them "fetuses". But they are "people" with souls! Dirty-old-men teach them sick little sexual "games" which scar them for life. Others 'use' their children to aid in their own advantage to gain sympathy for themselves. Jesus says, "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones." (vs10a) ...like the disciples did. (19:13)

So, whether we speak of children, or offenses in general, as Believers (the primary 'audience' of these studies) it behoves us to..

"Therefore whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1Cor10:31) and furthermore one of Paul's goals was... "We are in nothing giving cause of stumbling, in no way, so that the ministry may not be blamed." (2Cor6:3)

Children: saving the lost - (Mat 18:11-14)

"For the Son of man has come to save that which was lost.." (vs11)

With the little "snot-nosed kid" (vs2) still on His lap, Jesus tells a story. It is the familiar one that teachers tell to children in Sunday school, or Bible club. So we won't re-tell it here. Let's find some things from today's society to illustrate the same point...

Recently I saw a few seconds of a 60-Minutes or 20/20 rerun I had seen before, of some people's (young adult) child who had been taken in by a cult. The story documented the parents' search for the child. The time and money they spent, the queries of other cult members as they engaged in clandestine activities to try to find them. For everything else that these people's lives consisted of, they were dedicating 100% of themselves to find their child, to rescue them.

When a pilot was shot down in connection with the Kosovo bombings, a complete rescue team was used, putting all those personnel at risk, to rescue the one, lone, pilot.

When the child or pilot are finally rescued, there are tears of joy and high-fives of exuberation over the success at having found the 'lone' individual, safe and sound. A few years ago Scott O'Grady became a national 'hero' after he had been shot down over Serbia and was rescued safely.

How many millions of children exist? How many thousands of military personnel? The media takes no note of all their masses. But the single 'lone' one in peril, being rescued, results in GREAT joy. And they take no note of the patrols on regular duty. But when three are captured, they become a focus of the evening news.

Just as parents will not abandon a child to a cult, even though millions of 'others' exist; just as the military would not shrug their shoulders over a 'single' downed pilot...after all, we can train more; so, too, God does not abandon little children. (vs14) ...or, for that matter, a 'single' sinner. God is not willing that -ANY- should perish, (even one of these little ones -vs14) but that all should come to repentance. (2Pt3:9)

And just as comrades give each other 'high-fives' when the rescued pilot is lifted into the safety of the chopper, even moreso...

"I say to you that likewise joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance (Lk15:7,10,32)

See Also Addendum: "Let the Little Children Come..."

Forgiveness: on NOT forgiving - (Mat 18:15-20)

"..if your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take one or two more with you... and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he neglects to hear the church, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax-collector." (vs15-17)

A while back the "Christian News & Views" mailing list sent out a Reader's Digest article accompanied by editorial remarks, "When Forgiveness Is a Sin" This mailing pretty well summed up what I've been coming to understand.

There is a modern malady where everybody is luuuuving and simply "forgives and forgets". It is so pervasive that even at the highest levels of government, a man is found to be utterly corrupt, and yet, even though he continues on in his sins, 'everybody' is "forgiving" him. An adult finally comes to a point of confronting childhood issues of parental sexual abuse, or finds that relatives are doing the same things to their children, the psychological approach is to teach the offended and abused individual to "forgive" the perpetrator in order to achieve self-wellness.

There is even a blasphemous angle to this, too, led by the likes of James Dobson; to the effect that, once we get all our hurts and dysfunctions all sorted out, and we are experiencing forgiveness for all these people who have hurt us, we also need to "forgive God"..!!

Typically the "christian" (small "c") support for this ideology is Jesus' words as He was being crucified, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Lk23:34)

OK... so let's start picking away at these various matters, and see them with Scriptural understanding. First of all, notice that Jesus, as He was being crucified did not say, "I forgive you all, who are crucifying Me." He prayed to the Father, that the -Father- might forgive them. You see, as Jesus was being crucified, one of the outcomes of His crucifixion was going to be His coming 'advocacy' on behalf of those who sin. (1Jn2:1) And once He arose, "He ever lives to make intercession.." (Heb7:25) While His intercession is on behalf of Believers, while He was being crucified He was demonstrating His own teaching...

Jesus taught, "..love your enemies, and do good..be merciful [to them]." (Lk6:35-36) "when He was reviled did not revile in return" (1Pt2:23) Notice, He did not teach 'forgive your enemies'. There is a difference between loving, being merciful to; and forgiving. Love and mercy are qualities extended to another -in-spite-of- 'their' qualities. Remember that God "so loved the world" (Jn3:16) when the verdict was that "there is none

righteous, no not one." (Rom3:10) And where sin abounded, grace abounded much more. (5:20) Love and mercy exist even when the recipient of it is a worthless scoundrel.

But forgiveness is a different concept. Love and mercy indicate one's 'attitude' towards another. Forgiveness is an 'accounting' term. Jesus -needed- to die for all of humanity. Jesus was pleading that His crucifixion might not be 'accounted to' the men who found themselves at a point in history, following the orders of their commanding officers to crucify yet 'another' prisoner, to drive the nails into Him.

But regarding sin... sin does not get swept under the rug. For instance, God does not hold a person "guiltless" who takes His name in vain. (Ex20:7) Through centuries of rebellion and idolatry, God held Israel accountable for their sin, and scattered them throughout the remotest parts of the world. Let us not forget that, if it were not for God's 'mercies' we would all be consumed/destroyed. (Lam3:22) But the sin must be paid for. It must be accounted for. And this is why Jesus died on the cross...to 'pay' for the sin of the world.

So, now that we've been forgiven of our sin when we Repent and come to Faith in Christ, we are also to forgive others in the same way we have been forgiven. (Mt6:12,14-15)

But let's not forget one very important key to this understanding. We were forgiven BECAUSE we 'repented.' Always, always, always remember the order of things. 1) repentance, and -THEN- 2) remission of sins. (Mk1:4,Lk3:3;24:47,Acts5:31) God does not go around handing out remission of sins, Salvation, eternal life...willy nilly..to any ol' sinner. Only to those who have repented of sin.

Thus, we come to Jesus' teaching in this passage. The same principle of Salvation also applies to inter-personal relationships. If there is sin, sin creates a separation between the person and God. (Is59:2) In the same fashion, a human 'trespass' puts a wedge in human relationships.

The person commits a "trespass against you". Whatever the nature of it; Jesus doesn't specify. You go to him. You take others (witnesses) to make the point. Even after coming before the church (1Cor6:1-5) the person who has committed the act refuses to recognize or repent of his deed/s. Jesus does NOT say to "forgive" him. In fact, He says to treat him as an outcast. Don't tolerate evil. Don't have fellowship with the works of darkness but "rather REPROVE them" (Eph5:11)

So, a father molests you as a child. As an adult you confront him and he refuses to admit any wrong-doing. Do you "forgive" him? You cannot! To forgive the -deed- says, in effect, that it's OK. Well, it's -NOT- "OK"!! ...what he did. Do you love him? Sure! But in what he did, he made himself your "enemy" ...and Jesus teaches, "love your enemies". He didn't say

"forgive" your enemies. He said 'love'. There's a difference. "Forgiveness" is what you attribute to them. If they haven't repented, recognized their wrong, they cannot be forgiven. But 'love' is your own heart's attitude toward them.

It seems like the biggest 'abuse' that's coming out of the closet in recent years is sexual molestation of children. Such despicable acts!! Usually perpetrated by close relatives. The "offending [of] one of these little ones.." (vs6)

If you were the victim, do you forgive the perpetrator? If they refuse to admit their wrong-doing...NO. You cannot. If you forgive what hasn't been repented of; you, in effect, are saying that something is "OK" which God calls evil and sin. Making yourself a higher authority than God. "Who can forgive sins, except God alone?" (Lk5:21)

Lest the reader think we are all "negative" the next lesson speaks of "forgiving". For those occasions where the guilty one "hears" (vs15b) when you confront him and/or when he comes asking for forgiveness.

Oh...one last thing we mentioned above. About "forgiving God"?? What evil did God do? If bad things happened to you, it was not God's "fault"! It came about because of sin. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights.." (Jas1:17a) We should not say, "I am tempted from God. For God is not tempted by evils, and He tempts no one." (Jas1:13) ...but the evil comes about when a person is "tempted by his lusts, being drawn away and seduced by them, and when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin. And sin, when it is fully formed, brings forth death." (vs14-15)

Remember, Jesus said that "offenses" exist in the world. (vs7) We are not to forgive them. (vs17) ..because they are deserving of "woe" (vs7b) "For you know this, that no fornicator, or unclean person, or covetous one (who is an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers [or fellowship] with them." (Eph5:5-7)

See Also Addendum: Q/A "Church Discipline" & "Already Forgiven?"

Forgiveness: on Forgiving - (Mat 18:21-35)

"..how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." (vs21-22)

"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother trespasses against you, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him. And if he trespasses against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turns again to you, saying, I repent, you shall forgive him." (Lk17:3-4)

Here we see what true forgiveness entails. There are several things that society engages in, which do not fit Jesus' description. The first one is, "Time heals all wounds." This is the case where someone has injured another ("injure" meaning 'to hurt' them in some manner). Perhaps there is an argument over the matter. Perhaps not. But the incident is never resolved...and 'time' passes. After many months or years, the parties "evolve into" fellowship. But the one who did wrong never repented. And everybody acts like the matter is now OK as everybody 'luuuv's' one another. As the offended party 'receives' the perpetrator, the perpetrator might even suggest that the offended one has "forgiven" them because of this new-found 'civility' which is occurring. But the perpetrator has never repented, and admitted to having done wrong. Any imagined 'forgiveness' is a farce.

Another is today's malady. A youth takes some guns to school and kills teachers and students. The survivors, while learning how to cope with the trauma, collectively communicate to the perpetrator, "We forgive you. We love you." ..when the guilty one emotes no remorse.

Or, the case where someone continually offends another. The person who has been hurt, or is the object of the offense, as a result keeps a certain 'distance', which, in turn 'offends' the original perpetrator. And the original wrong-doer, with no intention of changing their ways, whines, "Can't you just 'forgive and forget'?" when there is no remorse, nor sense that they have committed any wrong.

Jesus describes 'forgiveness' with another story. 'Not going to repeat it all here. It is suggested that the reader read the rest of the chapter. But essentially, forgiveness is described in terms of "debt". A debt has accrued. The creditor wants to be paid, the debt is now due and the debtor is unable to pay. Punishment is due in lieu of payment. The debtor pleads for mercy. And the creditor 'forgives' the debt. Making it so the debtor no longer 'owes' anything.

This is God's forgiveness of sin. Sin exists. The debt for sin is death. Death, being the 'extension' of God's "Wrath" (punishment). The debtor (sinner) comes and pleads for mercy (repents). And God forgives, based

on Jesus' payment through His own shed blood and death. The person is now "justified". His account is "paid in full". He no longer owes for the sin.

Now, the story takes a turn. The debtor has someone who owes him. Thus, the former debtor, in his own rights, is now a creditor; and someone is in debt to him. The same scenario transpires. The debtor is unable to pay, but the creditor (just having been forgiven his debt) refuses to extend mercy and punishes the one owing to him. He was forgiven such a big debt...but is refusing to forgive a little "trespass" against him.

You see, the heart of a Christian is to be one where bitterness and wrath have been put away. We are to be "kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." (Eph4:31-32) We are not to hold grudges. As we learned in the previous lesson, we are to hold people accountable for their deeds. And yes, perhaps, because of the nature of the deed, we will become "angry". (Eph4:26) But we do not harbor resentment against them and "let the sun go down upon your wrath." (vs26b)

But notice: we are to forgive one another in the same way that God forgave us. (vs32) Not like the debtor turned creditor who refuse to extend mercy. We received forgiveness when we came to God in repentance.

Jesus makes a point of the relationship between repentance and forgiveness. If the person sins, yes, "rebuke" him. (Lk17:3) But you notice the 'forgiveness' doesn't come until -after- the one rebuked 'repents'. And to stress the point, Jesus repeats the pattern. If the wrongdoer -repents- 'seven times a day', THEN -forgiveness- is to be extended as many times as there is repentance. Remember: this is how "God..has forgiven you". Notice: "if My people, who are called by My name shall humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways [by definition: REPENT] ..THEN.. I will hear from Heaven and will forgive their sin..." (2Chr7:14)

On the other hand, if we continue in sin, as Joshua spoke to Israel, "He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins." (Josh24:19) ...as was the case with Israel when they hardened their hearts... As Jeremiah prayed to God because of their rebellion, "Do not forgive their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from Your sight.." (Jer18:23) As Israel would say, "we will come no more to You" (Jer2:31) "we will not walk in [the ways of the Lord]" (6:16) "we will not listen" (6:17) "we will walk after our own ways.." (18:12) "we will certainly do [the various forms of idolatry]" (44:17) When there is such refusal to repent, there is also no forgiveness.

Just as God forgives us... or doesn't...

Someone might say, "Well...if he REALLY 'meant it' when he repented, he wouldn't keep doing it over and over! ...fold the arms and... Hmph!!" Well...let us not get too hoity-toity with this. If we look into our own hearts

honestly, we see -just- how many times the Lord forgives us over and over. We are to forgive "just as God...has forgiven you" when you repented. (Eph4:32b)

Let us not forget that God knows our hearts. This forgiving we do must be from our hearts. (Mt18:35) If we don't forgive one who pleads with us, we cannot expect anything from God, either.

What of those who do not repent..? As we "have the mind of Christ" (1Cor2:16b) with which He went to the cross (Phil2:5-8), as God "forgave you" (Eph4:32) our kind and tender hearts will be "ready to forgive" those who don't repent...

"For You, Lord, are good and -READY- to forgive, and rich in mercy to all those who call on You." (Ps86:5)

You may never get a chance to extend forgiveness to that person before they die, because they may take their rebellion with them to the grave. That is not your problem; although you may have sorrow because of it. (Remember: God has promised to wipe away all tears and to remove remembrances of the "former things" -Rev21:4,Is65:17) God knows their heart and also sees yours. Are (were) you -willing- to forgive them? That is the basis upon which God will also forgive you.

See Also Addendum: Q/A *"True Repentance Results in Actions"*

Divorce: not God's design - (Mat 19:3-12)

And the Pharisees came to [Jesus], tempting Him and saying to Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? (vs3)

Notice, the legalists are confronting Jesus again. Picking a fight. Taunting Him. They were always out to try to find fault with His teaching. They were standing firmly on their tradition and Law. But rejecting the Son of God, Himself.

Jesus knows 'what' they are after. To see if He will parrot back their 'precious' law to them, like a "good Jew" should. 'See if He will quote back the party-line like a good "church member". If He would just do this, concede to their tradition, they would 'accept' Him... Right?

But notice what Jesus does. "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning "made them male and female" and quotes Genesis 2:24 "for this cause a man shall leave father and mother and shall cling to his wife, and the two of them shall be one flesh." He then reasons with them; if they are "one flesh" and this is what God ordained, "THEREFORE what God has joined together, let not man separate." (vs6)

First of all, notice that Jesus takes them to the Scriptures; not tradition. And as He had proclaimed previously, He came to "fulfill" the Law. (Mt5:17) That means, understanding "why" the Law was given in the first place. The Law shows the sinfulness of sin. (Rom3:20) And so Jesus goes back -prior-to- the Law. Prior to sin. What was God's ORIGINAL intent? God made -a- man, and then brought -a- woman to the man, to be his suitable helper. (Gen2:20) This was the creation which God proclaimed as "Very Good!" (Gen1:31)

OK...so, if God created things that way, why did He command how to get a divorce? (vs7) Can't God make up His mind? You see, the liberals are right after all, the Bible -DOES- have "contradictions"!! OK, Jesus, what are you gonna say to that? Huh?!? We gotcha! I betcha can't r'iggle Your way out of -that- one! Har, har!!

"Because of your hard-heartedness [sin] Moses -allowed- you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so." (vs8) "Jehovah, the God of Israel, says He hates divorce.." (Mal2:16)

Oh, Jesus, let me share something with You that somebody e-mailed me; Your teaching is just great. If You'd just have a little "compassion" you'd 'have it made'!. Do You always have to be so bull-headed; ATTACKING them so? All this 'name-calling'!! It's not very loving...

A step further here... "I say to you, whoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is put away commits adultery." (vs9)

Considering present society, how many people do you know, based on this Word, that are living in adultery!! Are you, perhaps? No, it's NOT "alright" to marry a divorced person. Divorce does not change the fact that the "two -BECAME- one".

The only case where divorce is 'right' is where infidelity is involved. Remember Joseph, "being a -just- man" (Mt1:19) assuming that Mary had been unfaithful to their betrothal, was considering "putting her away". And God intervenes, informs him that her pregnancy is of the Holy Spirit, in order to fulfill prophecy and bring forth Jesus "virgin" born. So he takes her immediately to be his wife, and keeps her a virgin until Jesus is born. But that was a very special circumstance.

What if there is a divorce? Either REMAIN UNMARRIED, or be reconciled. (1Cor7:11) What if there was a divorce; and then you remarried; and then got divorced from -that- person? According to "Law" you can then no longer be reconciled to your 'first' spouse. (Jer3:1,Deu24:1-4) You've been "defiled" regarding that first marriage, by the second one. Paul uses the expression "first faith" (1Tm5:12) ...that first pledge to fidelity.

And then, there is also the case of the unequal yoke. Paul was given liberty to give his view. (1Cor7:12) If the unbeliever is pleased to live with the Believer; Believer, don't divorce your [unbelieving] spouse. But if the unbeliever wants to leave, or sends you away; live with their decision. "A brother or sister is not in bondage in such cases, but God has called us in [to] peace." (vs15)

What if your life was all messed up -BEFORE- you came to Faith in Christ; and you've been married and divorced so many times you can't count them all? Or, your life was one of promiscuity before you came to Christ? Technically, marriage joins two to become "one -FLESH-". (Gen2:24, 1Cor6:16) When the two are joined, the result is -a- human life in the womb. The two cells, egg and sperm, join to form -one- new cell, the zygote. Whether a person was a Christian or not is not really part of this equation of God's -physical- creative design. While there are certainly 'spiritual' parameters to marriage and Believers should only marry Believers (1Cor7:39), this is a -physical- union. It has nothing to do with a 'certificate' or 'words' spoken by a preacher, priest or justice of the peace. It has to do with the "marriage bed". You may not have that 'piece of paper' saying you are "married", but if you're living together, sharing the bed, you are -married-. "Two become one -flesh-."

"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." (Heb13:4) The "first faith" is blessed by God. More than that comes under judgment. However, when a person comes to

Faith in Christ, Jesus says, "Neither do I give judgment. Go, and sin no more". (Jn8:11) Remember, Jesus had several -former- prostitutes who followed Him during his ministry, and helped with the feeding of the group. (Mt27:55, Lk8:2-3) And He made a special point to seek one out in Samaria, who came to Faith in Him. (Jn4) It doesn't matter "how bad" or "how many" the sins were, when a person comes in repentance to Christ, they are forgiven. When the woman "a sinner" came and wept over Jesus' feet, and anointed them, He pronounced to/about her, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven.." as He then says to her directly, "Your sins are forgiven." (Lk7:37-48)

So, if you were divorced before you became a Christian, your sin is certainly forgiven. But becoming a Christian does not now entitle you to a "clean slate" regarding the marriage bed. Remember, they become "one - FLESH". This is similar to, for instance, a person who got a tattoo, or was scarred in a fire or accident due to some sin. Becoming a Christian does not erase that -physical- tattoo or scar, although the -sin- is certainly "forgiven".

So, a person has this "colorful" past; and is now a Christian. What does one do? After all, there are -urges-. "Needs". Paul exhorts, "I would that all men were even as I myself am." (1Cor7:7) I don't know that we are told whether or not he had been married at one time. But when he wrote this, he was "single". But he goes on to say, "but each has his proper gift from God, one according to this manner and another according to that." Let us not forget that part of God's creation design was that it "be fruitful". In order to assure 'fruitfulness' God made these urges strong. In 1Cor7 Paul seems to be of the mind that, if this drive is too strong, and a person has problem with "self-control" (vs9) that it's better to get married, than to "burn" with lust or to commit "fornication". (vs2)

Are there any other options? The disciples react to Jesus' words by suggesting that there are cases where it's "not good to marry" (Mt19:10) And Jesus goes into some thoughts about what Paul called "gifts". Not everyone is able to be single. (vs11) And then addresses "eunuchs".(vs12) Some are born that way; their "gift from God". In many cultures it was done -to- them. In other cases, a person initiated the matter for himself. And Jesus says that they did it "for the kingdom of Heaven's sake." To keep themselves pure unto God. Remember in the previous chapter He was saying it's better to be minus a body part and "to enter into life" than to be physically whole and "to be cast into everlasting fire." (18:8-9) And one of the areas receiving condemnation is adultery and fornication. (Rev21:8, Gal5:19,21b) Thus, a Believer, although securely saved, should be keeping himself pure in these things.

[Ed: Don't anybody accuse me of teaching something radical here, nor of necessarily condoning, or even -suggesting- that anybody go and do something hasty and rash. I'm not. We're just observing what Scripture teaches. I know of a fellow years ago who, in a desire to be "pure" before

God decided to take matters into his own hands. Ended up in the hospital by ambulance, and then, I'm sure, counseling. At the time I felt "sorry" for him; he was such a "nice" person and a sweet Christian. (Being rather young and naive at the time, I thought that what he had done was rather bizarre.) I never saw him after that; but have often wondered how things turned out for him. These are serious matters! Don't ever enter into anything like this lightly. And if you do, -BE SURE- you are being obedient to the Lord! And if you REALLY MUST do something, see a physician.]

So again, He makes it clear that it's an 'individual' gift. "He who is able to receive it, let him receive it." (vs12b)

"..this is the will of God, your sanctification, for you to abstain from fornication, each one of you to know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor (not in the passion of lust, even as the nations who do not know God).. God has not called us to uncleanness, but in sanctification."(1Th4:3-7)

Riches & Eternal Life: some good thing? - (Mat 19:16-26)

"..one came and said to Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (vs16)

Isn't this the eternal question! Practically every religion in the world functions on this basis. And even those who don't make any claim to religion. DOING some -good- "thing".

Typically, these good "things" traditionally have taken the form of a "pilgrimage" to some holy place. Doing so in some torturous fashion, such as travelling hundreds of miles on one's knees, till they become raw and bleeding. Some flagellate their backs till they bleed. In our more "enlightened" affluent societies, someone will donate millions of dollars to erect some hospital, or other public-works project to "benefit humanity". The matter will then be on the evening news, and a plaque at the facility with the donor's name will indicate and 'document' his "goodness". Others, not as affluent, will participate in "walk-a-thons" for some cause, or help build a house with "habitat-for-humanity".

Surely, God will see all this "goodness" that I have "done" and I will be received with favor!! Now, let me get back to -my- life!!

This person has come to Jesus. "Why do you call Me good? There is none good but one, that is, God." (vs17) Well, this person is, at least, starting on the right footing. If he is calling Jesus "good", and only God is "good", the person is obviously recognizing Jesus' Deity. That Jesus is "God". Now, -this- is more than the pharisees are willing to do. He's starting in the right direction. But let's not forget, recognizing Jesus' Deity, by itself, is not enough. "..even the demons believe and tremble." (Jas2:19)

So, in answering the question as asked... "If you want to enter into life [by -doing- something], keep the commandments." (vs17) Before anybody gets too 'excited' prematurely here, let us not forget the Word, "And you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live in them. I am the LORD." (Lev18:5) Paul, in correcting the errors of legalism even quotes this passage, which by the way, is quoted numerous times as the prophets pleaded with Israel, from God, to forsake their rebellion and return to Him. While Paul proclaimed "Faith" he says, "But the Law is not of faith; but, "The man who does these things shall live in them." (Gal3:12) In other words, if you [can] keep the Law, you will live.

But now the man's true colors begin to show. He's not 100%. "Which?" Jesus says, 'keep the Law' and the man asks, 'which ones?' So Jesus obliges and lists off a few: matters of murder, adultery, stealing, false

witness, honor your parents, love your neighbor as yourself. And the man says, I've kept all -these- things. What am I yet lacking?(vs20)

If you want to be 100%, sell everything you have, give the proceeds to the poor, and come, follow Me. (vs21)

Oh dear! He had kept all "these" but notice Jesus hadn't listed: you shall have no other gods before Me, you shall not covet. The man went away "sorrowful" because he had -great- possessions. (vs22)

"For whoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (Jas2:10)

If a person never commits murder, nor theft, nor assault... all these "bad" things; but crosses an intersection against a red light and is ticketed for J-walking, he has broken -THE- LAW.

Yes, keep God's Law, and live. But man is not capable of keeping it. That's why the Law was given, to show the "sinfulness of sin".(Rom7:13) The law shows what is already in the heart. (Rom2:15) Notice: while this young man was claiming to have kept the law, his -heart- told him that something was yet "lacking". (vs20)

So... let's talk about wealth, a minute. Complete industries exist for those who want to "get rich quick". People spend in hopes of winning the lottery, jackpot, etc. They think that if they have all that money, their lives will become better. That they will be happy. When they win prizes on game shows, they are happy and applaud the "things". Cars, exotic vacation trips, appliances.

When a person is looking to possessions as a measure of happiness, they are not looking to God. They are not "waiting upon the Lord" (Isa40:31, Jer14:22) A person with wealth deals with everything by spending money to buy it or fix it. And they also often tromple upon the poor and despised. (Jas2:6,5:1-6) 'Why do I need to trust God? I have every -thing- I need or want.'

But when a person is in need, what do they do? They "pray". They seek God, "Oh, God, help me!" And we learned earlier in the series, "..your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." (Mt6:32-33) "Godliness with contentment is great gain." (1Tm6:6) When a person is following Christ, they share Paul's heart, "I have learned to be content in whatever state I am." (Phil4:11) "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and it is clear that we can carry nothing out. But having food and clothing, we will be content." (1Tm6:6-8)

And so Jesus says, essentially; while it's not impossible, it is next-to-impossible for a rich person to get to heaven. (vs23-24) Yes, there are those whom God has blessed with wealth, and they know how to handle it, and use it for His glory. So, wealth is not the problem. "The -LOVE- of money.." (1Tm6:10) is. The young man loved his wealth so much that when he was given a choice; his wealth, or God? ...he chose his wealth. "..but they who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which plunge men into death and destruction." (1Tm6:9)

The disciples, mostly from 'poor' backgrounds, are amazed. (vs25) After all, isn't he the one who chairs the board of elders, supplies 80% of the church's operating expenses through his giving, and you see him on the platform frequently, and is quite eloquent when he speaks. He is always so self-assured. He makes such a wonderful leader, he always gets "voted" to positions of leadership in the church.

Lord, You mean he's NOT going to heaven? Well, if someone [so wonderful] like him can't make it, who can?? (vs25) This seems like an impossibility, doesn't. But not with God. (vs26)

Man looks at the 'impressive' exterior, "but God looks on the heart". (1Sam16:7) Man looks to his own power and riches, but "you see your calling, brothers, that not many wise according to the flesh are called, not many mighty, not many noble. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise...the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty...the base things of the world, and things which are despised, and thing which are not, in order to bring to nothing things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence...He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." (~1Cor1:26-31)

"Charge the rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God.." (1Tm6:17)

We Left All: what do we get? - (Mat 19:27-30)

"Behold, we have forsaken all and have followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" (vs27)

Good ol' Peter! Always right there with a come-back or question. So, if it is nearly impossible for the rich to make it to heaven; well, look at us, Lord. We've left all and are following You. If the rich DON'T make it because they don't follow You, and we ARE following You, it must mean we DO get something...?

Jesus makes a two-pronged promise. One to the twelve. And another to Believers in general.

The disciples don't know it yet, but they are about to undergo many things for Jesus' sake. Right -now- they 'think' they have left all. Actually, all they left was -merely- their fishing boats. But they will also be giving their lives. On another occasion Jesus assures them "You shall indeed drink of My cup and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with..." (Mt20:23) They haven't a clue 'now' yet, however.

But yes, "in the regeneration" the apostles were promised the responsibility of judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (vs28) Positions of honor.

For other believers, those who leave all to follow Christ will have their needs met. And will inherit everlasting life." (vs29) Some will have material blessings. But if we read the latter part of Hebrews 11, we understand that most will endure many trials. There have been many martyrs. We are promised "tribulation". (Jn16:33) If we are following Christ, and are like Him, then we are to expect to be hated because we are no longer "of the world" (Jn15:19) Never forget that they crucified Jesus. And the "servant is not greater than his master" (vs20) And those who perpetrate the persecution do not know God. (vs21) If they persecute the Believer, they are -actually- persecuting Christ. And if they, in that manner hate Christ, they show their hatred of God. (vs23)

Notice the nature of the "loss" one will experience to "gain" Christ: houses, siblings, parents, spouse, children, wealth. (vs29) Things that are earthly dearest to us. Periodically someone will write, expressing how their new life in Christ has seemingly drawn this "line" between them and their family and acquaintances. They are now viewed with contempt and ridicule. Even by someone as close as a spouse. Pardon the personal example again: Those of you who have read my testimony know that I've experienced what I preach here. If I hadn't finally come to a place where years of wishy-washing around, being willingly led and advised against directions of service to God, were at an end; and it was firmly established that I was serving the Lord; I would guess I'd still be married. But when it became

obvious that I was serving the Lord, NOTHING BUT, the predeparture announcement was made, "Your God and mine are different." My marriage had been the most precious thing to me. Service for God meant losing it; accompanied by the taunts of the pretend 'christian' relatives. When you -truly- decide to follow the Lord, don't be surprised when it happens to you. Remember Peter's words, "Beloved, do not be astonished at the fiery trial which is to try you, as though a strange thing happened to you" (1Pt4:12)

And a lot of it will come from sources claiming to be "Christian". For the apostles initially it was the Jewish -religious- leaders who brought them to trial, imprisoned and beat them. It was they who had incited Jesus' crucifixion.

Today for the Church, generically, it is primarily "christian" (small "c") leaders who persecute -TRUE- Believers. It shocks and mystifies the Believer who is under attack, because, "how can -this- person be doing/saying these things?" ..when you -know- in your heart that you have the "mind of Christ" (1Cor2:16) regarding whatever matter you are under attack about. When that happens...and -happen-, it will...never forget Jesus' word, "I have spoken these things to you so that you should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogue [church]. But an hour is coming that everyone who -KILLS-YOU- will think that he bears God service." (Jn16:1-2) This will be coming from something called the "church". "Christian".

History bears this out. Most persecutions throughout history, the most numerous, most hideous and torturous, were carried out by -The- Church which calls itself "christian". The present pope in various sayings and writings has said he expects the same to happen again in the future. And there are militant "kingdom" factions from the protestant side of the aisle that say the same things from time to time. ...for the future. And remember, they are all "united." They are called "the church" ... "Christian"

A few years ago Pat Robertson was saying he would be at the Mt. of Olives with TV cameras to document the return of Jesus. But you know; if Jesus were actually to appear as He did 2000 years ago, all the current "great men of God" would be 'united in diversity' to crucify Him again...!

Jesus says of them, "..they will do these things to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But I have told you these things so that when the hour shall come you may remember that I told you of them." (Jn16:3)

There are many who -appear- to be Christians. Some are elevated to status as "great men of God". But these who appear to be foremost (first), in that Day will be last. Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you. Depart from Me!" (Mt7:23) But those who are esteemed as "insignificant" because they don't hold great honorable positions in a mega-church, and actually in many cases don't even 'belong' to any -organized- "church", they are not -

known- by those in-the-know, and thus -appear- to be "last" ...will hear Christ's "well done...enter into the joy of your Lord" (Mt25:21) as the Lord of the banquet Who "invited you" says, "friend, go up higher" (Lk14:10)

"The last shall be first." (Mt19:30)

First -or- Last: chosen - (Mat 20:1-16)

A while back someone e-mailed a question about the topic of this passage. At the time, the answer was used as the basis for a "Portion". It seems appropriate to insert that study at this point in the series.

The question was: "I do not know what verse it is, but the one that says "Many are called, but few are chosen." Does this mean among the ones that are already saved? Or does it mean among all of men?"

Answer:

"Many are called, but few chosen" is found in both (Mt20:16 & 22:14) The context of 20:16 is the parable of the land-owner who hired people to work for him. Some were hired in the morning and worked all day. Others at noon. And some, even barely worked an hour, as they were hired at the end of the day. The ones hired in the morning received a "full day's" wage. As did the ones hired at the end of the day. And if you look at the passage, you will see the exchange and grumbling from the ones who had been working since morning...thinking they ought to get more, since he had paid the one-hour people the same "full-day's" wage. An illustration of God's grace and gift of salvation (Eph2:8-9) which is not based on "what" or "how much" man does. The gift of Eternal Life (day's wage) is the same to all who come...because of the beneficence of God's grace. It is God's "choice" to give salvation to whom He wishes. (vs15) Now, if the grumblers were unhappy enough, they could go off in a huff, and not take the wage...out of spite. Only thing is, they are the loser. The ones who "receive Him" (Jn1:12) are the ones who are "chosen and faithful."(Rev17:14)

This word "chosen" means "picked out, appointed." It's kind of like the schoolyard choosing up sides for the game of softball or soccer. The captains each take turns "picking" the ones they want on their team. They pick, from the group, according to the ones they think will help their team be victorious. They "know" the people (as God "foreknew" -Rom8:29). They "choose" (predestine/appoint/elect -Eph1:11) the ones who are "qualified." ("..the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. -Col1:12) This may seem like a bit simplistic example. But God chooses His own based on His knowledge of their heart/s. "Many are called" (He is not willing that any should perish - 2Pt3:9) But only a few are chosen. (find it -Mt7:14)

Also, Jesus was speaking to Jews...the sons of Israel. They had been given God's promises. They had had the Truth for 1500 years; before Gentiles heard the gospel. They were "first."(Mt20:16) Gentiles came along later..."last." (Rom11) But Israel rejected God's Holy Spirit, so the gospel went to the Gentiles. (Acts28:28) Thus, those who had been "last" (outcasts to the Jews) became "first" as the Church progressed, and Believers are saved by Faith "without the works of the law."(Rom3:28) And

Israel, who thought they had it all, became "last" and were scattered amongst the nations in AD70.

Heading to the Cross: final week - (Mat 20:17-19)

And going up to Jerusalem, Jesus took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said to them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem. And the Son of man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death. And they shall deliver Him to the nations to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He shall rise again. (Mt20:17-19)

Earlier (ch16) in the midst of various situations and teachings, where Jesus is being scrutinized and defined to the people, He tells His disciples that, while they are learning all these -things- about Him, and have just come to understand that He is the "Son of God", His purpose is to die on the cross. And remember the exchange with Peter, discussing the -need-for such a thing, and the nature of the life (and death) of following Christ.

Now, it's "time" for all this to come to pass. This represents a division in the Gospel of Matthew; if you will, a new section heading. Up until now we have had teaching, description and defense of who Jesus is, and how to be obedient to God. Now, we are into that final -week-, including triumphal entry, Last Supper, crucifixion, resurrection. And this -week- is going to be jam-packed with teaching on some critical issues. Jesus' "final words" to the people before He is to give His life.

It will further cauterize, harden and anger the religious leaders against Him. But He is going to be laying it all out in no uncertain terms, so they know precisely what/Who it is they are rejecting and crucifying. And they will know why their judgment is just. "But though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they did not believe on Him..." "Lord, who has believed our report? ..He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (Jn12:37,38,40)

While the Gospel of John documents Jesus' final authenticities and proofs of His Deity to the people [especially the Scribes and Pharisees; the religious leaders who will be condemning Him to crucifixion] during this week; in Matthew He will be explaining the "Kingdom of Heaven" in clear terms; and the nature of the heart that has access to Heaven, and of those who don't. He will explain the duty and mission of Believers as faithful servants after He ascends to the Father, until He returns to appear. And will prophesy the future; His return, and the nature of the events leading up to His return.

He has just raised Lazarus from the dead (Jn11) and as this has proved to show His Deity to give life and His coming resurrection, the leaders are also considering killing Lazarus, because many are believing on Jesus because of it. (Jn12:10-11) And they have convened a council to figure out how to do away with Him, and have announced a command for anybody to

let them know how to find Him. (Jn11:53,57) So He's been "hiding out" a little. (vs54) It wasn't yet -quite- time. He had to die at Passover.

But -now- His time has come. It's "time" to go to Jerusalem and fulfill the eternal plan of Salvation. When they went to Bethany to raise Lazarus, things were already rather tense as there had been threats to stone Him, and Thomas had said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." (Jn11:16) But now, this is -it-.

So He briefly explains what is about to happen, in terms of His betrayal, condemnation, crucifixion and death. And as all is fulfilled, He will be vindicated as being Deity; since one of God's defining characteristics is that of declaring "the end from the beginning." (Is46:10) But also notice that, while all these "terrible" things are about to happen, He also promises:

"And the third day He shall rise again." (vs19)

Positions of honor: servanthood - (Mat 20:20-28)

Then the mother of Zebedee's children [James and John] came to Him with her sons, worshiping..desiring.. "Grant that these my two sons may sit in Your kingdom, the one on Your right hand and the other on the left." (vs20-21)

To understand the 10's "indignation" (vs24) against the two, Mk10:35 indicates that James and John, themselves, came to Jesus with this request. Perhaps this was a 'family' request? Whatever the case, the two are desiring positions of special honor alongside Jesus in His kingdom, when He is ruling. Let us remember 'who' these two are. they are part of the three-some along with Peter. (Lk5:10) They seem to have special attention from Jesus periodically. The "inner circle". They were introduced to Jesus in the "Mount of transfiguration". (Mt17) And when He was in agony just prior to capture, trial and crucifixion, it was these three He took along closer with Him as He prayed in the garden. (26:37) Furthermore, John is the "disciple whom Jesus loved". (Jn21:20,24)

Does honor come "just because"? Or is it earned? What kind of position will Jesus be having 'in His kingdom'?

He "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant...He humbled Himself and became -obedient- (Heb5:8) unto death..of the cross." (Phil2:6-8) The honor Jesus receives is because He first humbled Himself. And then God "lifted Him up" (Jas4:10) and "has highly exalted Him..given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.."(Phil2:9-11) This is not an honor Jesus takes unto Himself. (Heb5:4a) It is -given- to Him, since He "drank the cup" and was "baptized with the baptism". (Mt20:22) Therefore, He sits at God's right hand as His enemies are made His footstool. (Heb1:13) This place is the very throne-room of God Himself.

Jesus asks the two, "Are you able to undergo what I am about to?" (vs22) Well, it is obvious that they haven't a clue as to what He is talking about, because they say, "We are able." He says, "You shall indeed drink of My cup and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with..." (vs23) While Stephen was the first martyr (Acts7) James is the next martyr whose name is recorded. (Acts12:2) And tradition tells us that John was dropped into boiling oil, but God performed a miracle on his behalf and he shot back out, unhurt. But was exiled to Patmos, where he wrote "The Revelation".

But, to appoint their position in heaven "is not Mine to give, but to those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." (vs23) You see, if God was exalting Jesus, Jesus was in no position to make other appointments. The Heavenly Father prepares the awards and places of honor. Remember, it is the Father Who "draws" (Jn6:44) the Believer to Himself, to Jesus. It is

also the Father Who makes the banquet for His Son and His Bride, Who places the guests at the table according to their rank. (Mt22:2,Lk14:10,16)

So, the "sons of thunder" are thundering a bit much, eh! And the rest were "indignant" against them. (vs24) Does Jesus criticize their request? No. But we've got some animosities going on here, so He gathers them around.

This request is the way the world operates. (vs25) People strive to achieve positions of prominence, authority, importance and leadership. The highest position in a country is that of president or king. And so, people aspire to these places of honor: to be called "your honor", or "the honorable senator", or "Mr. President".

"However, it shall not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant." (vs26) And He goes on to explain His own position; although being the Son of God Most High, He came to "serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (vs28) In a few days He will illustrate this when He "rose up from supper and laid aside His garments...took a towel...poured water in a basin.." and proceeded to wash His disciples feet. (Jn13:4-5) The task a lowly servant should have done, and when there was no servant, nobody took it upon themselves to do it, either. A service of 'basic' hospitality. None of them did it. Jesus, their Lord, did it.

If you want to be "great" then be a "servant". (vs27) Don't desire to be on top, bossing everybody around, and telling others 'how to do it'. Get in there, yourself, and -do- it. Then, leave the matter of rewards to the Father.

Jesus' ultimate example of His servanthood and love would be to "give His life..." (vs28) because, "no one has greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (Jn15:13)

Blind eyes opened: by the "Son of David" - (Mat 20:30-34)

"Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened..." (Is35:5) "...I have sworn to David My servant, Your seed will I establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations." (Ps89:3-4) "There is no end of the increase of His government and peace on the throne of David, and on His kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from now on, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." (Is9:7)

Jesus is being authenticated to the people. The prophecy of the Messiah was that He would be opening the eyes of the blind. Recall when John, imprisoned and despondent, sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are You He Who should come, or do we look for another?" (Mt11:3) Jesus replied, "Go tell John what you see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, etc." (vs5) The miracles would authenticate Him.

Now, His title is being attached to Him publicly, too. "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!" (vs30)

Oh, Shhh!! Be quiet! You don't want to disturb the "teacher". What's this? "Son of David"?? Well, they're a couple of "crazy" blind men, anyway. They don't know what they're talking about. They've been blind so long, they're probably a "brick shy of a full load".

But they yell out louder, so everybody can hear, "HAVE MERCY ON US, O LORD, SON OF DAVID!" (vs31)

Ok, the attention of the crowd is now achieved. Jesus stops and calls them to Him. "What do you want?" (vs32) "Please open our eyes."

The "Son of David" does not deny the -title- they attribute to Him. They call out to the prophesied "Son of David" and He responds; in essence saying, "Yes, I'm the 'Son of David'." And then, He authenticates His title by fulfilling the Messianic prophecy and "opening their eyes." If anyone had doubts as to "Who" He is, this miracle authenticated His claim to be their "Messiah". Their "Son of David."

Also, notice a little picture of the Salvation 'process'. Joel had proclaimed, "...whoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be saved." (2:32) Paul affirms this in Romans 10:13. These two blind individuals called out to Jesus. But notice He doesn't just wave His hand over them and "zap!!" ...they're healed.

No. "What do you want from Me?" "We want to be healed." There are some who teach that Jesus' death automatically saves everyone in the world, and there is no need for repentance or Faith. And since Jesus died,

there is now "no more sin" in the world, because He came to "take away the sin of the world." (Jn1:29) And that repentance is a "work". Well, notice, the two had to "come" to Jesus. Was that a "work"? No more so than breathing 'in -n- out' to sustain one's life is a work. Jesus' power could have zapped them to sight. But He required an acknowledgment of their condition...that they were "blind". So, they -ask- to be healed. Was -asking- a "work"? No more so than their act of -standing- before Him. But when they asked, then He willingly healed them. Their asking to be healed implied a desire to "change" (repent) from their 'present' condition of "being blind" to one of "having sight".

Receiving their sight was something they could not -do- for themselves. They could not "help Jesus out" in the task. All they could do was to -stand- (or kneel/bow) there, and Jesus -did- the work for them. To "receive" it from Him. (Jn1:12) That is how we receive Salvation.

Royal Entry: Hosanna to the "Son of David" - (Mat 21:1-22)

Of the three 'synoptic' Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke), Matthew likely represents the most accurate 'chronology' of the Passover/Crucifixion week events. Mark ("Servant") records miscellaneous events in a more random order. Luke ("Son of man"), by admission, compiled what he gleaned from various sources (Lk1:1-3), not necessarily having been an eyewitness to it all, himself. (Acts1:1-4) Matthew ("King") is a 'chronicle'. Royal Court Records, beginning with Christ's genealogy in ch1. Done by a former tax collector (Mt9:9,10:3) who was accustomed to meticulous detailed record-keeping for the government.

Sunday, Jesus enters Jerusalem; which we will discuss shortly. He spends the evening in Bethany and Monday comes back into Jerusalem early to continue displaying Himself for observation for any "blemishes" (Ex12:3-6, Lev23:12, Jn12:1a, 12a) as the "lamb without blemish and without spot." (1Pt1:19) It is said that the -selected- Passover lamb was tied to the altar for four days prior to being killed. Jesus spends these same four days in the temple area.

While He is on display as the "Lamb of God" (Jn1:29) He also comes, symbolically looking for fruit in Israel (vs19, Mk11:13), as He said on another occasion, "Yet when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Lk18:8) Many Believers who anticipate His imminent 'Glorious Appearing', look at the apostasy today, and think of this verse, because it often seems like there is "nobody left" who believes. But while Jesus was on display to see if He was "without blemish", God was also observing His people. Is there anyone righteous? Or are they "-all- gone out of the way"?(Rom3:12) The fig tree withers away, not having fruit on it. In "preparing the way" (3:3) for Christ's introduction, John spoke of bringing forth "fruits worthy of repentance." (3:8) And those who did not measure up, "the axe is laid to the root of the trees." (3:10) The ones not bearing fruit are to be burned up. And so, while Jesus was physically hungry, and it wasn't the season for figs to even be on the tree (Mk11:13), He provides an object lesson. This curse He pronounced upon the tree would also be symbolic of what would happen to Israel, as the Gospel went to the Gentiles (Acts28:28) as Israel would be "broken off" for a season. (Rom11)

He already -knows- the answer to the question. The day before, after He had come in amidst the shouts of "Hosanna...!" He "beheld the city and WEPT over it, saying, If you had known, even you, even at least in this day of yours, the things for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." (Lk19:41-42) As He then prophesies its overthrow. (vs44)

He progresses to the temple where He is 1) questioned and interrogated by the religious leaders (21:23-22:46) Then, He 2) talks to the crowd and

disciples -about- the religious leaders (23:1-12), and 3) proclaims condemnation upon religious leaders (23:13-39)

And closes the day (Monday) when He leaves the temple and 4) talks with the disciples about the future, and duties of faithful servants while He's gone, until He returns. (24:1-25:46) This teaching is intended for - Believers- to understand. The unregenerate will die in their sin (Ez18:24) as judgment will overtake them like a thief. (1Th5:3-4) Those who are not Believers, but pretending to be "Stewards" will spend their time twisting the Scriptures "to their own destruction" (2Pt3:16b), claiming the Scriptures say things different than what God said, and rather than feeding His "household"(24:45) will be disseminating all the demonic filth of the enemy (1Tm4:1), often claiming it to be information for "discernment", and will be "cut apart and [appointed a] portion with the hypocrites." Where there "shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (24:51)

All these things (ch21-25) occur on Sunday and Monday. (26:1-2a)

So, on Sunday Jesus enters Jerusalem. And He does it in a most interesting way. He sends a couple disciples to go "steal" a donkey. (vs2) That, and the reaction of those who owned the donkey... what may have been going on in their minds and hearts? Did they have a dream telling them this would happen, and to trust these "thieves" when they say, "The Lord has need of them"? (vs3) What was the nature of their 'faith'? That is not recorded for us.

But what -is- recorded is that it fulfilled prophecy. (Zech9:9) The Jewish scholars did not understand prophecies like Isa61:2, where the Messiah was One Who was to heal and bind the broken, and to bring peace; but - also- to bring vengeance... That these would be two -different- advents, which we now know are separated by 2000 years. [Just as many today don't seem to understand -two- events for the future return of Christ: 1) appearing & 2) coming, separated by 7 years.] There were many prophecies where Messiah would bring relief from oppression of their enemies, and be victorious in battle; which is what the Jews were looking for, to free them from Roman occupation and domination. But Jesus, Himself, had proclaimed that -this- coming was with regards to Isa61:1-2a. (Lk4:19) Preaching the Gospel, healing the broken-hearted, proclaiming liberty to those held captive to sin, to proclaim "Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation." (2Cor6:2) He came to take on the "form of a servant" (Phil2:7) Thus, His entry and announcement to Jerusalem was "meek and lowly".(11:29,21:5)

He speaks of the "grain of wheat" that falls into the ground and dies, and then brings forth fruit. (Jn12:24) As a -man- He is troubled over the death He is about to undergo and reasons, "Should I say, Father, save Me from this hour?" Well, no, this was the whole purpose for His coming! (vs27) No, rather, "Father, glorify Your name!" And God thunders from heaven, "I

have both glorified it and will glorify it again." (vs28) And Jesus informs the hearers that the voice was for -their- benefit. (vs30)

The people don't understand what He is saying. He is speaking of dying. So they respond, "We have heard that Christ lives forever. How do You say, The Son of Man must be lifted up?" (Jn12:34) All they understood, and knew, was His second coming as military-political deliverer, to sit upon David's -everlasting- throne.

Who is this One coming into Jerusalem? "Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest!" (vs9) Who is this? "Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth of Galilee." (vs10-11) This is what the angels had proclaimed, "a -SAVIOR-, who is Christ the Lord...Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Lk2:11,14)

Let's look at the title again, "Son of David!" Remember our last lesson. The blind men called out to the "Son of David" and Jesus responds, essentially, 'I AM that One.' "Tomorrow" (Monday) He is going to be confronted by, and confronting, the religious leaders. So -all- of Jerusalem is shouting out, welcoming the "Son of David" and giving glory to God "in the highest". "Tomorrow" the rulers are going to ask for His 'credentials'. Under "what authority" are You doing this? (vs23) He will have already authenticated it.

After He tosses out the "den of thieves" (vs13) He is in the temple. Right in the middle of the rulers' 'turf'. His raising of Lazarus from the dead a few days prior is very much on their minds. (Jn12:17) And so now the "blind and lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them." (vs14) If you will, an "in-your-face" demonstration to the rulers; as if to say, 'You hypocrites, are you watching?' You claim to believe the prophets. How well do you remember Isaiah 35:5-6? I'm healing these blind people. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened..." They just called me "Son of David", and you whined, 'don't You hear what they're calling You?' It's blaspheme! (Jn10:32-36) Can't you make them stop?(vs16) You're worried that everybody is following Me, and you are losing your prestige before Rome. (Jn11:48,12:19) Do you need some more -authentication-? Here... watch while "the lame...leap like a deer..."

"But though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they did not believe on Him..." (Jn12:37)

Were you watching? "He who believes on Me does not believe on Me but on Him who sent Me. And He who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a Light into the world, so that whoever believes on Me should not remain in darkness...He who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day...whatever I speak, even as the Father said to Me, so I speak." (~Jn12:44-50)

I'll be back tomorrow and we'll talk...

"And leaving them, He went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there." (vs17)

Credentials please: refused - (Mat 21:23-27)

Jesus has spent the night at Bethany. It is now early Monday morning. Jesus has just cursed the fig tree on His way, arrives at the temple to start teaching, and the "priests and the elders of the people came to Him...and said, By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority?" (vs23)

Yesterday You let them call You "Son of David". On other occasions You have called Yourself, "I AM" (Jn8:58) while claiming to be someone greater than Abraham. But... who are You...really? You're obviously a man. We know You can't be of God, because You don't keep the Sabbath. (Jn9:16) Just who do You think You are??

So, Jesus turns the tables a bit. John's baptism; was it from heaven or from men? If you will answer this, then I will tell you. (vs24)

Remember what we said about Him cursing the fig tree in the last lesson? While it was true that Jesus was on "display" as the Passover Lamb, God is also scrutinizing Israel. Is there any fruit there? And as we continue this chapter, we are going to see Jesus spelling it all out in terms they can understand. (vs45) And so, as Jesus deftly turns the tables, He is in effect letting them know Who's -really- "in charge" of these discussions that are going to progress through the morning. As though to say, 'the question at hand is not -My- credentials, but -your- condition. I am not answerable to you, but you are truly on trial, and under scrutiny.'

The question of the source of John's baptism, and Jesus' "authority" are actually one and the same. The answer to the one, is also the answer to the other. John had retorted, "O generation of vipers.." what are -you- doing here?? "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance." (3:7-8) Now, Jesus is querying about their fruit.

They are stuck between a rock and hard place with this one. They -really- know the answer. But as ever, they are reasoning with their legalistic minds. When they reason as to it being "from heaven" they already feel the guilt of His condemnation, "Why then did you not believe him?" (vs25) And if they proclaim the party-line, having condemned John already...well, this is Feast time, and there are lots of people. They know they are presently, politically, in the minority because "the [whole] world has gone after Him." (Jn12:19)

The politically -expedient- answer: "we -cannot- tell". There! That's nice and "safe" straddling the fence. Plead -ignorance-. Just like modern-day politicians caught in scandals: "I don't remember. I don't know. Not to my knowledge. etc."

Jesus, Who "knows the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb4:12b) responds with -truth- to their question: "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things." (vs27)

No, it's not a matter of you "not knowing". You are resisting the Truth you already know. You are refusing to acknowledge the overwhelming evidence and fulfillment of prophecy. Therefore, 'I also -refuse- to tell you. I will not play your little games...'

Rulers scrutinized: true nature exposed - (Mat 21:28-46)

OK, now it's My turn, and you answer Me...

A man has two sons, and gives them both the same command, "Go to work." The one says "no, I won't" but later regrets his attitude, repents and obeys. The other says, "sure, I'll do it" but doesn't. At the end of the day, which one was obedient? Obvious answer! The one who repented and did the work. Not the one who was all -talk- and no action. You can -see- the results of the obedient one, because you can go to the vineyard and see the -work- he did. (Eph2:10) The one with the cheery disposition and 'promises', makes a good initial impression, comes up empty. No substance.

It's not enough to -talk- about "love and grace", if the life is still indulging in sin. Being legalistic about the "Sabbath" and "KJV" does not cut it either, while condemning those who don't "measure up", if one is not obedient to God from the heart, themselves.

The rulers give Him the correct response. (vs31) Does He complement them on their correct answer? No. "The tax-collectors and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." So harsh He is!!

You didn't want to answer about John's authority. Sinners repented at his preaching. But you didn't. When you saw all this going on, you remained aloof, condemning. You -refused- to believe. And so it is now. e.g. You maintained your 'righteousness' based on KJV-only, and when someone with NKJV or MKJV came along and pointed out that you don't believe in nor preach "repentance", you huffed & puffed, and refused...

Here's another parable....

A certain Master planted a vineyard, got things all set up so it was a successful operation, and left certain ones in charge. Being the "Owner" of the operation, He expected fruit from the harvests. And even though He kept sending His servants, "rising early and sending them" (Jer25:4) the ones 'in charge' kept killing and abusing them. So, finally He sends His Son, the very Representative of His essence. (Heb1:3) And rather than respecting the Son, they contrive to kill Him, not wanting to lose "both -OUR- place and nation." (Jn11:48) You see; they were guilty of the same presumption that many "leaders" are guilty of today. "My" church, "my" ministry, "my" organization, all these under "me", "my" rule and authority. And the "messianists" claim that it -belongs- to 'their' Israel; that Israel is the root, into which everyone must be grafted. Not remembering that -God- is the "Owner" of the vineyard. That Jesus is the "vine" into which the branches are grafted and "abide". (Jn15)

What is the verdict for such rulers? Jesus suckered them right into this one, as they answer, Bad men! He will miserably destroy them, and hand over the property to others. (vs41)

Right on!! "The kingdom of God shall be taken from -you- and given to a nation bringing out its fruits." (vs43)

And this is exactly what happened. After Jesus has been crucified, risen and ascended back into Heaven, these same rulers will persecute the fledgling Church. They will martyr Stephen, after he pronounces judgment on them, "O stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so you do. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you have now been the betrayers and murderers; who received the Law...and did not keep it." (Acts7:51-53) And so, with Israel's rejection of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, God's "vineyard" was taken from them, and given to the gentiles. (Acts28:28,Rom11)

There was NO DOUBT -who- Jesus was speaking of. (vs45) But right at the moment, they didn't have any political clout, because of the crowd of people. The same ones who had called Him "Son of David", which label He authenticated by healing all the blind and lame, and thus demonstrated the "authority" they clamored authentication for, but were too blind to believe. (Jn12:37-40)

Kingdom of Heaven: marriage supper - (Mat 22:1-14)

A certain king made a marriage for his son. Now, as we look at these verses, let's remember that this is a "parable". With parables we only take the "surface" issues. Don't try to connect the dots regarding every last little detail. It's not intended to teach complex doctrine. But to give a "big picture". This parable does not address the son's "bride". Israel was considered as God's "wife". (Hos2,etc) And the Church is Christ's "wife" (Rom7:4,Eph5:32,etc)

However, it does talk about Israel and Gentiles; not as "brides", but as to their -entrance- into the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus is continuing the same theme He has been talking to the rulers about.

Notice: "And he sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they WOULD NOT come." (vs3) When God commissions Ezekiel, notice how He says of Israel, "...whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, for they are rebellious." (Ez2:7) Israel was God's own special people, as Peter writes to the Believers of the Israeli dispersion, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.." (1Pt2:9) They had been called, "kingdom of priests." (Ex19:6) The O.T. is full of remembrances of how God had led Israel, done special signs and wonders on their behalf. But they rebelled at every turn. But "with many of them God was not well pleased.." (1Cor10:5) As He said, "They shall not enter into My rest." (Heb3:11) The underlying cause: their "unbelief." (Heb3:19)

Their attitude was that they WOULD NOT come. They insisted "we -WILL-do" what we want...we -WILL-NOT- listen to God. (Jer44:16-17)

And "he sent out other servants..." (vs4) as He did so "rising early and sending them." (Jer25:4,44:4) And they had excuses of all their earthly cares; and furthermore they mistreated the messengers. So, the king sent his troops and destroyed all those invited. (vs8) And scattered them [Israel] to the winds like stubble. (Jer13:24)

Well, the king needs guests to fill his banquet hall. Those he desired were unworthy. (vs8) So he sends out his servants to find anybody that will come, "both bad and good." (vs10) You see, it's "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." (Tit3:5) There is no such thing as self-WORTH. Those who had been "first choice" rejected Him. So, as Gentiles come in, it is not because we are so wonderful. We are of the "wild olive tree" variety. (Rom11:17) Of no value, except as we are grafted in to Christ. (Jn15)

When we consider the matter of the "timing" of the Rapture of the Church, one of the elements of that date is the "filling" of the wedding hall. How many people does it take? The "king" knows. But Israel's "blindness" will continue until that number, the "fullness", has come in. (Rom11:25b)

Also, notice the necessity to get there the right way. Observe the verdict on the one who didn't have the wedding -garment-. How did you get past the ushers without the right clothing? (vs12) He was "speechless." "...that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may be under judgment before God." (Rom3:19) When a sinner stands before God, not having been justified by Christ's blood, he will not have any answer to give. Salvation comes at God's invitation, and according to His mercy and cleansing.

Jesus invites, "whoever will, come after Me." (Lk8:34) On another occasion when Jesus told a variation of this parable, after the outcasts were invited, there was still "room" for more, so the king sends the servants to "find more" and to "compel" them to come. (Lk14:23) His desire is "SO THAT MY HOUSE MAY BE FILLED."

Israel rejected. God invited the Gentiles. He continues to invite people. If you reject Him, it will be -your- loss. God will continue compelling people until the "Kingdom of Heaven" is "full". If you reject after He invites you, He will find somebody else...

And you will lose out! "Bind him hand and foot and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

For many are called [invited], but few chosen [enter]." (vs13-14)

Pharisees taunt: Caesar or God? - (Mat 22:15-22)

Hey! What's going on here! We're trying to corner Him, and He just keeps coming out 'swinging' demolishing us. He's condemning us, and telling us our authority is flawed, and that somebody else will become the religious elite. Why... He's even suggesting that we won't even get into heaven, that we are not "saved". We need a new strategy! Since He "spots" us right away as being 'evil', let's send somebody in to "pretend to be righteous." (Lk20:20) Let's be real clever, and snare Him in His words, and then we can hand Him over to the Roman authorities. After all, He claims to be the "Son of David". -We're- "in charge" around here! The Romans won't think too kindly of someone claiming to be "king".

"Master, we know that you are true, and that You teach the way of God in truth. Nor do you care for anyone [You don't care what anybody thinks about you], for you do not regard the person of men [You don't play favorites nor are you bigoted]." (vs16) We just luuuuv your ministry, and say "amen" to everything you say. We just get such an absolute blessing from your teaching, and we can't wait each day as we 'live' for your next e-mails, and we forward your postings to all our friends, and they all love them, too. The Lord is just -blessing- your ministry...

Therefore, what's your opinion? "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?" (vs17) We want to hear what you have to say on this...

"Why do you tempt Me, you hypocrites?" (vs18)

Oh, but... Jesus! You are so harsh to them. Weren't You listening? They just said they "agree" with Your teaching, and they "respect" You. Why do You insist on name-calling?

As their mouths opened with their first words of schmaltz, before they ever got to their first breath or finished their first sentence, He -knew- their "wickedness". When this kind of stuff comes as e-mail, you who think you're so 'clever', understand that the Spirit of God pops up the "red flag" even to us who are not "Deity" as Jesus was, but are children of God; because we "have [been given] the mind of Christ." (1Cor2:16) We may sometimes "sense" that something is not -quite- right with your correspondence and will 'wonder' about it, as we may humor you for a few exchanges. We are not able to discern your "soul and spirit" (Heb4:12) like Jesus does, but eventually your 'true colors' are amply manifest. I don't know what others in ministry do, but, while -genuine- encouragement from fellow-Believers is certainly appreciated, many who send these kinds of comments this direction will often be exposed back to themselves as "hypocrites" (as Jesus did) or whatever the occasion calls for.

OK, you want an answer? "Show me the tribute money." (vs19) They bring Him a coin. "Whose image and inscription is this?" (vs20) Caesar's.

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (vs21)

What?? If You're the "Son of David", our "king", You should be leading us to rebel against Roman occupation and rule. After all, we are a "theocracy". If you are the Son of God as you claim, You should be only "heavenly minded". And "taxation without representation is...!" You mean Rome is Rome, and God is God?

The Jews always rebelled against God. When they were autonomous as a nation they resisted His will. When He put them under Roman authority, they rebelled against that. But it was Rome's "authority" for that time. As Paul would say, "there is no authority but of God; the authorities that exist are ordained by God." (Rom13:1) If the governing authority says to pay tax, pay tax. (Rom13:6) If a philanderer occupies the country's highest office, we may reject the -man- as evil, but we still "honor" the -office- he represents (vs7), even if he doesn't.

Equally, give to God what belongs to God. (vs21b) (Which is something you don't do, either.)

"When they heard these words, they marveled..." (vs22) Rats!! He got us again!!

Sadducees taunt: resurrection - (Mat 22:23-33)

Well then, here's a good one....

According to Moses, if a man died without children, his brother was supposed to take his widow and give her children, to continue the dead brother's good "name" and "seed".

Well, as it so happens, there were seven brothers. (A nice 'godly' number, right?) The first married a wife, and died. No children. The next married her. No children. Eventually, all seven married her, with no children. Finally, the woman died. Sooo, now, in the resurrection (which we as Sadducees don't believe in, but You say exists) whose wife will she be of the seven, because they all slept with her? (vs25-28)

Jesus answered, "You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." (vs29)

Now, Jesus! Just wait a minute! Don't You know it's not 'nice' to tell people they're "wrong"? If they actually -are- in error, which hasn't yet been confirmed, You should be more 'diplomatic' with them, so You don't hurt their feelings, or wound their sensitivities. You're basically telling them, flat out, that they, seminary graduates, don't know their Bibles; that they are ignorant. And they, like the pharisees, are not "saved". You should have a little more 'respect' for them with their degrees after their names. Maybe -dialogue- with them. Perhaps if you give them a chance, You'll discover that there are "gray areas" that need -exploring-. And perhaps, You could learn from them, too...and you can all learn from each other. After all, how can we know 'for sure' in matters where there are 'no absolutes'? We shouldn't be so 'proud' as to proclaim that "I'm right and you're wrong." After all, You might be wrong, too, You know. Think of all these people that hang on Your every word, and where You are leading them. That's an awful responsibility. Why can't You just be open to change...

"In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in Heaven." (vs30)

I think Billy Graham forgot about this verse when he suggests, "...Everything you ever wanted for happiness will be there [Paradise]. People say that the Bible teaches there's no sex in Heaven. If sex is necessary for our happiness and fulfillment, it'll be there...If certain other things that we think are pleasurable - it'll be there. ["Graham's Hedonistic Paradise" Calvary Contender, Feb,99 re: Larry King interview] I do know that this verse made me wonder, years ago, how badly I would -really- want to be in heaven, if I couldn't also be married to (what I discovered later to be) my unequal yoke.

Whatever things are like in heaven, sex won't be necessary. And, while I'm sure it's hard to imagine such a thing now, we apparently won't even miss it. "...the things before will not be remembered, nor come to mind." (Isa65:17) If gold, a most prized earthly possession, is the substance of the streets to be -walked- on; by comparison, our pleasure and joy in God's presence will be so great, that marriage relationships will be an incompatibility with our new state. What we consider as pleasures in this life, will be as sorrow in comparison to what God's presence offers.

Now, as for the resurrection, God does not deal in "death". That is Satan's domain. (Heb2:14) Death is the result of sin. (Gen2:17, Ezek18:4, Rom6:23) But God is righteous. His blessing is "life forevermore." (Ps133:3)

If God is the God of "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", they must be "living". Their bodies died. (Gen25:8, 35:29, 49:33) We know that. But if God is a God of the "living", then these three must be living, and their bodies will be resurrected.

Jesus has already -proven- the 'possibility' of -a- resurrection, by raising Lazarus a few days earlier. (Jn11) As He had also done on other occasion/s. (Lk7:15,22) And He, Himself, in a few more days will become the "firstfruit" of those who -will- rise from the dead. (1Cor15:23)

There is a difference between the soul, spirit and body. When a Believer has Christ in them, the "body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." (Rom8:10) When Jesus' body died on the cross, He gave up His spirit to the Father. (Lk23:46)

Thus, we can understand Jesus' seemingly contradictory words. "I am the resurrection and the Life! He who believes in Me, though he die, yet he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." (Jn11:25-26) Even if a Believer dies (physically), he will live because of Jesus at the resurrection. And yet, on the other hand, a Believer never dies (spiritually).

Another interesting thought some people derive from these two verses: the Believer who dies will be resurrected. And at the moment of the resurrection, whoever is living at that time as a Believer will not ever die physically. Which certainly agrees with what Paul says, "we shall not all fall asleep [die], but we shall all be changed." (1Cor15:51) The term coined as the "Rapture".

But the resurrection is a certainty, because God deals in -Life-.

Lawyers taunt: the greatest commandment? - (Mat 22:34-40)

Well, the Sadducees had no success. But His answer was rather "lawyer-esque". A different approach...

"Master, which is the great commandment in the Law?" (vs36)

Jesus is walking all over them. He's condemned them. Has answered their questions with skill, and left them speechless. He has even handled the esoteric ones. Well, let's get right down to business now. Get down to the nitty gritty, and pick Him apart. If we ask Him about the Law, we can certainly wrangle with Him, and find flaws in His 'logic'. And, Heh! Heh! ..with the Law, there's so many of them that tradition has added over the years that we can't even keep track of them all, ourselves.. He can't possibly, either... And, whatever He answers, we can come back with, "Well, what about...??"

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment." You didn't ask for it, but there's more... "The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (vs37-40)

Any question you want to counter with, can be answered by these two.

Think about it... if you truly love God totally, you will do those things that please Him. You will not do anything to disobey. If you truly love your neighbor as yourself, you will not do -to- him anything that you wouldn't want done to yourself; and as you would hope people would look out for your interests, you will do likewise on their behalf.

I've got one for you: whose son is He? - (Mat 22:41-46)

OK! My turn again.... (vs41)

The Messiah [according to your understanding of the prophets]... Whose son is he? (vs42)

David's.

Well, by the moving of the Holy Spirit David says, "Jehovah [Father] said to my Lord [Son], Sit on My right until I make Your enemies Your footstool for your feet" (vs44)

Question: If Messiah is God's "begotten" (Heb1:5,Ps2:7), the "Lord", Who exists prior to David; how is He to be David's "son" at some -future- date?

No answer. "...nor did anyone -dare- from that day to question Him any more." (vs46)

The religious rulers have attempted to scrutinize Jesus, the One proclaimed as the "Son of David", which title He authenticates with the miracles. Politics and pride are at work. If He is here 'now' as "king" that means Rome will no longer recognize -their- "authority". If He truly is Messiah, that means -their- clout over the people is also gone. They will no longer be looked up to by the people.

They have tried to discredit Him every which way they can think of. But every time, He circumlocutes their purpose to "try" Him and bring Him down; and instead, He is putting them "on trial". Remember the fig tree He looked for fruit on, on His way to these meetings earlier in the day? As He had said, "...shall He find faith..?" (Lk18:8) The Lord and Creator of the universe has just tried them, and found them wanting. They keep coming up speechless. They are "under the law" and their mouths have been "stopped" (Rom3:19) as they have been interrogated by God's Son.

When it comes time that they crucify Him, it will be obvious that He is guiltless; but that they are sinful. They will think they have been "successful" in killing Him; but this will have been the precursor of Him "giving Himself" into their hands. (Is50:6) He has answered all their questions, and pointed out Truth to them; and thus, judged them. When they come to take Him, He will further demonstrate that He is "giving" Himself to them, when He bowls them over backwards with His power (Jn18:6-8) illustrating that if He so chose, they would have no power over Him at all.

However, with the interrogations, they will not be able to claim "ignorance". They have received all the signs and wonders and explanations necessary for them to know Him as Messiah. They can't answer Him; but neither are they believing in Him. (Jn12:37)

"And if any one hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him, for I do not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." (Jn12:47-48)

This, now, ends the questions and interrogations between the Jewish rulers and Jesus for the day.

Rabbi/teacher: be a servant - (Mat 23:1-12)

Well... Jesus has publicly humiliated the religious rulers. They're supposed to be the "big shots" around there, but He has made mince meat out of them. It's "stinging" a bit. They are rather "ticked off", to put it mildly. And they are plotting how they might do what to Him. But they fear the people. (Lk22:2)

Suddenly an "ally" shows up from a most unexpected place. Judas, one of Jesus' followers. Judas sees an opportunity to make some money out of them. And he offers to help them find Jesus away from the crowds. (Lk22:6)

But now Jesus turns His attention to the "crowd and to His disciples." (vs1)

OK, people! The rulers "sit in Moses' seat." (vs2) By Jewish heritage and lineage, these people hold the proper "authority". In Jewish culture according to O.T. law, they were both religious and administrative/judicial authorities. Just as we pay taxes to Caesar, "whatever they [these rulers] tell you to observe, observe and do." (vs3) People, submit to them. They are- God's representatives to lead you.

Jesus was making it quite clear that He was not there to "take over". To instigate and lead a rebellion or uprising. Remember? He had come -this- time as "Savior". (Lk2:11) Not as ruler with the "rod of iron". (Ps2:9)

So... -do- what they tell you. But don't follow their examples. They don't practice what they, themselves, preach.

They make all sorts of rules and regulations for -others- to keep; but they remain aloof. The good works they do, they do to be noticed. In previous studies we have noticed how they would sound trumpets ahead of themselves to announce their good deeds. And they know how to pray long and vehemently and are skilled in KJ-eze. They're always seen up on the platform. And since they are "men of the cloth" people notice them immediately, and they love to be called "Rabbi! Rabbi!" Father! Reverend! (vs4-7)

But don't be like them. Don't clamor to be called "Rabbi" because you have One Teacher, Christ. And when He goes back to the Father, Jesus said, the Holy Spirit "will guide you into all truth." (Jn16:13) That because of this "anointing" He "teaches you concerning all things." (1Jn2:27) Don't call anyone "father, papa, pap, pappus" (whatever the language). The "catholic" family of churches calls their leaders "father", and the "reformation/protestant/baptist" family call them "reverend". And if someone is way -high-up- there, it's "holy father" or "the very most reverend". There is only -one- "Holy Father" (vs9, Jn17:11) Who is above all. (Jn3:31, Eph4:6) If a -person- accepts the label "Holy Father" he comes

dangerously close to being like 'the one' prophesied, "who...exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, setting himself forth, that he is God." (2Th2:4) And, indeed, the world renowned -person- with this label -is- looked to by "THE CHURCH", as Scripture and Jesus Christ are rejected, usurped and supplanted.

"But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant." (vs11)

Unlike the rulers, Jesus practiced what He preached. Although being the Son of God and Creator of the universe, He "took on the form of a servant, and humbled Himself to death" (Phil2:5-8) Although being the Creator, and thus "Owner" of all things, He had "nowhere to lay His head." (Lk9:58) And although He was the "Honored One" at the last supper, He performed the lowly servant's job of washing the disciples' feet. (Jn13)

Whoever exalts himself will be abased (humiliated), and he who shall humble himself shall be exalted. (vs12) And this, Jesus was example to, as well. The high-n-mighty rulers had just been humiliated, and in a few more years, would find themselves dead, and their nation dispersed into the world.

But God "has highly exalted [Jesus], and has given Him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil2:10-11))

Therefore, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Do not let each man look upon his own things, but each man also on the things of others. For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Phil2:3-5)

Woes: condemnation of hell - (Mat 23:13-39)

WOE TO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES!

You close up the kingdom of Heaven to men! You don't go in yourselves. And you don't allow others who -want- to go, to get in. (vs13)

Before the more perverted versions have been available in recent years, the catholic "church" has forbidden the reading of Scriptures by its parishioners. Their popes and priests have told them It was too difficult to understand, and so they taught them falsehoods and error, which, if a person believes, they will -NOT- get to Heaven.

Others, like Thomas Nelson publishers, require royalty fees for people to have the privilege of reading their NKJV translation, when there is a desire to post it for public reading, thus, eliminating a certain segment of people who might have otherwise had access to God's Word.

WOE TO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES!

You devour widows' houses, and pray at length as a pretense. (vs14)

'Granny' over here has been a widow for years, but she has this little retirement "nest egg". But your church needs some new fixtures, and you need money to start "your" new radio ministry and to support the staff necessary to do it. We can talk Granny into parting with some of those funds, because we'll persuade her that it's "for the Lord's work" for -her- church.

A church member has been 'recently' widowed, with large debts, and several small pre-school children to try to figure out how to raise on her own. Pastor comes along, "why don't you sell the farm, and then, you could give that money to -our- church." So much for caring for "widows and orphans"!! (Jas1:27)

These same pastors are fluent in KJ-eze, and their Sunday morning prayers last at least 5-10 minutes, because they are "so close to God" and "so spiritual" and they believe in the "power of prayer".

WOE TO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES!

You compass sea and dry land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves (vs15)

You "call" a young man fresh out of Bible school to work in your church for you. He's young, naive and moldable. You teach him to run your programs for you. He hangs on your every word because you appear at first to be a Bible teacher; that when you go into your personal witch-hunts, you have a

ready-made "amen-corner" to whom you can look during your sermons and elicit a positive response to bolster your agenda. And he learns to go out and "do exploits" after your 'footsteps' and become another "in your own likeness". But when he finally "wises up" to you, because he 'actually' -is- a Believer, and has fellowship with the Lord through the Scriptures and comes to realize that what you are all about is wrong, and confronts you with it; you kick him out of 'your' church, with the instruction that if he ever wants to be reinstated, he must come on bended-knee to -you- in repentance.

You have the name "conservative, fundamental, evangelical" and built a name for yourself. You then became the president of a leading seminary with the stated -purpose- as you took on the new position, to soften the school's firm stance on the foundation of Scriptural doctrine, in favor of New Age psychology. In so doing you betray the trust of all those thousands of people who looked to you for solid Scriptural Exposition. The seminary that used to be known for strict adherence to Scripture now produces graduates who no longer know how to be saved, having abandoned the Scriptures as their sole means to God's Truth. As a result, naturally, the people in their churches are on their way to hell.

WOE TO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES!

You pay tithes of [little tidbits], but ignore the weightier matters of the Law, judgment, mercy and faith...Blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (vs23-24)

After service one Sunday, someone tunes the organ for your church, while you push the keys for him. (It takes all of about 10 minutes to do) You later "apologize" to him for having condoned and participated in such "work" on the "Sabbath"... [well, you call it the "Lord's Day" but you 'keep' it like the Sabbath.] But on another occasion when -you- wanted some similar technical help for your phone on the "Sabbath" and you were refused by him, based on your previous -apology- for the previous occasion, you become angry. After all, -you- know all the fine points where to draw the line...especially if -this- time is to your benefit. In -your- case it was "ministry". The other time it was "work". [On the Sabbath tuning an organ is 'work', but sorting out your phone isn't.]

You argue as to how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, but when people say you need to join with pagans for religious unity, and lay doctrine aside in order to do so, you join right in, and become a ring-leader.

"Whoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever shall swear by the gold on the temple, he is a debtor. Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? ...whoever shall swear by Heaven swears by the throne of God, and by Him who sits on it." (~vs16-22)

WOE TO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES!

You cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of extortion and excess. Blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of them may be clean also. (vs25-26)

Because of "purity" and forsaking "lust" you have scolded women and girls under your care if their attire did not meet up to your standards. You have even soundly warmed the bottoms of girls who -accidently- let their skirt rise above their knee. You preached morality and purity to everybody else, and condemn those whom you think to be less than your proclaimed standards. But you, yourself, have a dark secret. You have cheated on your wife, and when confronted with it, you have denied it and attacked your accuser/s, telling them that it is none of their business.

WOE TO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES!

You are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outside, but inside they are full of dead bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so you also appear righteous to men outwardly, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (vs27-28)

A cemetery can be a beautiful, peaceful place. Well-manicured lawns and beautiful flowers, and shiny polished grave stones. I sometimes ride my bicycle at one locally that also overlooks a river valley below, to have some calm and peacefulness. But one does not want to dig up the graves. What's under the ground is grotesque.

When they preach love, grace, and unity, they do so with pious expressions, within nicely decorated and lighted buildings, with comfortable padded pews. They even pump you up to feel good about yourself, boosting your self-esteem. It feels wonderful. But when they exclude the message of the need for repentance, you end up like those bones, because that's what -they- are. Dead and rotten. "..for their worm will not die, nor will their fire be put out.." (Is66:24)

WOE TO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES!

You build the tombs of the prophets, and decorate the tombs of the righteous. (vs29-32)

You claim that you would never do what -they- did centuries ago, when they persecuted Jeremiah, and killed Zechariah. You "love God!" And yet, Jesus knows that -these- He is talking to will be the ones to stir up the people to ask for Barabbas' release, and to crucify Jesus. (Mt27:20) And they will cry out, "let His blood be on us and on our children." (27:25)

But, "Christians" would never do this today, surely! When a True Believer is politicked and ostracised out of a "church", who usually does it? Pastors and leaders. Who conducted the inquisitions? That which called itself "The Church". Oh, but that was/is "Catholic". Surely -Evangelicals- wouldn't do such things? I periodically read little snippets of comments by people in organizations like Promise Keepers, Moral Majority, Kingdom Restorationists, etc. that there is a growing mentality amongst their leaders to the effect that anybody who stands contrary to their agenda might need to be taken out of the way of their 'progress'. They find Scriptures, out of context, to condone their ideologies.

SERPENTS! OFFSPRING OF VIPERS! HOW CAN YOU ESCAPE THE CONDEMNATION OF HELL?

Therefore, behold I send prophets and wise men and scribes to you. And you will kill and crucify some of them. And some of them you will scourge [whip] in your synagogues [churches] and persecute from city to city. (vs34)

These leaders cast the blind man, whom Jesus made to see, out of the synagogue, even while He was still there. (Jn9) And Jesus said to the disciples just before His crucifixion, "They shall put you out of the synagogue. But an hour is coming that everyone who kills you will think that he bears God service." (Jn16:2)

You see, just as it was then, the same rhetoric exists today; and will grow, particularly after the Rapture. And these things will happen "because they have not known the Father nor [Jesus]." (Jn16:3)

While we have attempted to draw some parallels between Jesus' day and our own with these little examples of things that have actually occurred at some point in time in the past, by/to specific people (in some cases, if I inserted names, you would all recognize them), Jesus was heaping up condemnation on the rulers of Israel.

He is on display for Passover. He has come looking for fruit and found them wanting. And now He has proclaimed their true nature and judgment. All the persecution their predecessors have inflicted will be accounted to -them-. (vs36) They will crucify Jesus. And after He leaves He says one of the functions of His followers is IN ORDER THAT they will persecute and martyr them, too. (vs34) As they will shout in a couple days, "His blood be on us, and on our children." (27:25) All the persecution Israel inflicted on any Believers throughout their history was being account to -them-. At that time. This certainly gives augmented understanding to Paul's expression about his own sufferings, "...and I fill up the things LACKING of the AFFLICTIONS of Christ in my flesh.." (Col1:24)

Did Jesus 'enjoy' this? Was this some sort of 'power trip' for Him? 'Hey, I'm in charge now, and I'm gonna zap you all!!!'? No! He weeps over them, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one killing the prophets and stoning those who

are sent to her, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!" (vs37) He was always full of "compassion" for them. This railing He has just done on the rulers backs up His understanding about the rest of Israel, of being as "sheep without a shepherd." (Mk6:34)

He says, "Behold, your house is left to you desolate." (vs38) These woes He has just pronounced, follow up the woes Jeremiah had proclaimed. "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture, says the Lord." (Jer23:1) While God certainly judges Israel for their rebellion, His judgment is harshest against the leaders. The word "Woe" appears eight times in this discourse. More than the traditional "perfect seven." Judgment will be poured out. "Lavished" upon them. Perhaps this explains the historical plight of the "wandering Jew" and such atrocities as this century's "holocaust"!

But He also promises yet to care for the sheep. "I will gather the remnant of My flock...and I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them." (Jer23:3-4)

But for 'now' it is condemnation. You're tested and found wanting. You are going to crucify Me. And, you know what? Next time you see Me you will be proclaiming "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (vs39) And you will mourn as you "look on [Me] Whom you pierced". (Zech12:10)

"And Jesus went out and departed from the temple." (24:1)

Olivet Discourse: when will these things be? - (Mat 24:1-8)

It must be getting along into the afternoon, approaching evening on Monday. Jesus has been 'on display' in the temple area as God's Passover Lamb, and He is now "[leaving] the temple." (vs1) During this day He has been questioned by the rulers; speaks to the people, telling them to obey the rulers; and then denounces the rulers for their hard-hearted hypocrisy.

Now, as He leaves the temple area He is with His disciples. They admire the temple's grandeur, and He foretells its destruction. They question Him, and He then proceeds to describe the future. But notice that this is a more 'intimate' discussion. Not with the crowds. Not with the rulers. But just those who are following Him... Believers. He has just been blasting away at the rulers. Now, with His followers, a time of calmer reflection. During these days Luke (ch21) tells us that He would spend the days teaching in the temple, and at night would stay at the Mt. of Olives. They have now reached the Mt. of Olives and he sits down (vs3); no doubt, tired from the day's debates and teaching; and the disciples gather around Him. Thus, this following teaching (chs 24-25) is often called the "Olivet Discourse".

The disciples ask three questions: 1) When will these things be? 2) What is the sign of Your coming? 3) and of the end of the age? He answers in a different order, and in a different way.

When will these things be? What things? He has just foretold the destruction of the temple. There will be stages to the 'future'. Jerusalem is also going to be destroyed, again. If you have visited the "Morsels" section at the website, you will notice a group designated as "Day of the Lord". If you follow them through, in sequence, or remember when they were mailed out week after week, there is a progression, beginning with the prophets who foretold Christ's coming, His coming to die, His return in vengeance, His rule during the coming peaceful millennium, His destruction of the heavens and earth and bringing about the New Heavens and New Earth. All of these things are called, "the Day of the Lord". The Day of the Lord extends from when He was first born as a human baby, for around 3000 years, until that time when He hands everything back to the Father when the Father will be uplifted as being "all things in all". (1Cor15:28)

There are people who take these following passages and try to construct a year-by-year 'timeline'. But if we understand that Jesus is roughly sketching out the next 3000 years here, in what Matthew records in two chapters (ch24-25) and Luke in one (ch21), we must open our eyes to the realization that Jesus is painting this 'picture' with a 'broad brush' and 'large strokes'. He speaks in generic terms like "this generation" (vs34), "it

is near at the doors"(vs33), "those days"(vs19,22), "in an hour you think not"(vs44), "delays his coming" (vs48), "a long time"(Lk20:9). Many people "strain at gnats" with these passages like a person quality-checking a circuit board under a magnifying glass in an electronics production plant; where, what Jesus is presenting is an "impressionistic" painting. If you are up 'too close', you cannot tell what it is. But if you step back, and look at the 'whole', you see the overall picture more clearly.

As we spend the next couple months of lessons on these passages let us never forget that we cannot "set dates" from them. Jesus said, "But as to that day and that hour, no one knows, neither the angels of Heaven, except My Father only." (vs36) In fact, if somebody comes along claiming expertise and says, "the time has come!" (Lk21:8) Don't go after them. There have been many pied pipers who have made predictions, and those following them have sold everything, climbed a mountain to 'jump' at the prescribed moment...but they were disappointed. Other cults have committed mass-suicide over the matter, to "meet up with" Christ, traveling in a UFO in comets; and all other such stuff.

Some things are sequential. Some overlap. In some cases, some events will happen right in the middle of other generically-progressing events. Many sequential events are known from other Scriptures like Ezekiel, Daniel, 1Cor, 1Ths, Revelation, etc. Other than additional support for what is commonly called by many the "pre-trib rapture", these two chapters don't actually progress necessarily sequentially, except in the very broadest of senses. Thus, we will not treat them as such.

But let us observe one example to prepare our understanding of this "broad" concept; so that when we see similar things in this study, we will understand the prophetic "precedent". Isaiah 61:1-3 outlines in 'broad strokes' the 3000 year period of the Day of the Lord. It begins with Jesus preaching the gospel, healing people, saving people; and continues along with the "day of vengeance" and goes along into the restoration of Israel during His rule, where mourning is turned to joy, and Israel is healed and built back up out of the ashes. The Jews of Jesus' day assumed the -whole- passage foretold of a "specific time" in the generic prophetic timeline. But Jesus read up to "...to proclaim the acceptable year of Jehovah.." and closed the scroll (Lk4:19-21) and sat down to teach and explained how that portion He had just read was -then- being fulfilled. He came to heal and save at -that- time. But He was not yet fulfilling the words about "vengeance" and of Israel's restoration and His kingdom rule. That was Jesus' own explanation of that prophecy; thus, we know it is true.

However, as Jesus came to establish a new covenant with Israel by fulfilling the Passover, they "broke the covenant.[and] acted like traitors..." (Hos6:7) And thus, Hosea speaks of Israel's restoration after 2000 years of being "stricken" (Hos6:1) as they are then raised up "in the third day".(vs2) And so, while there is 3000 years to the Day of the Lord, only the first part

of Is61:1-3 was fulfilled 2000 years ago; even though the whole 3000 years is foretold in those three short verses.

Please remember this example as we progress in Matthew 24-25.

So... the first thing Jesus begins with is, "See that not any leads you astray." (vs4) This is quite important. The wolves and false prophets taunt any Believer who seeks to beware, by accusing them of being "judgmental" and of a "critical spirit". But John warns, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone forth into the world." (1Jn4:1)

"..many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ..." (vs5) Throughout a majority of the past 2000 years there has been a "church" whose leader claims to be "in the place of Christ". His "vicar". The deception has been so great, that when a faction (protestantism) split off from it, many followed after the faction, assuming that since it was a break-away from the false, that -it- was Christ's "Church". But they were merely two sides of the same coin. And the churches from this second lineage follow many of the same patterns established by the first; including the exaltation of the one who inhabits the "altar" area, and various symbolisms and rituals. Whatever he says, goes. And in some cases, this -man- from the altar area expiates the sins of the whole congregation, in view of the title "Reverend" which he possesses. As though he were Christ. Thus, both sides are false. And so, people are deceived, because many of the faction's leaders are considered to be "great men of God"; thus, people read -their- writings instead of Scripture.

You see, that is the most clever form of deception; to have what is quite clearly false, and then contrive something which appears to be in contradistinction to that false thing, thus, persuading people that it (the new entity) 'must' be the truth. When, in reality, it is just as false as the original entity it claims to expose. But, because the deceptions are more subtle and -contain- truth, they are more difficult to see and expose. They proclaim "Sola fide", justification, propitiation, grace, etc. All the basic correct doctrines...but have closed up the 'door' which gains a person access to those doctrines... "repentance". [Ed: As review of this concept, please see the Aug,99 commentary "The Gospel of Jesus Christ..? a most clever deception"]

"..you are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See, do not be terrified. For all things must take place, but the end is not yet." (vs6) Throughout this time there have been wars, inquisitions, rebellions, revolutions. Even during WWII, many said that Hitler was the antichrist. Well, like Jesus said, that wasn't yet "the end" was it.

"..famines, plagues and earthquakes.." (vs7) The "potato famine" of Ireland, the "black plague" of earlier years. There was polio. Today it's Aids. And at various times during the past century, even, there has always

been -some- part of the world where people are starving to death by the multiplied thousands. And in spite of modern technology, there are new strains of viruses that have developed themselves to be immune to medicines, and there are no cures. Earthquakes are proliferating.

Jesus said that all these things "must take place." But "all these are a beginning of throes." (vs8) What does that mean? It's like birth pangs. Paul speaks of judgement/wrath coming like "travail to the pregnant woman." (1Th5:3) The woman experiences pregnancy for 9 months. She gets bigger and bigger. There is discomfort of various forms and intensity along the way. And finally, it's "time" to give birth, and the -real- 'sorrow' (vs8 mkjv) comes. But when the final judgment comes, all that led up to that moment will be as nothing compared to the "throes" (spasms, agony, struggles) of the moment. The pangs of birth, and everything associated with it, are so severe that some women die in the process. And so Jesus says about the time that is coming, "..except those days were shortened, not any flesh would be saved.." (vs22)

Thus far since Jesus spoke these words, the world has had a 2000-year 'pregnancy'. The 'birth' is yet to come!

Olivet Discourse: ***tribulation*** - (Mat 24:9-22)

"Then they will deliver you up to affliction and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name." (vs9)

This word "then" has caused many to suggest that the persecution in vs8-10 is some future event. That the Church-age goes up to vs8, and then the "tribulation" starts at vs9. That -we- as the "Church" need to get prepared for the 'coming' persecution. However, when we see Lk21:12, we see that "before all these" (wars, famines, earthquakes) is when this persecution occurs. Remember our introduction to these passages as being like the 'impressionistic painting'. As though to say, "over here we have ???. And 'then' over there is ???". Or, put another way, "Here we have this section, and 'then' there's this other section." The word "then" not necessarily indicating "-now- something occurs, and -then- [after that, in time] the next thing occurs." But more the idea of, "Let's look at this...then...let's look at that."

If we look at history, and read books like Fox's "Book of Martyrs" we can see clearly that events like these have already occurred during the few centuries after Christ spoke these words. And even when the Catholics and Protestants were fighting amongst themselves centuries later, they -both- were persecuting True Christians and Jews. While we "Christians" look at these words as being "Christian persecution", let us not forget the "Jewish" part of the equation. Who, more than the descendants of Israel, have been despised by "all nations". Jesus was speaking to His 'Jewish' disciples, who were asking about the destruction of their 'Jewish' temple. He is answering their 'Jewish' questions.

When we read Lk21:12, we see a foretaste of what actually happened later in Acts. The apostles were dragged before the Jewish religious leaders in the temple. As the (Jewish) missionaries travelled about, they always first went to the synagogues to proclaim Christ. And it was the -Jews- from those synagogues who continually chased Paul around, harassing him, beating and stoning him. And it was Paul who appealed to Caesar, and in the process of getting to Rome, spoke before various "kings and rulers". And in more recent times, when a missionary goes into an area, who do they often communicate with? Village -chiefs-, and other such rulers. But the fact that persecutions is an ongoing thing is obvious.

We see vs11-12 today. Many false prophets rising and causing many to err. That's what the whole charismatic prophetic "new revelations" is all about. And "lawlessness shall have been multiplied, the love of the many will grow cold." (vs12) That's precisely what we see today. Mothers putting their own babies in plastic bags and smothering them to death. Tying them in cars, and driving the cars into lakes to drown them. Just recently (as this

is written in the beginning of October) in my city, a mother killed her own child, in her driveway, with a kitchen knife. People have been killing people since Cain slew Abel. But now, that which has always been considered the strongest bond, of "mother and child"... that love is "cold". And why not! They've been killing the unborn for decades by the millions!!

But Jesus interjects a little note of encouragement. "But the one who endures to the end, that one will be kept safe." (vs13) Notice how most Rome-based translations have the "enduring" -resulting- in "BEING saved". We know that salvation is by "grace through faith..not of works." (Eph2:8-9) Paul affirms God's safe-keeping of His own, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution...for I am persuaded that [nothing]...will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord." (Rom8:35,38)

I receive periodic e-mails from "baby" Christians, or ones who are just now realizing the nature of the apostasy, and are coming out of it. They express the "confusion" from all that they are bombarded with. Some receive taunts and abuse for holding true to God's Word. I think about how many years I've been a Christian, and think to all those years I was deceived within the system, and within my own spirit I 'shudder' to consider what it must be like for some of them. I was well-versed in the Scriptures, and yet was deceived...they are just now getting started in God's Word.

But notice Jesus' encouragement. It is not necessarily the one who knows it all, but the one who "endures", remaining "firm, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord..." (1Cor15:58) Not caving in to the deception and being led away. Happily, the Lord knows the heart. (Heb4:12) So He is able to keep the pure one, providing the necessary support. (Heb2:18) When the going gets rough, if you turn tail and run, and deny the Lord, He has promised to also deny you. (Mt10:33) But if you remain true to Him, no matter what, you will be "kept safe". Now, if He was promising "being killed"(vs9), this "kept safe" is for Eternity, isn't it! "Everlasting life" (Jn3:16) "And you should not fear the ones killing the body, but not being able to kill the soul." (Mt10:28a)

Now, this, could refer equally to past, present and future.

And then, "this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the earth for a testimony to all the nations, and then will come the end." (vs14) However, this, now, appears to be future. We do not presently preach the gospel of the "Kingdom". The "gospel" Paul proclaimed, which we preach, is the "Gospel of Jesus Christ". (1Cor15:1-4) While modern missionary efforts are to be commended as they fulfill the 'Great Commission' (Mt28:19-20), I do not believe they are what Jesus is talking about here. This is the gospel of the Kingdom. A "Jewish" entity. Could it be that the 144,000 who are sealed of the tribes of Israel (Rev7:4;14:1-5), and the angel "having an everlasting gospel to proclaim to those dwelling on the earth" (Rev14:6-7) are the fulfillment of this little bit?

"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (the one reading, let him understand), then let those in Judea flee into the mountains..." (vs15-16)

There is a belief called "preterism" that maintains this has already been fulfilled; and thus, -all- these prophecies have been fulfilled. That when Roman came in 70AD and desolated Jerusalem, and people fled, some even holding up in Masada until 73AD, that all prophecy has been fulfilled, and we have now been living in the 'spiritual' kingdom.

In considering the "abomination of desolation" many thought that Antiochus IV Epiphanes ("god manifest"), who stopped the sacrifices in 169BC was the one prophesied (Dan11:36), which Paul amplifies with "proclaiming that he himself is God." (2Th2:4) Or that Pompey entering the 'Holy of Holies' in 63BC was the one "standing in the holy place". And in at least one of these occasions (or both?), the invaders actually desecrated God's altar by sacrificing an ("unclean") pig on the altar.

But, the fact that there is yet a future element to this -has- to become obvious, because they fail to notice one aspect of Daniel's prophecies. He speaks of "seventy weeks" (Dan9:24) regarding Israel and Jerusalem. The 69th week was completed when Jesus was crucified. (9:26) And then 26b tells of Jerusalem's destruction in 70AD by the Romans... "the people of the ruler who SHALL COME.." And then, that ruler will "confirm a covenant with many for one week". (9:27) According to the previous verses, that week is a group of 'seven years'. The "70th week" of the "seventy". And notice that it is "in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease.." and he goes on to speak of the "desolating abomination"

There has never yet been such a period of time, of "seven years". Thus, we have to understand that there will come another surrounding of Jerusalem when its inhabitants will flee for their lives. Which matter is confirmed for us in Rev12:14, where it speaks of Israel's safe-keeping in the "wilderness" for three and a half years. Masada was only about two or three (?) years, and they all committed suicide.

While Lk21:24 seems to point to 70AD, where Israel was scattered "into all nations"; Mt24:15 in referencing Daniel, points to the future. Again, remember that 'impressionistic painting' we illustrated, and the fact that this entire passage is covering 3000 years with broad brush strokes. It is talking about "Israel". The destruction of Jerusalem at 70AD, and the coming 70th week, if we remove the intervening years of the gentiles, and put them together...overall, they look to be close together in a prophetic sense. So, Jesus could easily have been talking about -both- in the same sentence. Again, remember Is61:2.

The fact that the primary thrust is -future- is borne out.. "For there will be great affliction, such as has not happened from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever will be." (vs21) It will be the worst time of affliction the world will ever experience. Certainly Jerusalem's demise in 70AD was tragic, but such things had happened previously, and to many nations since. We might think the Holocaust during WW2 was worse, thus, 70AD was not it. Whatever it is, the nature of it is so terrible that, if God did not put a stop to the events as they will unfold, "not any flesh would be saved." (vs22) This word "flesh" referring to -all- living creatures, man and animal.

It will be a time when "the powers of the heavens will be shaken." (Lk21:26b) The time when the "dragon" is cast to the earth, and wreaks havoc in "great anger" (Rev12:12) as it is proclaimed "Woe to the ones dwelling on the earth...because the Devil came down to you.." When one reads in Revelation, putting the several accounts together, one realizes that before all is said and done, over half the earth's population will have been annihilated.

Even of Israel, only a third will survive alive. (Zech13:8-9) But -because- of Israel, God's "elect" (Mt24:22), God has "shortened" those days. Israel will have been purified as gold, as God will again call them "My people". (Zech13:9)

Olivet Discourse:

His coming - (Mat 24:23-31)

"Then if anyone says to you, Behold, here is the Christ! Or, Here! Do not believe. For false christs and false prophets will rise up. And they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I tell you beforehand." (vs23-25)

What could be greater than the "Moving of God!" The "outpouring of the spirit" as it "flows over the world!" People coming under the "anointing" and "power" of "the Lord" as they "yield themselves" to him. And as all this happens, "God's power" is manifest as "He does new things" in ways not done before. What we need to do it step aside and see what new things "God" is working. We -know- it is the "Holy Spirit" because we can "feel" it. "He" lays us flat as we are "slain in the spirit" and we receive our "heavenly language". People are healed, and covered in the gold of the anointing. The ones who lead in this are being raised up as "apostles and prophets" ...so-ordained by "the Holy Spirit".

There are various ones who have been rising up, calling themselves "Christ" returned in the flesh. There are apparitions of all sorts. All sorts of things in the realm of the 'miraculous'.

All the "signs and wonders". All that we are seeing today is merely the beginning of what will be. With all these miracles happening around the world, how can it -not- be the hand of God?! People have -seen- it. They've -experienced- it. If it has been -experienced-, it must be so... right? They said the same thing about Simon, the conjurer, "This one is the power of God, which is great." (Acts8:10)

Jesus says, when all these things happen "Do not believe." Those who follow these things are being "led astray". And Jesus warns, "Behold, I tell you beforehand." You are forewarned. Do not be deceived.

For all of these miracles that proliferate, nothing will be like when Jesus - actually- comes. "For as the lightning comes forth from the east and shines as far as the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man." (vs27)

Now, to be sure, satan will be imitating that, too. Recently someone sent an e-mail account of one of these false-prophet meetings. During the service, the people inside the building saw a great thunder storm, dark clouds, lightning, and rain. But when the service was over, and people went outside, there was no sign of it having rained outside. No indication that there had been a thunderstorm during that time. You see, the antichrist will also be imitating Christ's coming. The "beast" "..even causes fire to come down out of the heaven onto the earth before men. And it

deceives those dwelling on the earth because of the signs which were given to it to do..." (Rev13:13)

When Christ comes, there's going to be lots of "dead bodies" (vs28) with birds gorging on the 'feast'. (Rev19:17) The nations will have all been gathered at Israel (Rev16:14-16), and Christ will come like lightning and "zap" them all. (Rev17:14,19:11-21)

You see, also, when Christ comes there's going to be astronomical upheavals happening with the sun, moon and stars. (vs29) Whatever causes all this will cause the oceans to heave. (Lk21:25) And such a large earthquake like has never been before (and there have been some big ones) that all the islands will sink out of sight. (Rev16:20) These are the days foretold by Joel, "blood, and fire, and columns of smoke." (Joel2:30) In that day, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low...and the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of Jehovah has spoken." (Is40:4-5) And when the world sees it "[all] together" I seriously doubt it will be via TV or internet; as Pat Robertson made a boast a few years ago about having his TV cameras at the Mt. of Olives as he "welcomes" Christ back. All those media will have been destroyed by that point. If He comes and appears like lightning; if we understand that light can circle the earth seven times in a second, it is so fast...it will be as nothing for the Lord to encircle the earth in such a way that all humanity can see Him at the same time.

When Christ comes in the way He does, all these other false signs and wonders will be as 'nothing'. He will come "with power and much glory". And "all the tribes [all humanity] of the land will wail." (vs30)

Christ will be coming "and all the saints with You." (Zech14:5) "Saints" are "holy" ones. Those who have, prior to this occasion, believed into Jesus Christ (including the Church). And so He comes, sends His angels to "gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the heavens to their ends." (vs31) The ones being "gathered" are obviously -different- from the ones coming -with- Him. These elect ones are not -yet- believers. They are God's "elect" ...Israel.

When He comes, He will gather Israel yet in unbelief. He "foreknew" Israel in their unbelief, and preserved them, not "thrusting them away". (Rom11:2) He foreknew -them- and elected -them-. ".for Israel My elect, I entitle you. I name you, but you do not know Me. I am Jehovah, and there is none else; there is no God except Me. I will clothe you, though you do not know Me," (Is45:4-5)

It is -Israel- that was scattered "as the stubble that passes away to the wilderness wind." (Jer13:24) Thus, Jesus uses the same terminology regarding collecting them, -Israel-, back from those "winds" to which they were scattered. And we are told, further, that while God is gathering them

in unbelief, God is going to "cut a new covenant with the house of Israel...I will put My law in their inward parts, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Jer31:31-33)

No! Mt24:31 is -not- the rapture of the "Church".

See Also Addendum: "Resurrection and Christ's Elect"

Olivet Discourse: ***when will it happen?*** - (Mat 24:32-35)

Learn the parable of the fig tree: When its branch becomes tender and it puts out leaves, you know that the summer is near; so also you, when you see all these things, know that it is near at the doors. (vs32-33)

OK. We're back to the question the disciples asked originally. Remember how He begins by saying that all the bad stuff was only the "beginning of throes." (vs8) But that "the end is not yet." (vs6) In the next chapter He is going to talk about the duties of His followers during the "long time" (Lk20:9) that He is away, "preparing a place". (Jn14:2) They thought, because He was there 'now', that the "kingdom of God was immediately to be revealed." (Lk19:11)

So He says, essentially, Yes, things will be quite rough for a long time. But it's not yet -the- "time". And then paints various parts of that 'painting' we spoke of previously. We know what the 'continual' conditions will be: wars, rumors of wars, famines, etc. Then, we know what His return will be characterized by. The parable of the fig tree is a lesson in how things progress. We know the seasons by observation. When plants are budding and putting forth leaves, we know we are in the spring time, going into summer. When leaves turn yellow, red and brown, we know that fall is here, and that winter follows soon. When will the first 80-degree day occur? We don't know. But we can know it's soon as we watch the plants grow. When will the first snow fly? We don't know the date, but as the trees are all bare of their leaves, and the winds are blowing cold, we know we had better have the house prepared for winter. And as we stick our nose out the door, we can "smell" that storm coming, feel the 'crisp air' and we know it's "soon".

In the same way, as we read the Scriptures, read all the prophecies of what is to come, and see how the world is progressing and lining up with Scripture, we also know that Christ's return is close, "at the doors." We're not going to discuss at this point in the study what all these indicators of His "soon" return are; we have done so numerous other times.

But -come- they will. And His return is -sure-. What can be more sure than the sun rising every morning and setting every evening? Well, Jesus says that "the heaven and the earth will pass away." (vs35) And Peter tells us how this will be so, with great noise and heat as they are burned up. (2Pt3:10)

"..but My words will not pass away, never!" (vs35b)

And 'when' will these events occur? "In no way will this generation pass away until all these things have occurred." (vs34) What does "generation"

mean? It can mean anything from "the whole of humanity" to specific periods of years, as represented by the time from father-to-son, and from that son to the son he fathers; generation after generation. Some view a generation as 30-33 years. Others, 40 years. Gen15:16 seems to indicate a period of 100 years.

Somehow it doesn't seem to make sense that He would be saying the "whole of humanity" because these events include and involve humanity. It would be somewhat silly to suggest that judgment of humanity is going to occur, if humanity is already gone.

Some sort of time-frame would -seem- to make more sense. But 'how long' a generation is He speaking of? And at what date does "this" generation begin? If we don't know the "day and hour" (vs36) of His return, we can't very well know when that generational period begins, either, can we. But we do see ourselves living during a time when Israel has become a nation again, in their original geographic location. We live in a time when "knowledge [has] increased" (Dan12:4) and people "run to and fro." All the things written in Revelation have all the preparations 'in place' and 'ready-to-go'. We hear the rumblings almost daily as nations are getting situated for Gog/Magog (Ezek38-39) and the "kings from the east". (Rev16:12) As we observe the "fig tree" it seems -quite- apparent that we, now, are part of -that- 'generation' when these things will be fulfilled.

But as we are in that generation, Jesus assures... It WILL happen!

Olivet Discourse: ***watching for His return*** - (Mat 24:36-44)

"But as to that day and that hour, no one knows, neither the angels of Heaven, except My Father only." (vs36)

Back to that 'painting'... I'm not an artist, but I find it fascinating to watch artists do chalk drawings or paintings. Invariably, as the artist has the finished product in mind, they will often have these "blobs" sitting some place, with "no apparent reason" for its being there. Particularly, if the artist is telling a story while drawing, like missionary chalk artists would do, they will purposely leave that "blob" and work all-around it, keeping the suspense up as to "what will become of that blob". Until the final touches are laid down, that blob seems "out of place".

Prophetically we have Daniel speaking of "70 weeks". (Dan9) We know there is yet a period of "seven years" which is somehow divided in the middle. We know that from the middle of those years there will be 1290 & 1335 days. (Dan12:11-12) We see similar types of numbers in Revelation dealing with three and a half years. (Rev12:14) And 42 months. (Rev11:2,13:5) And so, if a person knows when the man of sin "confirms the covenant" and sees the "desolating abomination" in that context, then, all they have to do is count the days to when Christ returns. It's kind of a "no brainer".

But Jesus says, "as to that day and that hour, no one knows..." (vs36) Notice the wording carefully. Notice that He doesn't say that no one knows when the judgments He's just been talking about, will occur. "...that day and that hour.." What is -that- day? What is -that- hour? (What is -that- "blob"?)

He is talking about "the coming of the Son of Man" (vs37) and "what hour your Lord comes." (vs42) Up until this point Jesus has been talking about 'them' and what's happening 'out there' ...to the world. How the "tribes of the earth" and "they" will see His coming "with power". He has warned His followers not to be deceived 'by -them-' (false prophets).

But now He is talking to the disciples about "-your- Lord". This is easily a companion passage to Jn14:3, "...I am coming again and will receive -you- to Myself.." As we have noted on other occasions, two different events; His "appearance and His kingdom". (2Tm4:1) When He comes "with power" it will be to set up His "kingdom". The "gospel" that will have been proclaimed just prior to that will be the "gospel of the kingdom" (vs14) But He is now talking about the culmination of the gospel of Jesus Christ. (1Cor15:1-4) That's the Gospel the Church proclaims; the Church, being His bride. (Eph5:32) In the midst of this 3000 year 'painting', here is this 'blob' often called the "Rapture".

We know this is so, because the focus has changed. Up until now He has been speaking of all sorts of catastrophes and carnage. Now He's talking about Noah going into the ark, where he and his family were 'saved' out of the flood. (vs38) He speaks of being "counted worthy to -escape- all these things which are about to happen.." (Lk21:36) He tells the "faithful church" that He will "keep you out of the hour of trial which is going to come on all the habitable world in order to try those dwelling on the earth." (Rev3:10) Try "those"... not "you" the -faithful- Believers.

This is the event we don't know the "day and that hour". It will occur when the rest of the world seems to be going along "as usual". "Eating, drinking, being married." These things the world finds most important to its existence. (vs38) It is in this context He describes, "Two will be [doing whatever they do]" and "one is taken away, and one is left." The Believers will simply be "caught up..in the clouds to a meeting with the Lord in the air.." (1Th4:17) Sodom had nary a clue that they were about to be destroyed. They continued in their debauchery, even to not recognizing the angels who came to rescue Lot, wanting to include them in their perversions; they engaged in commerce and farming, as usual. Lot and family were dragged out to safety, and THEN destruction came. (Lk17:29)

We are instructed to "Watch, then, for you do not know in what hour your Lord comes." (vs42) If we are Believers, why do we need to watch? Why does it matter, if we don't know 'when' it will be? If we are Believers, whenever He 'gets around to it' He will come and take us. Big deal! ..??

He illustrates the "thief" who "digs through" into the house. In this case the thief is not coming right in the front door, and breaking in the windows. He's sneaking in from underneath, trying to be undetected. Coming through the "foundation". This is another warning against deception. Remember how the false prophets will be so clever with their Christian "look-alike" signs and wonders, if it were possible to deceive "even the elect." They are digging through the "foundations" of Scriptural doctrine. As they dig through, they are "casting aside" what they dig. Throwing it away, trying to get -at- the true Believers; trying to steal away and destroy what they have.

If you still hold to "once saved, always saved", please understand what Jesus is saying here, and rethink your position. Why do you suppose Jesus says so often to not be deceived,(vs23) if it doesn't matter? God's "eternal security" is effective upon those who "endure to the end". (vs13) He has saved them "by grace through faith" (Eph2:8) and "not by works of righteousness..." (Tit3:5) They will be "kept safe". But He warns against being "led astray". (vs4) Paul repeatedly warns in his epistles about not being deceived.

As it draws closer and closer to the time when the Lord returns for His Church, you can be sure that satan also can see the "fig leaves" and he

knows what season we are approaching. He continually "digs" and pushes and tries every which way to pull Believers away from God. But even he doesn't know that "day or hour".

Therefore Jesus uses the word "watch". (vs42) This word does not mean, merely, to be 'standing at the windows, waiting to -see- Him appear on the horizon'. "Do you see Him yet? Is He here yet?" Like the children eagerly waiting for Grandma and Grandpa to drive up the driveway. No. The word means to be "on guard". Watching like a sentry. Being "ready". (vs44) We are in warfare against "the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenlies." (Eph6:12b) As all the 'signs and wonders' proliferate to attempt to lure us away from God's Word, we are to "test the spirits, whether they are from God.." (1Jn4:1) Guarding our "house" that it not be broken into; and that when the floods come along, the foundation is still in tact so the house does not fall. (Mt7:24-27)

By the way...

For those of you who have been following the false prophets who proclaimed that 1993 was the date, on the White House lawn, when the "covenant" was signed between Israel and the PLO, and are expecting Jesus "second coming" in 2000... that obviously was not it was it. There wasn't anything for three and a half years where Israel was hiding out in the wilderness right now. But for the rest of you, were it to be the case that the Lord should come in 2000 to receive His own (in the rapture), you can be sure that these false prophets will resort to their interpretations, and proclaim that the "wicked" ones were the ones -taken-, and those going into the "kingdom" were -left-.

Do not be deceived!

Olivet Discourse: ***faithful servants*** - (Mat 24:45-51)

"My brothers do not be many teachers, knowing that we will receive greater judgment." (Jas3:1)

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his Lord has set over His household, to give to them the food in season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord shall find so doing when He comes." (vs45-46)

Most of Jesus' warnings are about the "false prophets" who come as "wolves in sheep's clothing". (Mt7:15) And as Paul convened a conference near Ephesus, he warns the same thing. (Acts20:29) He says these wolves will come both from the outside (vs29) and "from your own selves". (vs30) And Paul's warnings were "night and day with tears." (vs31)

And as they warned, so do we. Typically, people don't like so much "negativity". They want to be "happy, happy!" But a good portion of Scripture is "warning" against being led astray.

Jesus is talking to His disciples. Having a 'private' conversation. These men in a few weeks will become the leaders of what becomes the "Church". So He's giving them some pastoral exhortation. Paul warned the conference near Ephesus, "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased through His own blood." (Acts20:28)

What is the duty of the 'shepherd'? To "grow a church"? To oversee the construction of fine buildings? To organize campaigns and programs?

Paul says, "feed the church of God." Jesus says "to give them the food in season." What is this "food"? "...preach the Word, be urgent in season, out of season, convict, warn, encourage with all long-suffering and teaching." (2Tm4:2) "Until I come, attend to reading, to exhortation, to teaching." (1Tm4:13) Give attention to yourself and to the doctrine; continue in them, for doing this, you will both deliver yourself and those hearing you. (vs16)

What an awesome responsibility God's ministers have! It is not something one goes into because they think it will be a "cush job". It is something God calls a person to do. And if we consider that he is to feed, teach, convict, warn, encourage...we see the warnings given to Ezekiel of the "blood" that is on one's hands, depending on the kind of warning given.(Ez33) Paul writes that ministers of Christ are "stewards of the mysteries of God" and as such, the primary quality of such a servant that is required, is to "be found -FAITHFUL-." (1Cor4:1-2)

Faithful to whom? Who is his "boss"? The church council? The church's denominational hierarchy? No. The servant is one "whom his Lord has set over His household." (vs45) It is the Lord's flock. It is the Lord's call upon the servant. And... it is the Lord's -message-. Jesus sets out the nature of the rewards to the faithful servant. (vs47)

However, there is a stern warning for the unfaithful (wicked) ones. Notice the context of the "wicked servant". (vs48) Notice the -message- the wicked servant proclaims. "My Lord delays to come..."

And, indeed, this is what we see today! Aside from the whole set of charismatic doctrines that are the foundation for the false signs and wonders, there are two essential doctrines being maligned in these days. They are not proclaiming "repentance"; and they are saying that the Lord's return will not be as He said it would be. They are proclaiming that the Lord is -not- coming to take His Church, but rather, that they are preparing the church for the Lord to come and rule over...a church of -their- contrivances. You see, Christ foretold today's error in this warning. Not only does He have it all planned as to 'when' He is coming, He also has already told us what errors to watch out for before He does come.

This rejection of what is commonly called "pre-trib rapture" is a -tide- of apostasy. -MANY- of those occupying the pulpits, who used to proclaim it, are now "falling away". It is of epidemic proportions! Many excuse their unbelief by saying things like, "I'd rather be safe than sorry" ...thus, preparing "just in case" the 'pre-trib rapture' was wrong. Such attitudes highlight the person's unbelief. But it is important enough that Jesus made a special point of warning us against this -specific- error! Notice: the "crown of righteousness" goes to the "ones loving His appearance" (2Tm4:8) Not, the "kingdom" (2Tm4:1)

If you know better, and are having troubles accepting the fact of His appearance, reverse-logic would suggest that which is in your heart. "You will know them by their fruits." (Mt7:16a) "Fruits" can include a whole host of things besides -just- those things listed in Gal5:22-23. When Jesus promises to come to receive the Believers to Himself (Jn14:3), and a person says they don't believe it, and are preparing to go through God's judgment, such "works" (Jas2:18) pretty much declare the person's heart as being in Unbelief!

Many of -you-, reading this, are ones who proclaim and teach. Some of you have been deceived, and need to confess and return to faithfulness to God's Word.

Others of you know better. You are false prophets. For some reason you seem to think you are a "Christian" and on your way to heaven... eventually... after you've been "refined" (contrary to Scripture) in the coming time of judgment and wrath. But hear what Jesus says is in store for you...

"the Lord of that slave will come in a day in which he does not expect and in an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in two, and will appoint his portion with the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (vs50-51)

Olivet Discourse: getting into Heaven - (Mat 25:1-13)

Since this passage was already addressed back in January, 97 as a Commentary, "5 Wise - 5 Foolish", I'm going to insert that writing here in this series, and make a few modifications for this study.

Let us take a brief look at Jesus' parable of the 10 virgins. And, as is appropriate with parables, we look at the primary surface (obvious) issues illustrated, not attempting to teach doctrine from all of its little details. [Ed: ...like we began our understanding of chs24-25, of the "broad brush" strokes of the 'impressionistic painting'.] He's not describing the "bride" or the Jewish traditions of who the virgins might have been. This parable talks about getting into heaven, and what it takes to "get in".

All 10 virgins had lamps. They had the label that they "belonged." They all APPEARED to be "Christians."

But you notice, only 5 had oil with them. Oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The 5 foolish, "taking their lamps, did not take oil with them"(vs3), were Not Christians. "Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." (Rom8:9b)

The announcement was made, "Behold the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" Jesus said, "Now when these things BEGIN TO happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."(Luke 21:28) What are "these things?" To anybody with open eyes, we see prophecy being fulfilled right and left as things are prepared for what is to happen, as foretold, during the time of God's wrath and judgment upon the world.

So, the 'proof' of having the Holy Spirit (oil) is when the wick can be brought to flame. Jesus said of Believers, "you are the light of the world". (Mt5:14) How do we know there is true faith? When something is manifest in the outworkings. (Jas2:17-18) And so, as the Lord returns for His own, the outworkings are tested to see of what sort they are. (1Cor3:13) In the case of a lamp, if there is -no- oil, there isn't going to be any flame, is there. There is -no- "work", good or bad, to manifest the Faith. There is no work, because there is no Holy Spirit. But there is the -perception-, because they are carrying the lamp.

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, it says that the appearance was like "tongues of fire". (Acts2:3) Can you grab a 'tongue' of fire and put it in a box? Can a flame be contained? Jesus explained the Holy Spirit like the "wind blowing". (Jn3) You cannot see the -actual- wind. You cannot take a 'piece' of wind and put it in a container. But you see it is there, because the grass is leaning, flags are fluttering and you wrap your jacket around you

tighter to keep warm. If the flag isn't fluttering, there is no wind. If a flame cannot be ignited in a lamp, there is no oil. The person is minus "light". If all you have is a lamp, but no Holy Spirit, your "light" is no -light- at all; you might as well be carrying a flashlight without any batteries, all the good it will do you. When a person is minus the Holy Spirit ".how great is the darkness!" (Mt6:23)

The wise keep preaching to the foolish to "get oil"; "repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk1:15) and "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts2:38b) Now, in our 'impressionistic painting' the way people back then could get oil, was to go "buy" it. Jesus says to today's "church" "..I advise you to buy from Me gold having been fired by fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, and your shame and nakedness may not be revealed. And anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see." (Rev3:18) And so, people go about "buying"; stock-piling -physical-supplies to "go through the tribulation". But you see, what Jesus offers "for sale" is "with no price". (Is55:1) It is "a gift of God, not of works." (Eph2:8-9)

You see...these people have heard the midnight cry, and rather than having the Holy Spirit, and looking for Christ, are back in the villages buying up what they think they need. And while they are thus engaged, the Bridegroom comes (appears) and the Wise (with the Holy Spirit) follow Him in to the banquet hall.

"And the door was shut." (vs10) And then the foolish come along, discovering they were wrong, and too late. And the Lord says, "Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you."(vs12)

So... you were wrong, and the Rapture happened, and you are left behind? You might think, "Oh, I can always 'get saved' ...THEN."

SORRY, FRIEND!! It doesn't work that way! When the "lawless one" comes he will display "signs and lying wonders..with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they DID NOT receive the love of the truth [when they had the chance]. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned WHO DID NOT believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness"(2Ths2:9-11)

Yes, many will be "saved" during the Tribulation. (Rev7:14) But, if you knew the Truth before the Rapture, and refused to believe, don't count on any "second chances" when all hell breaks loose!

For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor 6:2)

The ones with the lamps will come and say, 'See?? We have lamps. We're christians. Didn't we do all sorts of wonderful things "in Your name"?

"Then surely from their fruits you shall know them." If their lamps have oil, they will glow with a flame; if not, they won't. "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but the ones who do the will of My Father in Heaven." (Mt7:20-21) And "This is the work of God, that you believe into Him whom that One sent." (Jn6:29)

And if you truly believe into Christ, you will also believe His promises when He said that He would come to "receive [us] to Himself". (Jn14:3) And so, He exhorts, "Therefore, watch [be prepared and vigilant], for you do not know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes." (vs13)

Olivet Discourse: ***individual rewards*** - (Mat 25:14-30)

"For it is as if a man going abroad called his own slaves and delivered his goods to them..." (vs14)

What is the "it" that Jesus is talking about? That which He has been talking about ever since the middle of chapter 24. That "hour your Lord comes." (24:42) When He said He was "going to prepare a place" (Jn14:2) He did not leave us to sit here 'twiddling our thumbs'. He gave us work to do.

Now, the disciples continually had it in their minds that Jesus was imminently -then- going to set up His kingdom. (Lk19:11) Even after the crucifixion and resurrection, as they are going to the Mt. of Olives where Jesus is about to be taken away into Heaven, they are asking Him, "do You restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?" (Acts1:6) When He is giving a variation of this parable He also says that the land owner is gone for "long periods of time". (Lk20:9) Certainly, 2000 years could be considered "long periods" of time.

Anyway, after "much time, the lord of those slaves came and took account with them." (vs19) " So then each one of us will give account concerning himself to God." (Rom14:12) On what basis?

First of all, notice that the 'man' delivers "his" goods to the servants. The property and ownership is the Lord's. You that are pastors, remember this. The congregation you shepherd is -NOT- "yours". Moses discovered the hard way, the task he would be taking on to lead Israel out of Egypt was not 'his' task. When he tried to "take" the job, he failed miserably. But 40 years later when -God- 'called' him, he then did exploits. How many pastors haven't I heard use terminology like "my church" or "my ministry". And if somebody starts to show them Scripture, the attitude becomes, "how DARE YOU mess around with "MY"....?"

Notice also, that the Master gives out the responsibilities "to each according to his ability". (vs15) Not everybody is a 5-talent slave. Some are 3, some 2...and some are only 1-talent servants. If you are a 1-talent servant, do not envy the 5-talent slave. "Oh, just look at him! ...Oh, I just can't do anything...mumble, mumble, mumble." In the military some people fly the airplanes, and others pump the gas. They each do their job to the best of their ability. If the fuel pumper messes up, the pilot crashes when he runs out of fuel, and the war is lost...and the 'pumper' loses his freedoms that the pilot was flying to protect. Like Paul writes about the "body" which is "fitted and compacted together.." (Eph4:16) No body part is less important than the next. They each, all, function together, doing the jobs as "God set the members, each one of them, in the body, even as He desired." (1Cor12:18)

A 1-talent servant should not envy a 5-talent one, nor should a 5-talent slave despise and judge the 1-talent servant. "To his own Master [each one] stands or falls." (Rom14:4)

And so, the Master returns to have each one "give account" of what he has done regarding his duties. How has he been building? His work is tested, to see of what sort it was. (1Cor3:13)

The primary criteria is "faithfulness". (1Cor4:2) Those who were given 5 talents, and those given 2, equally faithful to the degree they were entrusted and their unique abilities, -equally- receive commendations.. "Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your Lord." (vs21,23)

But the one who received 1-talent, in this parable, was only given one talent because the Lord knew his heart. But "let's see if he will amount to anything. Let's give him a chance to redeem himself."

Now, this one has a bad heart. He is rebellious against the Lord. Does not accept His authority. Is not willing to submit to His lordship. He doesn't even fit into the category of "wood, hay, stubble". (1Cor3:12) He has done -nothing-. He doesn't even have anything -to-be- burned up. As the master says, hasn't even invested it to receive interest. (vs27) He is not even saved "so as through fire." (1Cor3:15)

He's called a "slave". Is he a -pretend- slave, only merely carrying a 'lamp', but with no oil? One for whom, when he is found wanting, it proves out that he "never was -really- a slave?" (1Jn2:19) Or was he one of the seed scattered on the rocks or among thorns, that temporarily sprang up with 'life', but due to various reasons, withered up and died? (Mt13)

Whatever the case, he receives judgment. He is cast out "into outer darkness [where] there will be weeping and gnashing of the teeth." (vs30) In other words, the judgment of one who is not a Believer into Jesus Christ. One who is not "saved".

Again, he had the -appearances- of being in the "church". He 'looked like' a "Christian". But when the Master came and assessed his faithfulness, he came up empty. Was a fake. On the 'outside' after the door was shut. And Jesus says, "I never knew you; depart from Me, those working lawlessness!" (Mt7:23)

See Also Addendum: Q/A Jesus teaching "works"?

Olivet Discourse: ***judgment of nations*** - (Mat 25:31-46)

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all the nations; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And indeed He will set the sheep off His right, but the goats off the left hand. (vs31-33)

This is, yet, another -new- occasion. He is not coming "like a thief" (Rev3:3) like He promises the "dead church" of Sardis, in an hour "you do not know". (Mt24:42) Thus, this is not the Rapture. He is not coming back to His "slaves" (vs19) to take "account" with them. Again, not the Rapture. He is not coming to "receive" His own to be with Him. (Jn14:3) His own that He -previously- received are part of the group that comes with Him. "And Jehovah my God shall come, and all the saints with You." (Zech14:5b)

Reading in Zechariah ch14 we see Jehovah going out to "fight against those nations, like the day He fought in the day of battle." (14:3) That is the occasion when the great earthquake, likely the same one that sinks the islands into the oceans, levels all the mountains, and raises the valleys (Is40:4), splits the Mt. of Olives (where Jesus and the disciples are sitting as He foretells all this) in two, creating a huge valley between the two new parts. (Zech14:4-5) And it says Jesus' "feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives.." (vs4a) Fulfilling what the angels will be telling these same disciples in about 40 days, "This Jesus, the One being taken from you into the heaven, will come in the way you saw Him going into the heaven." (Acts1:11) This is the occasion where it is declared, "The kingdoms of the world became our Lord's, even of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever." (Rev11:15b) This will be the culmination of the 7 years of the 70th week, where the nations will have given up their autonomy to the "beast" and with "one mind" they will "make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and the ones with Him are the called and elect and faithful ones." (Rev17:12-14) Notice again, the ones coming -with- Him are the "elect and faithful ones". Again... this is -not- the Rapture. Believers have -already- been "received" to Him -before- this event.

But as Jesus goes forth, He does so with the title "Faithful and True". (Rev19:11) "And He judges and wars in righteousness." He goes out to battle dressed in a "blood-dipped" garment, with the name "The Word of God." (Rev19:13, Heb4:12) His heavenly armies follow Him, and He will "smite the nations" with the sword of His mouth. Apparently, as He -spoke- the creation into existence, He will -speak- the destruction of the world's armies. And the "wrath of God Almighty" will be trodden in His "winepress", as the "birds flying in mid-heaven" are invited to "the supper of the great

God" of all the dead slain in that final battle. Jesus, with the title "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." (Rev19:16)

It is after -these- events, when He is sitting on His throne, that He will issue judgment upon the nations. This is most likely not judgement of -individual- people, but of 'nations'. These are the national entities which will be required to pilgrimage to Jerusalem "year to year to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles." (Zech14:16)

What is the criteria for judgment? What 'evidence' will be considered? Treatment of "one of these, the least of MY BROTHERS.." (vs40,45) Who are His "brothers"? Who are "His own" (Jn1:11) that He came to?

In Ps22 is the prophecy of Jesus' crucifixion. And He says, "I will declare Your name to My brothers; I will praise You in the midst of the assembly. You who fear Jehovah, praise Him; all the seed of Jacob, glorify Him; all the seed of Israel, fear Him." (Ps22:22-23)

National treatment of Israel. As far down into the gutter as my country, the USA, has sunk into immorality; SO FAR, its one redeeming factor has been its friendship and support of Israel (in spite of the current administration!). There are also other nations that have supported Israel. And then, there are other nations whose sole reason for getting up out of bed every morning, is to try to annihilate Israel.

Those who supported Israel will be invited, "Come..inherit the kingdom prepared for you..." (vs34) And those having been contrary to Israel will be judged, "Go away from Me, cursed one, into the everlasting fire having been prepared for the Devil and his angels." (vs41)

Now... this matter of -nations- receiving rewards and eternal punishment, I do not fully understand. How -national- judgments differ from -individual- ones. Even these "blessed" nations who enter the kingdom, at the end of 1000 years when satan is released, will be deceived, and the ones who rebel will be judged. (Rev20:8-9) If I were to try to speculate and proclaim, I would be like the false prophets who speak, but God "did not send them" (Jer14:14) about "things they do not know.." (Jude10)

But let us just notice another reference about "nations" that has a bit of mystery to it. About the new heavens and new earth, and the "holy Jerusalem". It says, "and the nations of the ones saved will walk in its light; and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it." (Rev21:24) "And all the profaning may not at all enter into it..." (vs27)

And then, we see the image given at the end of Isaiah. After God has executed vengeance on the world, the sons of Israel will be brought back. Notice in Is66:19 the nations from where they come; the English speaking nations, Russia, Asia and "the far away coasts that have not heard My

fame nor seen My glory." You see, they will come from the "four winds, from the ends of the heavens to their ends." (Mt24:31) One problem Israel has, currently, is the tracing of genealogies to find properly qualified people to serve in the priesthood. Notice God says, "I will also take some of them for the priests, for the Levites, says Jehovah." (Is66:21)

But then, another mystery I don't claim to understand at this time. It is written as though being in the same context as the "kingdom" age, where it says, "And they shall go out and see the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against Me; for their worm shall not die, nor shall their fire be put out; and they shall be an object of disgust to all flesh." (Is66:24) In this judgment of nations, the "goats" are sent to the "everlasting fire.." (vs41)

Now, while these judgments are based on treatment of His "brothers", - Israel-, there is another entity by which judgment will occur. "Prophets, just ones, disciples." (Mt10:41-42) Jesus speaks of rewards for "receiving" a prophet or Believer. This word "receive" does not indicate a receiving of Jesus Christ as 'Savior'. It is a different word than one finds in John. In Jn1:11-12 the person is "joining with and becoming of one mind with" Christ. But in this case, the person is being cared for. If they are in adversity, they are being rescued or aided. Notice that Jesus includes something so simple as giving "a cup of cold water to drink." (Mt10:42) This is where a Believer is being detained due to his Faith in Christ, and usually being physically tortured and neglected. As Mt25 speaks of "hunger, clothing, sickness, imprisonment" (vs35,42-43) and being ministered to. Throughout history there have been people who have done what they could to help such people, and ease their suffering to whatever extent they could. Or, if they were "on the run", provided shelter (hospitality) against their enemies; "receiving" them into their homes. We think often of various ones who have risked their own lives to help Jews in this manner. There have also been those who have done so for Christians.

When Jesus comes, and judges, these will be rewarded. What is the nature of their reward? These nations get to "live" in the kingdom. Not executed.

There is an error that proclaims the accumulation of "good deeds" to get one into heaven. And they recite, "just a cup of cold water...he will not lose his reward.." (Mt10:42) But we know that salvation is a "gift of God" (Eph2:8) and "not by works of righteousness which we have done." (Tit3:5) Since it is speaking of people aiding someone because they "are of Christ" (Mk9:41), it would be obvious that the person would not necessarily be "of Christ" themselves. Many non-believers aided Jews during the Holocaust...but it does not assure them of eternal life. They do not know Christ, and salvation comes by no means other than the "name of Christ". (Acts4:12) Thus, we must understand these rewards in the -physical-context of the -earthly- kingdom Christ sets up, going into the millennium of peace.

But for those related to taunting of the Church, the "just ones", those "faithful" to the Lord from the "church in Philadelphia" He makes a promise. All those pretend-christians that have been harassing you? Those "out of the synagogue of Satan those saying themselves to be Jews, and they are not, but they lie. Behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they shall know that I loved you. Because you kept the Word of My patience, I also will keep you out of the hour of trial which is going to come on all the habitable world in order to try those dwelling on the earth. [Again: 'pre-trib' rapture] Behold, I am coming quickly. Hold what you have that no one take your crown." (Rev3:9-11)

Christ's judgment goes through and sorts the nations out. The good from the bad. Just like the fisherman who "gathered the good into containers, and..threw out the rotten." (Mt13:48) And as we step back and overview our 'broad-stroked' -generic- 'impressionistic painting', perhaps there is also an element of the -individual- in this word "nations" as "groups of individuals"...?

The evil ones "go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into everlasting life." (vs46)

Anointing for Burial: sacrifice & atonement - (Mat 26:6-13)

And it happened, when Jesus finished all these sayings, He said to His disciples, You know that the Passover is coming after two days, and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified." (vs1-2)

In the past Jesus has already told of His death. In ch16 He has told how He will be betrayed by the religious leaders and be 'killed'. But now He adds a bit more information. If He were to be killed by -only- the Jews, He would be stoned. But now He is adding another detail, "crucified". That indicates a "Roman" style execution.

Over the centuries antisemitic bigotry has labeled the Jews as "Christ killers". It was the 'church' of Rome that commissioned series of Crusades to free the Holy Land from 'pagans', and they also persecuted the "Christ killers". Thing is... THEY, ROME, were the ones who crucified Jesus. It was a Roman ruler, Pilate, who condemned Him. It was Roman soldiers who beat His back to a bloody pulp. And it was Roman spikes that nailed Him to a Roman cross. Yes, the Jewish leadership asked for His death, but Rome did the deed. They were -both- culpable.

You see, God so loved the -WORLD- that He gave His only begotten Son. (Jn3:16) When God looked down from heaven to see if He could find anybody righteous, He saw that -ALL- had "turned aside". (Ps14:1-3) So, the world's condemnation of God's Holy Son to death was a -joint- effort. Both God's 'elect' as well as the 'heathen' world, jointly, crucified Jesus.

These next three chapters of Matthew contain a lot of information about the -events- of the crucifixion. This series from Matthew has been called the "Teachings" of Jesus (from Matthew), not necessarily a historical chronology of the "life of Jesus". Thus, in keeping with that theme, we will concentrate on the passages dealing with Jesus' teaching, words, etc. Somewhat, as though we were considering His words from a red-letter edition of the Bible. In the past we have considered historical aspects, and I expect we will again in the future. Thus, we are not omitting things from God's Word. Also, during the time-frame under consideration, if we are thinking of Jesus' teachings, it might seem appropriate to divert to John's Gospel for the upper room discourse. But again, this series is from 'Matthew'.

With that understanding, we find Jesus and company at Bethany. And a woman comes with "very precious" ointment and pours it on Jesus' head. (vs7) This is a different event from the one where Mary a few days earlier anoints His feet. (Jn12) In both cases, there is indignation from the disciples at such a "waste". In Mary's case, the value was equivalent to a year's wages. In this case, the value is likely even greater. In both cases

Jesus shushes the outrage with the fact that these anointings are for His "burial".

In Exodus ch12 is the first Passover. When we considered it in a recent Walk-thru, we observed that many 'tithe' and 'firstfruit' offerings were brought in 'as-is' condition, whether the animal had an illness or blemish. But the Passover lamb was to be "without blemish". It was to be perfect in every respect.

As we see the life Jesus led, they were always at poverty level. Jesus commented that all the animals have their burrows and nests, but the "Son of Man has nowhere He may lay His head." (Mt8:20)

But there were two times when gifts of highest value and quality were given. First, when He was born. The wise men brought gold, frankincense and myrrh. Costly things of quality..."fit for a king". After all, they had come seeking the "King of the Jews".

And then, for His burial. Anointed with ointments of highest quality. When the O.T. priests were commissioned for service to atone for the people, they were anointed with special oil. (Ex29:21) The psalmist says, "Behold! How good and how pleasant is the living of brothers, even in unity. It is like the precious oil on the head that ran down on the beard, Aaron's beard, going down to the mouth of his garments.." (Ps133:1-2) When Jesus died, one of the things He accomplished was the "uniting" of Jew and Gentile, alike, to God. Where we (both Jew and Gentile) were at enmity with God, Jesus' death on the cross "reconcile/s both in one body to God through the cross, slaying the enmity in Himself." (Eph2:14-16) Jesus was being anointed for the Sin Offering... Sacrifice of Atonement... going behind the Veil to open the way to the Holy of Holies.

The disciples didn't understand this. All they could see was dollar signs. Just think of how many poor people that money could help! And Jesus responds, "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me." (vs11)

Notice this statement. There will always be poverty. No matter how many government subsidies there are, or programs to get people on their feet, there will always be need to help the poor. And the early Church made a point of helping the poor, and requested that Paul, the 'rogue' Apostle, do the same. (Gal2:10)

But Jesus is saying to His disciples, I'm a special case. He would not always be around, physically. They did not yet fully understand the significance of His imminent death. But later Peter would write about it, that before that time, even the prophets who wrote the O.T. Scriptures did not understand. But that our redemption comes about "with the - PRECIOUS- blood of Christ, as of an unblemished and unspotted lamb.." (1Pt1:10-12,19)

This anointing of Jesus' head; notice Jesus said that this act by this woman would be recorded for history as a "memorial of her". (vs13) And yet, notice, we are not given a -name- of that woman. People often become upset if they don't have a -name- of the person ministering. I've had people unsubscribe from VW's e-list for the very reason that I don't promote 'me' (this writer), and readily tell them "all about me", so that they can 'judge' me for my credentials or lack of them. That I shouldn't be so "ashamed" of who I am. When people see the printed VW's sitting by the door at my store, they often try to find out "who" writes them? I always give evasive answers, that they are written by one of God's servants, and never say that "I do it". On a couple of occasions they have become rather insistant and vocal, trying to find out "WHO DOES IT???" But I don't answer...

Yes, the woman and her deed would be remembered. But -she- was not the focus. "...but you do not always have Me" ...the Son of God. This time is leading up to the most important event of all time and eternity, when the Son of God would die for sinful man. His preciousness, holiness and sanctification for the event was prepared by His anointing, since He is God's Anointed, the Messiah, our High Priest (Heb8:1)

It is time: Traitor, do your duty - (Mat 26:17-25)

The Teacher says, My time is near; toward you I will prepare the Passover with My disciples. (vs18) Mark 14 and Luke 22 tell how Jesus instructs the disciples to follow a man "carrying a pitcher of water" to whatever house he goes to, and basically 'invite themselves' in to prepare the Passover. It always intrigues me how Jesus would send somebody to do something, telling them what would happen, and what to do if they needed contingency plans. Like, when they went to get the donkeys... and He prepared them for the response when the owners would be yelling after them for "stealing" the donkeys.

In that culture, men typically did not carry pitchers of water. That was "women's work". And yet Jesus tells them to follow a "man" carrying water. Why was the man carrying water? I have read some speculations in the past, that the water he was carrying was 'ritual' water for 'purification' purposes. I don't know. But Jesus knew. Just like He knew the owners of the donkeys would release them to 'total strangers' when they knew He needed them. Since Jesus was the fulfillment of centuries of Mosaic rituals, where many things were ritually cleaned in water prior to sacrifice, and so were the priests; was that pitcherful of water for Jesus to use? Had that man received a vision from God to go get the water? An unnamed woman has already 'anointed' Him, God's High Priest. (Heb8:1) Perhaps the water was for other ritual fulfillments?

Whatever the case, the group is now reclined, partaking of Passover. And of all things to talk about, Jesus says, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." (vs21) Jesus already knew 'who' it was, because He picked him for the very purpose. (10:4, Jn6:64,13:18) The disciples, however, haven't a clue what He is talking about. And so He begins by quoting Scripture, "The one eating the bread with Me lifted up his heel against Me." (Jn13:18,Ps41:9)

They ask around, "Surely it isn't me??" (vs22) And Peter gets John to ask Him, "Who is it?" (Jn13:25) And Jesus responds, "The one dipping the hand with Me in the dish will betray Me." (vs23) "And dipping the morsel, He gave it to Judas Iscariot.." (Jn13:26)

And then Jesus says a little about God's sovereignty, and man's will. The purpose of God is fulfilled, "Indeed, the Son of Man goes, as it has been written about Him." Christ -will- die. It will happen no matter what. God's purpose -will- be fulfilled. But "woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed." (vs24) It would have been good if he had never been born! And Judas, the lying thief, has to cover his tracks, and cannot be different than the rest. He's the only one who by now hasn't asked, "surely not me?" So he asks, "Not I am the one, Rabbi?" You have said it. Judas already knew. He had already contrived with the rulers for 30 pieces of silver. (vs15-16)

Now, quite an interesting thing here. The rulers have been seeking for some time, for opportunity to do away with Jesus, but they are always caught between Jesus' knowledge and power, and the fear of the people who they expect would stone them for taking Jesus into custody (Mt21:26). One time, already, they had tried to stone Him, but He had simply walked away, right through their midst. (Jn8:59) And when Judas contracted to 'help' them, it says of Judas, "...from then he SOUGHT OPPORTUNITY that he might betray Him." (vs16) But Jesus' time was "not yet" ready to be "fulfilled". (Jn7:6,8)

But notice how things unfold. Jesus dips the morsel and gives it to Judas. He confirms Judas' phony query. And then says to him, "What you do, do quickly." (Jn13:27) Judas, you're looking for the right moment? That moment is -NOW-. Go! Do it! You see, even in betrayal, Jesus is in full command of the situation. He was not betrayed. They did not get Him by stealth. He "gave" Himself, (Is50:6) just as the Father 'gave' Jesus for sinful man. (Jn3:16) In the last lesson we considered the matter that both the Romans and Israel crucified Jesus. But they were only able to do so, because Jesus 'gave' Himself into their hands. And this crucifixion process begins when Jesus tells Judas, Go... Now..!

And finally, the ultimate test of exactly "Who" Jesus is as He is crucified. Jesus is setting things up so that in a few days, when it is all over, the disciples will recognize that He told them about it -before- it all happened. Remember that one primary distinguishing feature of the Most High is His "declaring the end from the beginning.." fulfilling His purpose. (Is46:10)

Jesus tells them about His betrayal and glorification, "From this time I tell you before it happens, that when it happens you may believe that I AM." (Jn13:19) As Judas leaves to fulfill his 'assignment', the disciples still haven't a clue as to what is about to happen. (Jn13:28-29) But Jesus now tells them, "Now the Son of Man was glorified, and God was glorified in Him." (vs31)

Once He has been crucified and raised again, and they can see everything in hindsight, then He will "open their mind to understand the Scriptures" (Lk24:45)

Lord's Supper: New Covenant, One Salvation - (Mat 26:26-30)

And as they ate, taking the bread and blessing it, Jesus broke and gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And taking the cup, and giving thanks, He gave to them, saying, Drink all of it. (vs26-27)

In other years as we have approached the season of Passover, Crucifixion, Resurrection remembrance, we have considered how the Lord's Supper came out of, and was related to Passover. In the 1997 'Tidbits' section of the website we considered in "The Lord's Supper" the various elements of the Passover Seder, and how they are related.

However, based on Paul's words, it would also seem that Jesus is instituting something "new" that a typical Jew would not have been used to with the traditional Passover rituals. Paul was a Jew, remember; trained up as a Pharisee. He would have known all the intricacies of a 'proper' Passover observance. But notice he says, "I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed..." did/said the various things He did. (1Cor11:23) If this was something he "received from the Lord", the context seems obvious that the Lord's Supper is not "the Seder". Yes, it certainly came -from- Passover, and was a -fulfillment- of it; but it was also a "New Covenant in My blood". (Lk22:19-20) Typically, something -new- will have its own unique characteristics and rituals.

While the O.T. Law was detailed in its reckonings of how everything was to be done, down to minute details of utensils, mixtures for incense, anointing oils, etc.; we are not given such details in written form regarding the Lord's Supper. Apparently the early Believers knew these rituals, as it says after He was resurrected that He was recognized in how He broke the bread. (Lk24:30,35) Perhaps these things became 'lost' as the Church became a primarily 'Gentile' entity? Perhaps the important thing is the "remembering" (1Cor11:25), and not so much the -physical- ritual? ...since we are not saved by "works of righteousness" (Tit3:5)

So now, when Jesus says, "this is My body" did that mean the bread was 'literally' Jesus -body-? When it entered their mouths, did it miraculously turn into 'meat' with blood? (As some Catholic 'miracles' claim?) First of all, God would not be behind such a miracle, because He made it -quite- plain that meat (of any kind) was not to be eaten 'with the blood'...because the life of an animal is in the blood. (Gen9:4, Lev17:11) Jesus handed this -bread- to the disciples. He did not cut off little pieces of His own -body- and give it to them. When Jesus proclaimed that He was the "bread coming down from heaven" (Jn6) He was not speaking of the bread eaten ritually as being His 'actual' -body-. He was 'flesh and blood' standing

there, telling them these things. But even His hearers did not understand, "How can this one give us his flesh to eat?" (Jn6:52)

He speaks of the difference between physical and spiritual. He is proclaiming a -spiritual- life from heaven, comparing it as being different from the manna Israel ate in the wilderness, and then died. (vs49) Paul carries this discussion further in 1Cor10:1-5. Yes, Israel ate -physical-manna and drank -physical- water. We know this from the -physical-accounts from Exodus. But Paul explains how the thing Israel rejected and rebelled against was the -spiritual-. They were murmuring against Moses and complaining about food and water, but their complaints were actually more directly against God. (Ex16:2,8) Refusing God's leadership of them. Christ was their Leader in the pillar of fire/smoke, but they rejected. Christ continually fed and nourished them, but they disobeyed at every turn. And because they rejected the -spiritual- relationship with God, "God was not pleased with most of them." (vs5) The daily manna was symbolic of God's daily care and nurturing of them and the desire for a spiritual relationship of oneness with them.

Thus, as Paul delivers what he received, reminding of what Jesus said, he says that the Lord's Supper is "in REMEMBRANCE of Jesus". (1Cor11:25, Lk24:19) A 'memorial' of His death.

In addition to being a memorial, the bread symbolizes the oneness about which He prays in John ch17. "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected in one.." (vs23) What better symbol of oneness than the eating of bread. When food becomes digested, its nutrients spread into the eater's body, becoming inextricably chemically linked as "part of" the body. When a person is "in Christ" (2Cor5:17) and Christ is "in you" (Col1:27) through the Holy Spirit's indwelling (Rom8:9), it is symbolically just like that digested bread.

Does it become even more clear, now, why, if groups of people are 'striving' to -create- a sense of unity because it doesn't exist amongst them, that such groups are NOT "Christian"? When a person is truly "in Christ", the resultant unity is the very essence of what it means to be a Believer. And if -various- Believers are thus united with the "one Lord" (Eph4:5), by virtue of the one Lord, they are also united to each other. That love -is- there. (Jn13:35) If that essence isn't there, they are not in Christ. (1Jn3:14)

And then, Jesus says of the cup, "Drink all of it." (vs27) There were old covenants in the O.T. with the blood of animals. But 'now' it was time for the Real Thing. The "symbolic" nature of Christ's "body" in the bread should also become obvious from the statement, "..for it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Heb10:4) They are merely 'animals'. Every time an animal was sacrificed, it was an act of faith in the coming of the One Who said, "I come..to do Your will, O God." (Heb10:7) When Jesus was crucified, "He takes away the first (covenant with

animals) in order that He may set up the second (the body of Jesus Christ once for all). (vs9-10) The old covenants were imperfect, because they had to be continually repeated, because they, of their own merits, "can never take away sins". (vs11) But Jesus "offering but one sacrifice for sins, sat down in perpetuity at the right hand of God" (vs12) And just as the bread symbolizes the "unity" with God, this New Covenant is God's "..laws on their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." (vs16)

You see, the "new birth" (Jn3:3) is a "spiritual" one (Jn3:8). Just as the O.T. animals could not save, neither does the bread of the Lord's Supper. But it symbolizes that which happens 'spiritually'. We "remember" continually what Jesus did in giving Himself in death.

And when Jesus says, "drink -ALL- of it", it might be likened to His earlier statement about a farmer putting his "hand to the plow" and then "looking back". (Lk9:62) If a person is becoming a Christian, there are no provisions for doing it "half-way". It's either all or nothing. You cannot remain of the world, and merely "add" Jesus into your life to 'help' you along in your life of-the-world. A person cannot serve two masters. (Mt6:24) If you drink into the Covenant, you drink into "all" of it. Which is why, if you "draw back" (Heb10:38-39) then there is 'no more left'. (Heb6:4-6) You cannot drink "some" of it now, and 'save' the rest for later... 'hedging your bets'.

This, also, is why the symbolic ritual of baptism -must- be by "immersion". Jesus shed -all- His blood when that spear went into His side. If we are "buried with Him through baptism into death" (Rom6:4), we must go "all the way". When a person dies, that's -it-. There's nothing more. Not being buried only 'part way' into the water. Nor, are we baptized with the Old Covenant where they only merely "sprinkled" everything with blood. In the O.T. they would take "some" of the blood to sprinkle. But remember, the O.T. rituals could not save. They were only symbolic of what was yet to come when Jesus would shed -all- His blood, and symbolize the Covenant by instructing the Believer to "drink -all- of it".

And to finalize the fact that there is only -one- salvation, that He was dying "once for all" (Rom6:10, Heb7:27, 9:12,26, 10:10), and that if a Believer "draws back" that there is "no more sacrifice for sins", Jesus says, "I will not at all drink of this fruit of the vine after this until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of My Father." (vs29) And indeed, when He was offered a drink just prior to being crucified, when He tasted and knew what it was, "He would not drink" (Mt27:34) But then, once Salvation was complete, He says, "I thirst" and when something is offered, He drinks. (Jn19:28-30)

And, yes, it is appropriate to end the Lord's Supper observance with a hymn. "And singing a hymn, they went to the Mount of Olives." (vs30)

Offense of the Cross: denial & scattered - (Mat 26:31-35)

Then Jesus said to them, You all will be offended in Me during this night. For it has been written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. (vs31)

This is a rather interesting expression Jesus proclaims. Remember a couple of lessons ago we considered the fact that Jesus' crucifixion involved joint culpability between God's "elect" (Israel) and the "world" (Rome); they were -both- 'guilty'.

Now, Jesus is saying that His own disciples will be "offended" because of Him. What does this mean? Does this mean that Jesus is going to "hurt their feelings"? No. There is an "offense" to the cross. (Gal5:11) What does the cross represent? It is a place of sin. It is a place where all the sin/s of every human being were laid upon Jesus. Every person who comes to God in repentance, receives God's grace because of that one act of Christ on the cross. When Paul proclaimed that God desires "all men everywhere to repent" (Acts17:30), if it were the case that "all men" actually -did- repent, Jesus' redemption on the cross would cover them -all-. Forget the heretical notion of "limited atonement" as taught by some of the 'great men'!! It says, "Jehovah made meet in Him the iniquity of -ALL- of us". (Is53:6) But to accomplish this "full atonement", the cross is also a place of judgment. God judging sin, in the person of His own Son, "who Himself bore in His body our sins, on the tree.." (1Pt2:24)

The word "offended" carries many shades of meaning; most appropriate in this case being... "stumble, fall, entice to sin, cause to fall away, begin to distrust and desert one he ought to trust and obey." Think about it a moment, if it is truly the case that we -all- have gone a-wandering from God (Ps14:3), then, Jesus could not have His disciples being "buddies" with Him as He is crucified; or even being crucified along with Him. Jesus was not a 'cult' leader. His followers were not yet qualified to partake in His sufferings (Col1:24) because they were not yet "in Christ" through His death, since He had not yet died. His place as "firstfruit" (1Cor15:20,23) was not yet fulfilled. In His death it was prophesied, "Behold, and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow." (Lam1:12) The thing that would 'satisfy' Jehovah regarding sin would be the "travail of His soul" (Is53:11-12) When we read Psalm 22, we read of His travails "alone".

If His disciples had -not- been offended and abandoned Him, it would have indicated some measure of 'perfectness' to them; somehow not fully needing saving. But He had come to die for -them-, too. As He died, they needed to be "sinners". Their faith in Him would be shaken. "...we were hoping that He is the One going to redeem Israel.." (Lk24:21) And Peter says, "I am going out to fish" (Jn21:3) and the rest, "we're coming with

you." Where Jesus had called them away from that to "fish for men", their faith has wavered, and they are about to take up their former lives as fishermen.

Notice about Peter, that while Peter was the one who confidently affirmed, "You are the Christ" (Mt16:16), Jesus in foretelling Peter's denial as He is saying that the disciples will "begin to distrust" in Him, "I entreated concerning you that your faith might not fail.." (Lk22:32) Peter might utter words of denial, and his faith will begin to falter, but he will not completely fall. And so Jesus exhorts him, "And when you have turned back, confirm your brothers".

Also notice, even though John was the only one who didn't abandon Jesus, but followed along into the judgment hall, he did not yet believe. That did not come until after the resurrection when he and Peter ran to the empty tomb, and when John saw the burial clothes lying as they were, it says of John, "..he saw and believed." (Jn20:8)

I cannot even begin to fathom what must have been the thoughts of the hearts and minds of these disciples through these next few days. We are only given glimpses into what it might have been like. We often like to judge Peter for his brash boasts of self-confidence that he would never deny the Lord; and maybe we would think he had it coming when the Lord would promise that he would deny before the rooster crowed the next morning; and shake our heads and sigh with a "Yup, yup, yup!" as he goes off to weep bitterly after he has denied the Lord. But notice that "all the disciples said the same" (vs35), and when Jesus is taken in the garden, they "all" fled, too, "forsaking Him". (vs56)

But notice that Jesus does not 'judge' them for this. He knows it will happen, and is simply stating the facts. He hadn't come that time to judge, but to save. (Jn12:47) Again, when it is past, they will know that He predicted it, and that it happened just as He said it would. He is I AM. For Peter He prays that his faith does not fail. And generically, He states that when it is all said and done, and He is resurrected (another thing they haven't a clue about), "I will go before you into Galilee." (vs32)

Jesus' Passion: discipline & obedience - (Mat 26:36-46)

Then Jesus came with [the disciples] to a place called Gethsemane. And He said, Sit here, until going away, I shall pray there. And taking along Peter (James and John), He began to grieve and to be deeply troubled. Then He said to them, My soul is deeply grieved, even unto death. Stay here and watch with Me. (vs36-38)

And going a little further, He fell on His face, praying, and saying, My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will. (vs39)

And being in an agony, He prayed more intently. And His sweat became as drops of blood falling down onto the earth. (Lk22:44)

"You are My Son; today I have begotten You." (Ps2:7) As He also says in another place, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek," (Ps110:4) who in the days of His flesh was offering both petitions and entreaties to Him being able to save Him from death, with strong [violent] crying and tears, and being heard from His godly fear; though being a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered"(Heb5:5-8)

While we know that Jesus was the Son of God, we should never forget that He was also "Son of Man", "come in the flesh". (1Jn4:2-3) He partook of "flesh and blood". (Heb2:14) These agonies He is going through are His 'humanity' crying out to the Father. I don't have any medical documentation for this, but I've heard others proclaim that it is the Most Extreme case of human emotion that will produce 'blood' as sweat. That there is nothing stronger than death itself. The writer of Hebrews suggests His prayer was of a 'violent' nature. In His flesh, but also knowing what His Godhood knew, He knew He would be suffering God's full wrath upon sin...and He understood the nature of that judgment. As He would cry out from the cross, "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me!???" So He is praying, Do I -REALLY- need to go through with this??? Is there NO OTHER WAY???

And as we read in Hebrews, the 'discipline' He learned as a 'Son', He responds, "yet not as I will, but as You will." We are told that it was the Father's will to "crush Him" (Is53:10), to see the "travail of His soul" (vs11) as He would "bear their iniquities".

But... don't you think He had this 'prayer' thing all wrong?!! I mean.. He took Peter, James and John along separate from the rest. Hadn't He taught, "where two or three are gathered in My name..."? (Mt18:19-20) Shouldn't He have taken them, and "agreed together" about this thing, and

gotten God to 'change His mind' and do for them what they asked? He just goes in His humanity, crying out to God, and like a big 'wimp', submits to God's will and authority. Didn't He know about the "power of prayer"? ...that if He prayed 'hard enough' that He could "release God's power" to do all sorts of wonders? ...that there could be some new revelation for how mankind could be saved, apart from all that had been prophesied in the Scriptures? ...some 'new' extra-biblical prophesies?

On such a matter as Jesus' grief just prior to carrying away my sin, it almost feels blasphemous to even try to 'joke' with these kind of words! But we're making a point! You see; this is exactly what people are doing, and calling it "prayer". They haven't the foggiest notion -what- prayer is! If anybody had a -reason- to pray regarding his own will to get God to conform to it, it would have been Jesus. And, indeed, if Jesus had prayed in such a manner, satan would have won... and we would still be "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph2:1) Jesus was praying "according to His will..." (1Jn5:14) And fully knowing the Father's will, in obedience, went to the cross.

And then, finally, notice Jesus' words to the disciples. In the previous lesson we noted that it was 'necessary' for the disciples to desert Him; that His suffering was something which only -He-, Jesus, could do alone; He could not be "buddies" with them through this, because His death was -for- 'them', too. And thus, it becomes obvious that His praying in Gethsemane is "alone", too. When He receives strengthening, the strength does not come through camaraderie with the sleeping disciples whom He has just earlier called His "friends" (Jn15:14-15), but through an angel. (Lk22:43)

And so He exhorts them, "Watch and pray, that you do not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (vs41) This struggle between the spiritual and the flesh is something Paul goes on about in Romans ch7, and his conclusion of the matter is that deliverance comes through Jesus Christ. (Rom7:24-25) OK... so what did Jesus -just- say here? "Watch and pray."

First of all, to be successful in keeping pure against temptation, we must watch. Be on guard. Paul writes about all the defensive armor. (Eph6:10-18) And once all is said and done, the conclusion of the matter is that we are "to stand". (vs13) "Standing" is the opposite of "tolerance" and "acceptance". The military guard does not stand his post to wave and smile at people wanting to enter the base; his purpose is to scrutinize everybody, making sure that everybody wanting to enter has 'clearance' to do so. Years ago when I used to drive school bus into an Air Force base (Grand Forks, ND), even though the guards knew the bus company, and recognized my face from the daily trips, they would periodically ask to see some ID. They were not there to be my 'friend'. And regarding those things that would seek to enter our lives, we must scrutinize -everything-, to keep pure before God.

And then, "pray". Now, this point requires a proper understanding of what 'prayer' is. It is not what most people engage in. We have considered this before, so we won't go into detail now. It is -not- being on one's knees, eyes closed, uttering 'words' in KJ-ese. It -is- being in continual fellowship in God's presence, spiritually. So, now, think about this. If you are "in" God's presence, and you -know- Jesus is in the same room with you, are you going to sin? Of course not! When Peter was in Jesus' presence he was bold about how strong he would be. In the garden next to Jesus, he was bold and pulled out his sword to start fighting. But when temptation came, when Peter was 'alone' next to the guards and other officials, that's when he failed. He was not "with Jesus". (Acts4:13)

This, then, is where the "renewed mind" (Rom12:2) comes into play. The mind is the connection between the spirit and the flesh. (Ps119:58-60) We 'pray' with the heart. As a result we "muse" (think) on our ways, and "turn our feet" to follow His testimonies.

Jesus learned "obedience" through the cross. If we desire to be pleasing to Him, to be "worthy" of Him, we must "take up the cross" and follow Him. (Mt10:38) This must be a "daily" commitment. (Lk9:23)

Betrayed: "captured"? - (Mat 26:47-57)

Judas came, one of the Twelve. And with him was a numerous crowd with swords and clubs..and the one betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, Whomever I may kiss, it is He; seize Him. And coming up at once to Jesus, he said, Hail, Rabbi. And he ardently kissed Him. (vs47-49)

Remember a couple weeks ago we considered how, although Judas was looking for "opportunity" to betray Jesus, that even the timing of that was at Jesus' command, "What you do, do quickly". (Jn13:27)

Now, Judas is doing as assigned... leading the mob out to where he knows Jesus is used to frequenting. But just hold on a minute! Who is doing what to whom? Is Judas betraying Jesus. Is the mob actually "capturing" Jesus?

As the mob comes, Jesus asks, "Whom do you seek?" (Jn18:4) "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus says, "I AM!"

When Jesus invokes God's -Name- "I AM" (Ex3:14) notice what happens. The power of God's Name knocks the mob backward and onto their fannies.

Let's try this again, "Whom do you seek?" (vs7) "Jesus the Nazarene". This time, restraining His power, "I AM; then if you seek Me, allow these to depart.." (vs8)

Now, Peter gets into the act, pulls out his sword and whacks off the high priest's servant's ear (Jn18:10), which Jesus picks up and puts back on. (Lk22:51)

And then Jesus reasons with them, "..do you think that I am not able now to call on My Father, and He will place beside Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the Scripture be fulfilled, that it must happen this way?" (vs53-54) He continues to reason with them about all the previous opportunities they 'could have' had to seize Him, but didn't.

Like we considered in last week's lesson... yes, perhaps, had Jesus prayed according to His own will, He could have come up with a "new revelation" of God's will, and avoided the cross. Being Deity, Himself, He could have called upon the angels to rescue His humanity from what was happening. But notice that -even- Jesus, God-made-flesh, was sticking with the Scriptures. When the devil had tempted Him, He had replied with "it has been written" [in the Scriptures]. (Mt4:4) And notice the verb tenses that are missed in most translations which say "it -is- written". The Scriptures are 'past tense'. It has -already- been written. The Faith has been "once" delivered. (Jude3) The Scriptures that are -already- known are sufficient for everything to do with Godly living. (2Tim3:14-17) New 'apostolic/prophetic revelations' are not necessary; and rather, are

accused. (Gal1:8-9). If Jesus was the Word, and was God (Jn1:1), and Jesus Christ "is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb13:8), and is the image of God's essence (Heb1:3) Who does not change (Mal3:6) ...then, the Scriptures -had- to be fulfilled, that "it MUST happen this way". (vs54)

So, again... who is "in charge" of this "capture"? Jesus was not captured by treachery, stealth and intrigue. He -GAVE- Himself! As they are no doubt still rubbing their sore fannies, and seeing the healed ear... Jesus' Authority is indelibly etched into their hearts and eternal memories! And so, everything happened according to God's eternal plan, and the "Scriptures of the prophets [were] fulfilled." (vs56)

King of the Jews?: you said it - (Mat 27:11-14)

And the governor questioned Him, say, Are You the King of the Jews? And Jesus said to him, You say it. (vs11)

And..the high priest said to Him, I adjure you by the living God that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said to him, You said it. I tell you more. From this time you shall see the Son of Man sitting off the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of the heavens. (Mt26:63-64)

Before both the high priest (26:63) and Pilate (27:12) all sorts of accusations are brought forth against Jesus by false witnesses. (26:60) In both of these 'courts', the accused was expected to respond to charges. Before the priest "Jesus kept silent" and before Pilate "He did not answer him, not even to one word, so that the governor greatly marveled." (27:14)

First of all, all the accusations were deliberately trumped up. They were false. And second of all, had Jesus responded, Pilate would have released Him. When Pilate hears the accusation "Son of God" (Jn19:7) the -heathen- governor was "more afraid" (vs8) as he then queries, "Do you not know that I have authority to crucify you, and I have authority to release you?" (vs10) But it was necessary that the Scriptures be fulfilled. (26:54) Jesus -needed- to be crucified. And thus, to insure the matter, He again fulfills Scripture, "..as a ewe before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth." (Is53:7)

But notice the one (and ONLY) question He -does- answer. Are You the Christ? Are You the Son of God? Yes!

Before the Jews, up until this time, He has only on a couple of occasions referred to Himself as "I AM", etc. He has continually alluded to the matter, but when they would confront Him, trying to bushwhack Him, He would not answer; but rather, would confront them with all the Truths they were ignoring... His forgiving of sins, and proving His authority to do so by healing, and fulfilling all sorts of prophecies. But now it is time to be crucified...and they need to know, in no uncertain terms EXACTLY WHO it is they are crucifying. You see, there is another prophecy that will be fulfilled 2000 years into the future of this time, "And they shall look on Me whom they have pierced.." (Zech12:10) As they are about to 'pierce' Him, they need to know -Whom- they are crucifying. The Jews will tear their clothing at His answer and cry out "Blaspheme!!" (26:65)

On the other hand, Jesus and Pilate will have some discussion. The Jews supposedly already know God. But the 'heathen' Pilate does not. The Jews already have the Law and the Prophets which speak of Jesus, and all the things He has been fulfilling for three years. Pilate does not.

Pilate asks Him, What's the deal with You? Your whole nation is against You. (Jn18:35) So Jesus explains His Deity to him. Pilate, I'm no threat to you. Yes, I am a King, but My kingdom is "not of this world". Jesus did not come brandishing swords and spears. He had told Peter to put his sword away. If He had come to set up an earthly kingdom "My servants would have fought that I might not be delivered up to the Jews." (vs36) [Ed: and so why is it that the so-called 'christians' today think that -they- are supposed to 'help' Jesus by setting up an earthly kingdom for Him?] Jesus briefly tells His purpose, to "witness to the Truth.." (vs37) This addresses His coming to provide salvation.

And from this conversation Pilate realizes Jesus is no threat to anybody (the Roman empire or himself); there is no reason for Him to be crucified. He humiliates him and brings Him out, "He is not guilty of any crime" (Jn18:4) But then the Jews bring up Jesus' Deity. He claims to be the "Son of God".

Now -this- really scares Pilate. With the Roman pantheistic mentality he is open to the idea that Jesus 'could be' one of the 'many' gods. After all, many of the Roman gods at times came down in human form. So Pilate tries to talk some 'sense' into Jesus..."Don't You know I can release You, and give You Your freedom? And You can go back to being a god again?" To which Jesus makes a distinction. "You would have no authority against Me, not any, if it were not given to you from above." (Jn19:11) Remember how Paul proclaims that there is no earthly power but what it is "ordained" by God. (Rom13:1) And in a way, Jesus then somewhat "lets him off the hook" by saying, "because of this, the one delivering Me to you has a greater sin." (vs11) The Roman gods would 'zap' people who displeased them. Pilate found himself in a place in history, confronted with the Son of God. And just like Jesus would pray the Father, "forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk23:34), it would seem that Jesus is also not judging Pilate for what he does in condemning Jesus; telling him that what is happening was already ordained from heaven, from an Authority higher than that of Rome, that it is not really within his (Pilate's) control one way or the other.

But Pilate will know that he has been face-to-face with the Son of God. And truly, once Jesus has died on the cross, one of the Roman soldiers in attendance will also utter, "Truly this man was the Son of God." (Mk15:39)

When the Jews object to the 'title' Pilate writes over Jesus' crucifixion "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews", Pilate responds, "What I have written, I have written." (Jn19:19,21)

Ironic, isn't it... that a -heathen- ruler would recognize the true identity of God's Son to make sure He was 'labelled' properly, when God's own "elect" rejected Him!

It is finished: our High Priest - (Mat 27:46-51)

As Jesus is on the cross, there is a solar eclipse from 12-noon until 3-pm. Was the eclipse from the moon? Or did another celestial body come near the earth...judging by the earthquake? After all, the universe was created on a time-table to be for "signs and seasons" (Gen1:14)

God's own "elect" have rejected their Messiah, but God's creation is providing the appropriate 'mood' for what is on one hand a most glorious event, because sin is being atoned; but on the other hand, is the darkest moment of all time and eternity, as God, Himself, in the form of flesh and blood, is being subjected to God's wrath upon sin. This it not an occasion when there should be bright ("happy") sunshine!

As Jesus "bore in His body our sins on the tree" (1Pt2:24), a separation became necessary. Corruption CANNOT be in the presence of the Most Holy God. (1Cor15:50, Is6:3-4) Whenever there is sin, there is a separation from God. (Is59:2) During these three hours Jesus became the embodiment of mankind's sin. The whole sin nature in which "my mother conceived me" (Ps51:5) was upon Him. (Is53:6) The Father had to withdraw from Jesus. That "oneness" that was between Them (Jn17:21) was broken. While Jesus' Deity knew what was going on, for His humanity it was more than He could bear, which is why He had been pleading in the garden if there was "any other way". But there was not! What does a human do when bereft of spouse or children, those closest of human bonds? Man cries out! And so does the Son of Man, "My God, My God, why did You forsake Me?" (vs46)

The time of judgment is fulfilled and then Jesus cries out, "It has been finished." (Jn19:30) At the moment He cries out, sin HAS BEEN atoned. It is now 'past tense'.

And notice: the Romans or Jews did NOT "kill" Jesus. Yes, they betrayed, whipped, hit, taunted and crucified Him. But He did not die from the whipping, nails, suffocation or loss of blood. Once everything has been fulfilled "that the Scripture be completed.." (Jn19:28) He cries out with a loud voice, again, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Lk23:46) and He breathed out and "Jesus released His spirit." (Mt27:50)

God "gave His only begotten Son" (Jn3:16), and Jesus "GAVE" His life. "No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down from Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. I received this commandment from My Father." (Jn10:18)

So... what was the result of Jesus' finished work? "And, behold! The veil of the temple was torn into two from above as far as below. And the earth quaked, and the rocks were sheared!" (vs51)

Notice the wording as quoted from the LITV here. It was not -only- the veil of the temple which was torn (top-to-bottom), but more importantly that which the veil represented. The veil was a divider between the Holy of Holies, which symbolized God's presence, and sinful man. The only person who could go behind the veil was the high priest, once a year; only after he had been ritually cleansed, dedicated, and was carrying blood to sprinkle. When Jesus died, the division between God and man was torn "from above" (where God dwells), "as far as below" (where sinful man is).

"Christ having appeared as a High Priest..through His own blood, He entered once for all into the Holy of Holies, having procured everlasting redemption." (~Heb9:11-12) But He did not merely enter the "Holy of Holies made by hands...but into Heaven itself [from above], now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.." (9:24) And when He cried out "it has been finished" it means that the continually repeating annual cycle was no longer necessary. He offered Himself "once for all". (9:26) With the veil being torn, man can now 'see' into the Holy of Holies, directly. We can now "[have] confidence for the entering of the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus" (10:19) and we can "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience.." (10:22) Since our High Priest, Jesus Christ, has passed into the heavens, we can "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.." (4:14,16)

-THAT- is the significance of Jesus redeeming us from sin. We can now come into God's presence. The "wall of partition" has been broken down. We are now reconciled to God. (Eph2:14-16, Rom5:10, 2Cor5:18,20, Col1:21) And now that we are cleansed, the Holy Spirit is also able to dwell in us, (Rom8:9, 2Cor6:16) and thus we "have access by one Spirit to the Father." (Eph2:18)

See Also Addendum:

Q/A Jesus' death physical/spiritual? priest Levi/Judah?

Great Commission: ***Jesus' authority*** - (Mat 28:16-20)

So now that we have been redeemed and cleansed, and have access to God's presence; what do we do? Hoard this blessing to ourselves?

Jesus says, "All authority is given to Me in Heaven and in earth." (vs18) Before His crucifixion Jesus was saying, "...I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things..I always do those things which please Him." (Jn8:28-29) But as a result of His humbling Himself to the cross, "Therefore God has highly exalted Him, and has given Him a name which is above every name..." (Phil2:9) And so, as Jesus 'commissions' His disciples He says, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (Jn20:21)

What has become known as the "Great Commission" has three parts: The Commission, proper: Go and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe (obey) all of Christ's commands.

Notice a couple of things here. Some translations incorrectly say, "-make-disciples.." And many with the "soul-winner" mentality try to 'make' disciples; getting them to pray 'the -ritual- prayer' right on the spot under -their- supervision, whether the person's heart is ready or not, so they can be added to some 'list'. Let us never forget, however, that it is only -God- who saves, in God's 'own timing' as He knows the individual's heart, thus 'making' a person into a follower. No one is saved unless the Father "draws him". (Jn6:44) Our commission is to disciple the ones God saves. Teaching (Eph4:11), nurturing (1Cor12:25), bearing their burdens. (Gal6:2) But we should never forget that it is "God who causes to grow (gives the increase -mkjv/kjv). (1Cor3:6-7)

Some people also get hung up on semantics about baptism, saying that Believer's baptism is in the "name of Jesus" (Acts19:5), and they will denounce those who baptize in the "Trinity"...supposing that the Trinity is not taught in Scripture. But if they are baptized in the name of Jesus, notice that it was -Jesus- Who commanded to be baptized in the Trinity. Jesus is not without the Father, Who is not without the Holy Spirit, Who is not without the Son.

The -Message- of the commission: "that Christ must suffer and to rise from the dead the third day. And repentance and remission of sins must be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem." (Lk24:46-47)

There are many who only proclaim the part of salvation which Jesus provided, as found in 1Cor15:1-4; His death, burial and resurrection. They

would have people believe that God provides salvation, and there is nothing man does, except to have a "need" for salvation. After all, they also erroneously believe that God in His predestination purposed some to be saved, and others to be lost; and so, they suppose that He just reaches down and saves those He purposed, and the one saved has no say in the matter; that God's grace is "irresistable". They do not understand Peter's words that God "did not PURPOSE that any should perish.." (2Pet3:9)

When they -only- look at the Gospel Paul mentions in 1Cor15:1-4, they ignore his review where he "kept back nothing" that was necessary as he reminds "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts20:21) They say that, since 1Cor15:1-4 says nothing about "repentance" that we "dare not either". Apparently they missed the Gospel that Jesus -commanded- to be preached. Yes, Jesus suffered and rose the third day (that's what Jesus did); but then, man needs to 'respond' to God. The thing which separates us from God is our sin. (Is59:2) We need "remission of sins"; and to obtain/receive it, we need to repent. Jesus -specifically- COMMANDED that "repentance and remission of sins" should BE PROCLAIMED.

The Power or Authority with which we go forth: "..you shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts1:8)

Before Jesus came and died for sin, the Holy Spirit could not indwell. Feasts were always observed with unleavened bread. Israel was placed in a location (crossroads to three continents) where the nations came -to- her to hear of God. But once the veil had been torn, and sin had been atoned, and the Believer could have direct access to the Father, the Holy Spirit was able to indwell. The foreshadow of the Holy Spirit's indwelling was the 50th day, Pentecost, in which the bread was baked "-with- leaven". (Lev23:17) When the Holy Spirit came into the cleansed "sanctuary" (1Cor3:16), like leaven, this new life was like a "fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (Jn4:14) With this overflowing residing Spirit, we then understand the command to "go" into the whole world. And, indeed, the early Church turned the "world upside down" (Acts17:6) as they spread out as they "scattered... preaching the Gospel, the Word." (Acts8:4) And notice the -basis- for this 'going'. "..you are witnesses of these things" (Lk24:48) Primarily, witnesses "to Jesus". (Acts1:8) And, indeed, as the early disciples found themselves before judgment, their accusers noted that "they were with Jesus". (Acts4:13) When Jesus went away, He promised the Holy Spirit. How do we know Jesus? The residing Holy Spirit tells us of Him. (Jn16:13)

When a sinner comes to the foot of Jesus' cross and repents of his sin, and dies with Jesus, and comes to a new life (Rom6:3-5), there is a transformation. It is a new birth. (Jn3:3) New babies 'announce' their presence when they cry. If they don't cry, it is usually because they are not

breathing. They were still-born. Dead. But one who is "in Christ is a new creation..." (2Cor5:17) This transformation is an experience he has been through. He has 'witnessed' it. The earlier disciples could witness, "that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled.." (1Jn1:1) But we all, who are Believers, can witness the death and resurrection with Christ, and the new spiritual nature where "old things passed away" and everything has "become new".

And finally, we do not need to worry about being "alone". In these days of spiralling apostasy, as many Believers are "coming out of her" (Rev18:4), many are feeling "alone" like Elijah did, "I alone, am left". (1Kg19:14) They feel like they are without fellowship. Jesus encouraged, "I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you." (Jn14:18) We have "comfort in Christ" through the "fellowship of the Spirit" (Phil2:1) As the early churches did, we can "increase in the comfort of the Holy Spirit." (Acts9:31)

We can take courage as we forge ahead, being faithful to the calling with which He called us. No matter what may come along the way, we can always remember His promise:

"..behold, I am with you all the days until the completion of the age. Amen."
(vs20)

Addendum Section:

Light of the World © 2005

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a grain measure, but on a lampstand, and it shines for all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven." (Mt5:14-16)

You drive along in traffic, and suddenly a little 'flash' catches your eye. You look to see what it was, and where it came from... come to discover another vehicle has dangling from its rear-view mirror an assortment of glass, beads and crystals, which, as the sun landed on them as they were swaying with the movement of the vehicle, they 'sparkled' the sun's light as they refracted light of various colors for all to see. New Age spirituality is into candles and light-refracting crystals. Many believe there is 'power' in those crystals.

When I was a kid, in central N.Dakota where we lived, in catholic country, it seemed as if everybody had little statues on their dash boards. I don't know, to whom... Mary and various 'saints'. When one observes the symbols of catholicism, one sees various representations of their roots in Babylon's sun-worship (similar to today's Illuminati and Freemasonry's worship of the sun): art and carvings of the brilliant sun with its 'face', the eucharist host with its 'flames', their logos with a broken cross engulfed by the sun, Renaissance art depicting the radiance of the sun around the heads of the saints, or halos hovering overhead.

When Jesus was speaking to Believers, saying "you are the light of the world", was He speaking of this pagan symbolism? Was He declaring that we worship the sun as Freemasonry and catholicism do, or the moon as Islam does? Does the N.T. teach us to have candle-lighting rituals, to hold sunrise worship services? Or are we commanded to paste on 'smiles' to our faces so as to -appear- 'bright' and of continually 'radiant' countenances? Somewhat like when those deeply into the religious game of christendom are headed to church, they get all spiffed up, don an air of piety, exhort the children to "put on your smiles!", where just a few minutes ago they had all been fighting and yelling at each other; and then -at-'church' the worship leader does some cheer-leading, pumping people up to -SMILE- as we all (happily) sing this next song, and go around shaking neighbors' hands and greeting them with a -smiley- "Howdy do!" If a person is not smiling, or (Heaven-forbid!) exhibiting a slight frown (Gasp!), or even a 'stern' countenance (Shudder!), are they terribly backslidden and living in sin? After all, to a Christian, everything is "Praise the Lord!"; and "P-T-L" automatically also assumes a Cheshire-cat-like ear-to-ear grin!

Right?

When the Christian's "light" is seen, what is manifest? Following in the context that Jesus was teaching: when we let our light shine, what the world sees is "good works". (vs16b)

But does not Paul teach that salvation is "by grace, through faith...not of ourselves...NOT OF WORKS" (Eph2:8-9) ?

Oh...but...Jesus is not talking about Salvation. He is not talking about - how- to be 'saved'. This is the so-called "Sermon on the Mount", and a great crowd has gathered around; but to whom is Jesus talking? It says that "His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught - them-" (vs1-2) "Them" == the "disciples" who had just come next to Him. Disciples: ones who were already Jesus' followers.

There is a serious malady in christendom today that teaches grace minus mercy, mercy minus repentance; and their counterpart: salvation minus a changed life. Today's "salvation" (whatever that might possibly mean to them, when it is minus repentance and God's saving grace!) seems to consist of an overwhelming 'glow' of something supernatural, where a person suddenly finds themselves in a state of ecstasy, where they "feel" happy and joyous. But the accompanying follow-after doctrine exhorts them the same way President Bush did to America after 9/11: Continue living JUST LIKE YOU WERE DOING...you DON'T need to CHANGE A THING! ...because: God accepts you "just as you are". Thus, christendom is full of 'happy' people, with smiles on their faces, yet living in the swill gutter of sin!

But Jesus teaches the light of "good works". If a person continues in what Paul proclaims: SALVATION is "not of works"; but when a person has been saved, they become a "new creation" in Christ (2Co5:17) "UNTO GOOD WORKS" (Eph2:10) In other words, a person cannot be saved by doing works; but once a person has been saved, they will yield "fruits worthy of repentance" (Mt3:8) Christian "works" is the "fruit" by which the tree is known. (Mt7:16,20)

Furthermore, if we can back up just a bit in the passage: in what sort of context might the world be seeing these good works? Is the Christian life the proverbial "bed-of-roses" where everything is la-dee-dah, lollipops and sunshine?

"Blessed are they who have been persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when they shall revile and persecute you, and shall say every evil word against you falsely because of Me. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven, for in this manner they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (vs10-12)

Paul and Silas had been beaten and wrongfully imprisoned for casting the demon out of the young girl, and what the prisoners observed was a couple of Christians "singing songs" in the midst of their hurting backs. (Ac16:25) I don't suspect they were grinning ear-to-ear as they were beaten and hauled into jail!

Another quality of the Believer in that same context is as "salt": "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." (vs13)

The Christian life is not for the purpose, necessarily, "to be seen by men" (Mt23:5), for it to be announced, "look at his good works"; but when salt is in the food, the "good flavor" is tasted by the palate. The person eats the 'food', not necessarily thinking to themselves "how good the -salt- tastes"; nevertheless, if the salt wasn't in the food, the person would notice how 'bland' it was. There are many who concern themselves with "appearances"; look at what wonderful salt I am!; not actually being 'in' the food, not being of any eternal use to God's Kingdom; whilst leaving the kettle full of rotteness.

Salt gives food flavor. But salt also brings a "sting" to wounds. Where there is sin, the Christian is in stark contrast to that sin. The Christian often doesn't even need to utter a word of condemnation; the mere fact that he does not participate speaks loud and clear. Quite often, when a person of the world comes into the vicinity of a Believer, even though not-a-word may be spoken, the person of the world will begin to stare at and analyze the Believer, observing the witness of the Holy Spirit in the Believer's mere 'presence'. Just as Believers witness God's Holy Spirit in other Believers (Rom8:16); so, too, the world can often witness the Holy Spirit in a Believer, being in stark contrast to their own spirit of darkness (Eph5:11); when nary a single word was spoken. That 'salt' either providing a pleasant flavor, or contrariwise, an unspoken condemnation to the sinful conscience.

Back in the 70s there was this stupid song, "It only takes a spark to get a fire going..." Well, if a person is in a black coal mine, underground, at night...all it takes to provide light by which to see is the merest faint glimmer of a tiny candle or lit match. It doesn't have to be a bon fire or a halogen lamp...to contrast the vast darkness, just a tiny glimmer...and the darkness goes fleeing away into the corners.

When a Believer faces adversity or persecution, what does the world see? A resoluteness and unwavering peace, being in God's presence. The sanhedrin observed that the disciples "were with Jesus" (Ac4:13) When the world tries to divert the Believer away from God's Word, and find their efforts unsuccessful, that salt 'rubs' in the sinful wounds of their evil conscience. This is true of the world as well as those pretending to be

"christian", but are not; when the True Believer stands firm on God's Word, the pretenders become uncomfortable and turn the blame, calling the - True- Believer "judgmental". That's the 'salt' at work!

On the other hand, if the Believer decides to take the easy way out, and go-with-the-flow, don't stir up waves...that salt has lost its flavor. And what did Jesus say about such an one? "It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." (vs13b) If good works reveal a Believer and shines light, what does tasteless salt reveal? One who has put his hand to the plow and looked back! Jesus said that such a person is not "fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk9:62)

Yes...the Christian -is- 'different' from the world! By definition! If one is claiming to be "Christian", but for all appearances and fruits is a child of darkness, one seriously questions whether there is any light in them! Is there any salt to them? "If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Mt6:23)

A Christian's deeds are righteous...the world's are wickedness. The Christian walks as a "[child] of light" (Eph5:8)...the world "remains in darkness" (Jn12:46) and "lies in wickedness" (1Jn5:19) One does not entice the world to God's light by giving them more of their own darkness, nor does a Believer prove his Godliness by living like the world.

The world has plenty of 'light shows' and entertainment that 'smiles' at them, offering false happiness, false hope, and eternal judgment; they don't need more 'smiling-faces' from those pretending to belong to God. What the world needs to see is Christians who are FOR REAL, who are GENUINE...to-the-core...who, when the world is next to them, there is no question to -whom- they belong. That there is NO QUESTION that they are NOT OF THIS WORLD (Jn18:36), as Jesus said to Pilate...

but that their...

"...citizenship is in Heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ," (Php3:20)

Relaxing a commandment © 2000

"Therefore, whoever relaxes one of these commandments, the least, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of Heaven. (Mt5:19a -LITV)

Not long ago we considered 'verb tenses' in Acts4:13 from the LITV compared to other translations. Had the disciples been with Jesus (past tense) or "were" they (present tense) with Jesus while on trial? Someone e-mailed and gave me a theological/intellectual run-around to suggest that I was being too stringent... trying to 'enlighten' me to the notion that that passage didn't really say what it said.

Please do not misunderstand my motives here. These studies are not for the purpose of promoting the LITV translation. However, every time I see these little nuggets of Truth because of reading it in LITV (after a lifetime of other translations), I cannot help BUT share them. And when I find them, I double-check them with Strongs, etc. And, truly, they are something.

Most translations will say something like "whoever shall BREAK one of these commandments..." Well, of course, breaking God's Law brings judgment. But what about those eentsy weentsy little diversions?

God said about His "words" which He was "commanding", "..and you shall bind them for a sign on your hand.." (Deu6:8a) In our culture today, what happens if a watch band is too loose? The watch can slip off the arm. If a ring is too big, it will fall off the finger. If the glasses are not hugging the head/ears properly, they will fall off.

This word "relaxes", for which most translations use "break", carries with it the idea of a tight bandage which a person might 'loosen'. If an injured person is bleeding, the cloth needs to be pressed -firmly- against the wound. If a cast is not -snug- around the arm, the bones will not heal properly. It doesn't take the glasses being totally -broken- for them to fall off...being merely 'loose' will do the job just as well.

Jesus had been teaching "do not think that I came to annul the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to annul, but to fulfill." (Mt5:17) He continues talking about the "one iota or one point" (crossing "t"s, dotting "i"s, commas, periods, etc.) Things which give precise meaning to language.

This is the context in which He talks about "relaxing" any commandment. Yes, it's sin to commit adultery; but in the heart, looking with lust is just as sinful. Not to get into the topic of "divorce", but this makes a good illustration... Two divorced people 'find' each other and

want to get married. Jesus says that a remarriage in such a situation is "adultery". (Mt19:9) But modern "theology" teaches, "But they are so happy together. After everything they've been through in their lives, these two people are finally content in life and are sooo 'blessed'. Surely, Jesus wasn't referring to them?!" -Relaxing- Jesus' command? Or following His Law?

And there are many other areas where Christians have been "relaxing". And a whole theological system has come up out of it, the theology of "gray areas". Yes, we know there truly -are- gray areas, and Paul teaches about them in Romans 14. But there are many things that are clearly evil, which began by relaxing. It's like the parable of the "Arab's Tent and the Camel". While we can read how only 'qualified' Levites could even assemble/disassemble the tabernacle and carry items, the churches allow the unsaved to do janitorial duties or be 'hired' to work the nursery. And then, the unsaved are recruited to sing in the choir; after all, they are not teaching or preaching... and you never know, from the experience they might even get saved! After that person has been in the choir long enough, it is not even noticed (or even forgotten) that they are unsaved, and are approached to teach a Sunday School class. 'See how it progresses? All because God's law about keeping the unclean -out- of the assembly of Believers was -merely- "relaxed"'.

Remember: the 'broken' glasses are obvious, and fall off. But the 'loose' ones will fall off just as easily, even though they -seem- OK.

What does Jesus say about those who relax the Law? These great pastors with mega-church attendances, and a great 'name' that everybody knows their fame by...? They -got- their fame by 'relaxing' God's Word.

"..he shall be called LEAST in the kingdom of Heaven...but whoever does and teaches them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven." (Mt5:19)

Prayer and Fasting? © 1998

"What is the deal with this fasting thing? I am hearing it from different sources. It doesn't seem necessary to me. Am I wrong? ...So much pressure that the church needs to repent for the sins of our nation. Don't we need to witness and pray and bring people to Christ? Not give up food for 40 days....especially during Lent of all times.. we are not Catholics.. We are saved, born again believers...who know Jesus paid it all...His final sacrifice...has done it.." This, a recent query/comment from a VW subscriber.

From another source via e-mail, information about anti-religious "monitors" in Alabama schools, with ACLU support, to eliminate and persecute any form of Bible study, witnessing and prayer in school. Even if such prayer is "silent" in one's own heart, that another doesn't "see" it. That prayer, even during emergencies when someone is dying, is to be banned. The encouragement that Christians need to "PRAY HARD" about this.

What does "pray hard" mean? To grunt and groan? Maybe sigh? Or does one hold one's breath, and... "PUSH!"

From another source, an "Intercessors Network." Talk of "prayer warfare" and "prayer targets." And "creating areas of refuge." Uh, let's see. "Prayer targets" is found in Ephesians 6, right? Whatever happened to, "The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, And with my song I will praise Him. The LORD is their strength, And He is the saving refuge of His anointed. (Psa28:7-8) Where is prayer ever associated with aggression? Eph6:18 says "praying always with all prayer and supplication.." "Supplication" is a word of "submission" to the Lord, along with entreaties. Not of militance.

This kind of talk is part of the whole "manifest sons - kingdom now - kingdom restorationist" kind of ideology. They speak of being "in touch with the prophetic dimension" (not the Holy Spirit) to study, research, compile data on areas where they presume to bind and cast out demons in geographic regions. They do this with "networking" via internet, e-mail, faxes so as to "PRECISELY DEFINE and FOCUS a PRAYER COVER to any one in need." I wonder how God has been able to "manage" for 6000 years without faxes and e-mail, to accomplish His will, and to protect His own...to know "where" the need of the moment was to provide the "cover"!! "Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice." (Ps63:7)

They teach that "intercession is the ability to react and act" and quickly dispatch "prayer warriors" to accomplish..??? I failed to see their Scriptural references for that one, too. Where were they when Daniel was in the den of lions? Daniel was much too simplistic, "My God sent His angel and shut

the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me" (Dan6:22) And God did this without the internet and "prayer blankets."

Concerns that the Lord would "save us from poor praying." What's that?! Poor praying...?

They are concerned with "nations, community needs..where DRASTIC CHANGES are needed." As they say, "personal issues" is not part of their ministry. I thought God was a "personal" God..."I cried to the LORD with my voice, And He heard me from His holy hill." (Ps3:4)

I'm sure we could go on and on with this tongue-in-cheek expose. But the query that opened this commentary raises some serious questions that Christians need to consider, as we see this current major push by the false prophets and their followers.

The expression "power of prayer" is on the forefront of every- body's lips again these days. We will try not to cover old ground here from articles (Jul-Aug,95).

The PSA's on local Moody radio encourage people where they can "sign up" to go pray in this "church", or that, at some "specific time" when the doors are open. As though to "schedule God" and plan His itinerary for Him!! But Jesus said that "men ALWAYS ought to pray."(Lk18:1) And Paul speaks of "pray without ceasing."(1Ths5:17) ..the Holy Spirit is the One Who actually does the praying on our behalf.(Rom8:26-27)

Thus, because the Holy Spirit indwells us (Rom8:9,1Cor6:19), prayer is the very definition of communion with God. Prayer is not something we "DO" but a POSITION of "BEING." Abiding in Christ. (Jn15:4,7)

So, what about "fasting" and "national prayer?" First of all let's understand one thing clearly. The USA never has been a "Christian" nation.. that prayer and fasting could hope to bring her "back to" God. While it is true that many of the founding fathers adhered to Scriptural principles, the nation has never been a "theocracy." In fact, the Constitution was specifically written to allow "diversity" of religious beliefs. Which, "the Lord Himself is God; and there is none other besides Him."(Deu4:35) Such diversity is NOT "Christian." However, the diversity has allowed Christians to worship God openly, without fear of reprisal.

Is "fasting" taught in Scripture? Did God command it? It certainly is mentioned a lot.

Fasting is the act of not eating food and/or drinking liquids. Moses did so in the mountain for 40 days and nights.(Ex34:28) As did Jesus 40 days being tempted. (Lk4:2)

The only command I could find on "not eating or drinking" is in connection with the Feast of Firstfruits.(Lev23:14) It seems the intent here is that produce from the new harvest was not to be eaten until the offerings had been brought.

The passage the commentaries CLAIM teaches fasting is the "Day of Atonement" in Lev.23:26-32,16:1-34. This is the once-a-year occasion with the "scapegoat" and the high priest going into the Holy of Holies with blood. However, nothing is actually taught in Scripture about "fasting." While it was a "sabbath" of rest, the other requirement was to "afflict your souls." (23:27,32)

Afflict means to be humble, oppressed, downcast, put down, become low, weaken oneself. It says nothing of "food" or eating. Perhaps "fast- ing" was something Israel did in response to God's command? If food and feasting symbolizes wealth, prosperity and happiness; perhaps it was "their way" of showing humility?

But God never commanded it. In fact, as Israel became apostate God reacts to their fasting, "during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me; for Me?" when you eat.. do you not eat and drink for your- selves?" (Zec7:6-7) And Jesus says in His day, "When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites"(Mt6:16) parading their holiness for men to see. Rather do it before God "in secret."(vs18) And God in Isaiah 58 expresses the fallacies of Israel's fasts, and tells them what true "fasting" should consist of. That it was not about "food" but the "heart." Which Paul reaffirms in Col 2:16~.

While fasting is mentioned in the N.T. there is no doctrine taught on it; as we recall that the Church started out as a "Jewish" entity; no doubt, carrying with it some of the Jewish "traditions."

But what we do see in the N.T. is God's original command refreshed. God had commanded to "afflict the soul." James says, "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:7-10)

This is what God intended and desires. Not, necessarily, giving up food.

Violent Take it by Force? - (Mt11:12) © 2000

QUESTION:

I sure would appreciate your expertise and wisdom on the following:

From Matthew 11:10-19 and Luke 7:19-30, what do you think is the explanation of Matthew 11:12?

"And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."

ANSWER:

I don't know that I have a sure answer. All I can do on this is give some Scriptural references, and make some resultant observations

First of all, we must remember that satan has been given the world to rule over. (Lk4:6) He is called the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience". (Eph2:2) Our struggle to live before God is not a physical struggle, but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Eph6:12)

But we also know that he still has access to Heaven. He appears before God on a periodic basis to give account of his comings and goings. (Job1:7) And he also engages the good angels in warfare, as he (and/or his demons) detained the messenger who was sent to Daniel, being called figuratively the "prince of Persia" (Dan10:13)

Now, in the context, Jesus speaks of prophets and those who hear the message of the prophets; no matter in what manner the prophet comes, the hearers not responding. It is a continual warfare for the "minds" and "understanding" of mankind. That's why charismania is such a powerful tool of satan, because it bypasses the mind (1Cor14:14-15), and enters via the emotions, and ultimately possesses the soul/spirit of the individual. And when a person has been recaptured in such a manner, "the last state of that man is worse than the first" (Mt12:45) And this 'capturing' of the souls of mankind is with a militance. Those thus engaged become vehemently angry at anyone who would dare to proclaim and expose their deception. But the people thus-possessed, are no longer in (self)-control (Ac24:25, Gal5:23, 2Pt1:6) of themselves. The "in-filling" spirits take them and "force" (Mt11:12, Lk8:29) them to do/babble various things, and throw them around the room. (Mk9:22)

Another means, which readily comes to mind, where the "kingdom of heaven" is being "taken by force" is with abortion. Jesus likened the Kingdom of Heaven as being "like little children" (Mt18:3, 19:14) If we understand Paul's teaching that children of unsaved parents are "unclean" (1Cor7:14), in other words... "unsaved" or "not of the Kingdom of Heaven",

then, what does abortion do? It yanks that little one out of the womb in an "unclean" state, without any opportunity to hear God's "drawing" (Jn6:44) upon the life. They are taken out of the womb, "by force" and are, thus, cast into hell. [Editor: for more on this, please see a past commentary: "Abortion: What's REALLY at Stake?"]

This is one passage I cannot claim 'full' understanding of yet, which is likely why I did not address it when we went through this spot during the Matthew series. But these are some concepts which my mind/spirit mulls around when I consider that statement by Jesus.

Now, you reference both Matthew and Luke, speaking of John the Baptist. John was a prophet, 'preparing the way of the Lord'. (Mt3:3) He typically did not have smooth soft words. But rather on the order of "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Mt3:7) He was 'confrontational'. As we see the "two witnesses" in Rev ch11, we see signs and wonders of the magnitude of Moses and Elijah, causing droughts and bringing fire down to consume their enemies, etc. Satan sending his emissaries to attempt to do the prophet 'in', and the prophet with God's power, being victorious over those whom satan sends. It is spiritual warfare, brought to human terms through the human servants of God and satan. And in the context of Jesus saying this, John was in prison, having been taken "by force" by Herod. And he was ultimately beheaded. (Is that the -specific- meaning of that verse at that time and occasion of Jesus saying it?) The two witnesses in Rev ch11 are ultimately killed by the "beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit" (Rev11:7)

Even today, the prophets (for-TH-tellers/proclaimers) that God sends are attacked. In some quarters... physically. In free societies, it is more verbal abuse. Jesus heaps praise upon "you when they revile and persecute you, and -say- all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.." (Mt5:11)

Any Believer who is more than a mere "pew-warmer" -WILL- receive taunts and attacks. In this world "you -WILL- have tribulation.." (Jn16:33) A person can be a passive Christian, and live a smooth life. But as I experience, and as subscribers write, who take a stand and step out in faithfulness and boldness for the Lord... the opposition -DOES- COME. Yes, indeed!

It is spiritual warfare...for the lives of humanity.

No Hope for Charismatics? © 1998

After last Sunday's lesson from Matthew on the "Unpardonable Sin" and suggestions of its application to the charismatic movement, a letter came from a person quite distressed over their own situation. Concerned that there might be "no hope for charismatics".

This person was saved at a young age, but has experienced about 20 years of sliding along. At the invitation of friends, they have been attending a charismatic church. While the music and other trappings were appealing, this person leaves the services wondering why she "doesn't enjoy" going to church. She has "experienced" some sort of "tongues." But the whole commitment to the charismatic "thing" is "on the shelf" in her heart as the person is "seeking to know God." (I think this summarizes the basics, without sharing such a deep-felt letter publicly.)

What about this? First of all, please notice, remembering that the connection of "Unpardonable sin" to "charismatic" was made interrogatively. You will not find any verse that says, "a charismatic cannot be saved." We were noting what God's Word says about these things, and wondering "could this be?" In other words, IS IT POSSIBLE? "...that these practitioners have put themselves in a place of not being able to be saved?"

Let's look at two Scriptural examples. As the Word was proclaimed in Ephesus, Paul (an apostle) was performing "authenticating miracles." (Acts 19:11, Heb 2:3-4) Some pretenders decided to dabble around in some charismatic counterfeitism to perform exorcisms, and were beset upon by the demons. (vs 16) And the experience caused "fear [to fall] on all of them, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." (vs 17) As a result, as people saw the difference between the real and the fake, "many who believed came and confessed and showed their deeds." (vs 18) And the ones who had been engaged in practicing witchcraft and occult brought all their books of incantations and whatnot and burned them publicly. (vs 19) As a result, "the Word of God grew mightily and prevailed." (vs 20) These people experienced true conversion.

There was another occasion in Samaria. (Acts 8) Simon had been engaged in black magic, as people labelled his deeds "this one is the great power of God." (vs 10) You see, this is what the modern practitioners say about their so-called "healings, tongues & exorcisms." They say it is being "spirit-filled" ...the claim, that the "spirit" in this instance is the "Holy Spirit." "God's power!" Just the same kind of thing Simon was doing. But you notice it says that he was actually "conjuring." (vs 11 -MKJV/LIT) ("bewitched w/sorceries" -KJV) Just as the modern methods and manifestations are known for their "shamanistic" origins.

Along comes Philip preaching, and people get saved. And you notice it says "then Simon himself believed also, and being baptized, he continued with Philip."(vs13) And so he watches all the "signs" Philip is performing with REAL "power" from God. And then, along come Peter and John (apostles) to impart the Holy Spirit to Samaria.(vs15-16) (a unique "apostolic" function for "that time" which we won't go into here)

Simon sees this as a "gift" that he would like to have. He sees that the "apostles" are doing this "laying on of hands" and he wants the power, too. And so, he seeks to "purchase" it. (Like in his past in black magic) And what does Peter respond? "Your [money] perish with you because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God." (vs20-21) You notice Peter points to Simon's "HEART." Same thing we spoke of last week. As he says "I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." (vs23) While it said that he had "believed", Peter is seeing what we noticed last week, that he's still got the "other foot" in the realm of darkness. He's "bound" there and just can't seem to get loose.

Those in Ephesus, clearly, came to repentant Faith in Christ. On the other hand, Simon we don't quite know about. It would seem that his situation ("heart") was highly doubtful.

So, what about "you" who may be a "charismatic", and are wondering about your standing before God? What about this person whose letter we summarized? Are you TRULY a REAL "charismatic?" Is a "charismatic" a person who attends a charismatic church? Well, this person who wrote is no more charismatic than, a person who attends a "church" is a "Christian." It's not the "building" or the group of people one associates with. It's the "HEART." Remember God's yearning after Israel, "Oh that there were such a [HEART] in them..." (Deu5:29)

Since this person mentioned "20 years" of floundering, let me add a little about my own "20 years" of sliding. Around the same time I became persuaded to be a bit more "tolerant" of other viewpoints, and be more "loving" and "less judgmental" of my "fellow-brothers and sisters" (early 70's) oddly enough, was around the same time I switched from KJV to NASB. (I did so in ignorance and the innocence of my heart because the "scholars" I respected said NASB was "most accurate.") In hindsight, I now see those years, culminating in the day my unequal yoke left, as a steady descent, spiritually. My heart was continually "desirous" of serving the Lord. But my life had been compromised; first through the NASB, and then a few years later, the unequal yoke.

When the unequal yoke was taken away, and I had confessed my sins before the Lord (1Jn1:9), a new era began. The following year exposed me to a few things. First, was the matter of the Truth regarding translations of Scripture. And then, the true foundations about the modern apostasy.

The Lord allowed me to be associated for a time with a church whose pastor was deeply involved with the local Pastor's Prayer Summit movement. And at his invitation, I attended their weekly Thursday morning "prayer meetings." I've already mentioned their "prayer" times in the past. But I have not mentioned their "hot seat."

After a few weeks of attendance, I spoke up in the meeting, requesting prayer on behalf of my absent unequal yoke. (there was no divorce yet at that point) This pastor asked if I'd like to sit on the "hot seat" and be prayed for. In my then-current state of earnestly seeking the Lord (regarding everything in my life) I agreed. This "prayer" involved "laying on of hands" as everybody in the room (including charismatic practitioners) gathered around. Some MIGHTY, VEHEMENT and EARNEST "praying" went on. Requesting and "commanding" the Lord to answer prayer, to do this and that, and to impart extra measures of "the spirit" upon me...

As I left that meeting, on my way to work, I was praying to the Lord to "show me His Truth" regarding what had just taken place, this whole matter of "prayer" and all the things this group was about. This had been as close to a charismatic experience as I would ever expect to experience... if I was going to. (At that time I hadn't yet concluded the ABSOLUTES of the Scriptural teachings we present here now. I was "open" to the idea that charismatic contained some "beneficial aspects" for us non-charismatics...things that would be "good for" us to consider. I didn't even consider that it was "demonic.")

Well, folks. I'm a True Believer in Jesus Christ. I received Him as my Savior when I was 5 years old. And even though I had been in a 20-year slide, I was still, nonetheless, a "Christian." As today's (out-of-sequence) study on the "Empty Heart" says...God's Holy Spirit was in my heart. So, even though, in ignorance and seeking, I allowed myself to be on their "hot seat" ...their "spirits" did not enter me, because I was "Occupied." I went to the hot seat, with my heart in total communion with My Lord, seeking Him earnestly. (Ps119:45,Jer24:7) I did not get "tingly" in a "spiritual orgasm" nor babble, nor become "slain." A few more weeks of attending these meetings eventually showed me that they were not of God. But the Holy Spirit was with me. And apparently my imperviousness to their "spirits" was not unnoticed by them, as a few weeks later, when I happened to be sitting at McDonalds, a couple of the "fully charismatic" ones of them happened to walk in, and the younger one spoke to the other about me sitting there, with a tone of "wonderment" in his voice, "Hey Look! There's that fellow...!"

As we stated in the study/s...God knows the heart. He knows "your" heart. He knows whether or not you are "True."

What about somebody like this person who wrote? The very fact that there is deep concern indicates a compliant heart. If you wonder if you have crossed "that line" and whether or not it's too late; the very fact that you

"wonder" about it means that God is still speaking to your heart. There is still hope/time. God has not written you off yet. God is "longsuffering, not willing that any should perish."(2Pt3:9)

What if you are feeling "uncomfortable" with your present situation attending these places, but your spouse wants you to go, and you are "obligated" to go with him? Does this put you in danger of Satan's "Gotcha!"? What about, if you attend somewhere not knowing what to expect, and suddenly this stuff erupts around you? Here, we can draw from Scriptures, again. Naaman, a Gentile, has just been healed of leprosy, and is now talking with Elisha. He has obviously come to Faith in Jehovah. (2Kgs5:17) But "back home" in Syria he is in subjection to his (heathen) king. He expresses his "position" in being required to accompany his master when he worships at the "house of Rimmon." (vs18) Asks for "Jehovah's pardon" in this matter. And Elisha responds, "Go in peace." (vs19) "Grace." If your heart is right before God, Jesus promised, "behold, I give to you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the authority of the enemy [including charismatic demons]. And nothing shall by any means hurt you."(Lk10:19)

However, if you are scoffing at the clear teaching of Scripture against it, and are rebelliously **INSISTING** on your demonic "spirit-filled" experiences... well, my heart **SHUDDERS** to consider your destiny! Amen!

Addendum:

In a couple more subsequent communications, the topic of "catholic" came up, which raises one other point that needs to be made here.

First of all...

In these current studies we are addressing "charismatic" generically as one big package. For you newer subscribers, specific manifestations were considered a year and a half ago. If you are interested in Scriptural teaching about things like praying in the spirit, healings, tongues, prayer language, revival, etc. please visit VW's website, Articles, Commentaries & Q/A's around May-June, 1997. In addition, there is a very good piece by one of VW's subscribers on "Tongues" in the Library. These topics also have their own search words in the "Topics Search" menu. If you scroll down to "charismatic" that link will branch out to the rest.

However...

The "manifestations" such as tongues and healings are not the primary concern. They are merely symptoms. "Charismatic" is; because "charisma" the "power" of the "spiritual" is what is at stake. It is the "glue" which binds the current ecumenism. When Evangelicals were rejoicing back in the 70's that Catholics were "becoming christian" it was Catholic "charismatics." If we understand that in the dark recesses of catholicism is occult, witchcraft and demonology (see Dave Hunt's book, "A Woman Rides the Beast");

and we understand that charismatic is a shamanistic approach to conjuring spirits; think about it a moment. Why shouldn't they combine with each other. In reality, they are of the "same" spirit/s. And whether Assemblies of God do their tongues, or Baptists merely do the emotional "worship music", satan doesn't care. The same spirit is at work in both. It is what drove the "Jesus People" and "Christian Hippy" movements. And through these over time, the eastern Tibetan/Indian Hindu-type meditative empowerment techniques became readily accepted by the up-until-then conservative Evangelical Fundamental churches.

The same Isaiah who spoke of the "mediums and wizards who peep and mutter"(8:19) saw this "word" concerning Israel (who is an "example" for our day -1Cor10:6)...

"You have forsaken Your people the house of Jacob, because they have become full from the east [eastern ways], and are fortune tellers like the Philistines. And they clap their hands [in worship] with the children of strangers." (Is2:6)

In the modern church... "charismatic" ...is it's name.

"all dwelling on the earth will worship it, those whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If any man has an ear, let him hear." (Rev13:8-9)

Blasphemy of Holy Spirit & tongues? ©2000

QUESTION:

What is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? I feared that I may have done this when I spoke against an instance of tongues.

ANSWER:

For the best answer to this, let me send you to the website: Unpardonable sin (Mt12:22-32) And be sure to click the link at the end of that section, "No hope for charismatics?" ...and I think there are a couple of links within that one, too. These studies are -most- detailed and fairly complete on this subject.

Would I be guessing correctly that your 'fear' comes because you have spoken out, and some charismatics have taunted you that your criticism of what they do was blaspheme? It is not the first time, and won't be the last. This is what they do. But you need to be assured of what it is that they are doing, and how that compares with Scripture.

Regarding the Holy Spirit, be fully assured that there are a couple of things the Holy Spirit will -NEVER- do:

The Holy Spirit will never go beyond God's Word. Anyone who does so is "accursed" (Gal1:8-9) God's Word was given "once for all". (Jude3) And Jesus said quite plainly that the Spirit would "not speak from Himself". (Jn16:13) That word "from" indicates something which the H.S. -initiates- or -originates-. The Holy Spirit will only proclaim from Jesus Christ. (vs14)

The Holy Spirit will never overwhelm and "take control" of a person, rendering the person physically helpless against their own will. In correcting charismania of Paul's day, he says, "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets". (1Cor14:32) Yes, the Holy Spirit fills a person (Eph5:18), but it is always in context of the person being in "self-control" (Gal5:23,2Tm1:7,etc) and having full use of his "mind". (1Cor14:15)

Regarding tongues...

If tongues is of the Holy Spirit, the hearers WILL UNDERSTAND what is being said. In Acts2:8-11 the hearers understood in their own dialect. And notice that when the Holy Spirit was given in the O.T. that they "prophesied" (preached)(Num11:25) Why did they not speak "in tongues"? Because everybody spoke Hebrew. Nobody was a 'foreigner' of a different native language. Notice Paul begins his corrective remarks by saying that "prophesying" is preferred (1Cor14:1,5). Why? Because the hearers "understand" what is being said.

You see, what was happening in Acts ch2 was -NOT- "tongues". It was "preaching". Preaching God's Word. Yes, -incidentally-, there were Jews there, for the Jewish feast of Pentecost, who had pilgrimaged there from many countries in which they were living, their ancestors having been 'dispersed' there; and they heard the apostles speaking in their own dialects of the regions where they lived. But the primary event that was happening that day was -PREACHING-, and telling them that -they- had crucified Jesus, and that they needed to "repent". (2:23,38) So, you see, when the Holy Spirit was imparted in Acts2 and Num11, in both events, the "manifestation" of the "filling" of the Holy Spirit was "prophesying" (PREACHING). -NOT- "tongues". What happened when Saul was '[Holy] Spirit-filled'? He prophesied (preached). (1Sam10:9-13)

Now, mind you, I have not heard of a single modern-day instance of a genuine Acts 2 "tongues". What happens today is the "peep and mutter" of the "mediums and wizards". (Is8:19) God gave "signs and wonders" to Israel (Is8:18) and warns against these demonic manifestations. And notice that God's method of ascertaining truth is "To the Law and to the Testimony!" (vs20) God's Word, the Scriptures. These who do these "signs" say that they are receiving an 'extra' or 'new' revelation from God...-APART-FROM- Scripture.

Now notice, it also says that if they reject God's Word in favor of their wizardly manifestations, "it is because no light is in them". (vs20b) In today's terminology, they are not saved. They are not Christians. They are not Believers. They are of the devil.

Here is the matter reviewed: (Isaiah ch8)

- Signs and wonders are for Israel (vs18)
- Babbling gibberish is demonic. (vs19)
- Scripture is the plumbline, which the babblers reject (vs20)
- The babblers are not Believers. They rave and curse (vs20b-21)

Thus... unless you have observed (and condemned) an instance of Acts 2-type 'understandable languages' spoken by somebody whose native language is different from that of his hearers, and they were proclaiming (preaching) God's Word, do not be afraid. You have NOT 'blasphemed' the Holy Spirit. If you were speaking out against babbling, demonic gibberish; rather, you have "reproved" their "works of darkness". (Eph5:11) "Rejoice and be exceeding glad" that they have spoken evil against you; for your reward in Heaven is great. (Mt5:12)

Jesus appearing in visions? © 1999

[Ed: The following is an answer to an e-mail which was too "personal" to post here. But is a subject related to several others in this grouping. In this case, of Jesus -appearing- in a vision. I think the answer stands on its own without the question.]

ANSWER:

If I have not been -in- someone else's dream...seen it as they did...I'm hesitant to speak dogmatically. But I have had some dreams of my own. Some which I'm still waiting to know their outcome and truth. But they were simply dreams of physical people I know.

But there was a dream I had, which, having evaluated it, I have come to realize, since, what its source was...because it was a sort of "supernatural" dream like yours. The source was -NOT- from God.

First of all, let's look at Scripture, and then analyze your dream as best we can from a "distance" like this.

Jesus said to Thomas that he had seen [Jesus] and believed. "Blessed are they who have -not- seen and have believed." (Jn20:29)

When Jesus went up into heaven, He did so -from- the Mt. Olives, and the angels said that He would come back in the same way they had seen Him go up. (Acts1:11) Which is something prophesied in Zech 14:4. Back -to- the Mt. of Olives.

Furthermore, Jesus said, "if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ! Or, there! Do not believe it." (Mt24:23) And then He describes what it will be like when He comes again, "as the lightning comes out of the east and shines even to the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man" (vs27) That's when He comes back to the Mt. of Olives.

One final thought...regarding false doctrine. Paul warns that "even if an angel from heaven" should proclaim something different, "let him be accursed." (Gal1:8) And how do angels appear? as "light" (2Cor11:14-15) And John proclaims that there are "even now" many antichrists (1Jn2:18)

There are MANY dreams, visions and out-of-body experiences where people experience darkness, light, and various situations of "calm", "peacefulness" and "love." That's part of what "Touched by an Angel" is all about.

The Faith we have right now until Christ returns, is one of which Peter says, "...Though NOW YOU DO -NOT- SEE HIM, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, (1Pet1:8)

If Scripture says that we -don't- see Him "now" ...that we are waiting for His "glorious appearing" (Tit2:13) ...then, we have to assume that any other "vision" like that is -NOT- really Jesus. It is satan's counterfeit. -An-"antichrist". And the rest of your dream, with the darkness, light, calm...is very similar to what other occult visions are like, as testified by those who have had them. For...if it really had been Jesus who was in the dream, He would not have been ignoring you. Jesus doesn't come to us, only to shun us. He is the One Who invited, "Come to Me...and I will give you rest." (Mt11:28) Those are not the words of someone who is not paying attention.

Sex with Angels? © 1999

This is a warning and caution, especially to women, who tend to be, by their God-given emotional make-up, more "vulnerable" to these things. But men...pay attention, too! Please pardon, but the subject matter necessitates being somewhat 'graphic'.

Remember that the days prior to Christ's return, He said would be like the "days of Noah." (Mt24:37,Lk17:26)

In the days of Noah there were disobedient "spirits" who are now "in prison." (1Pt3:19-20) These are ones who didn't keep to their proper "domain" (NKJV) "estate" (KJV) "place" (MKJV/LITV) and are in a place, being reserved for judgment. (Jude6) These are the angels ("sons of God") who apparently changed their form, and had intercourse with women. ("daughters of men")(Gen6:1-2)

How is this information related to -visions-? VERY IMPORTANT!!!

On various occasions I hear/read of/from women who have had some vision, encounter, hallucination, dream, etc. where they see or find some "male" figure communicating with them, or approaching them. They often -think- it's "Jesus." In some cases, it seems the figure -wants-to- have relations with the woman. The woman is troubled...the figure goes away. More often I hear of the woman seeing the figure, and the terms used to describe the entity are ones of "DESIRE" ...on-the-part-of-the- woman. The woman (especially if she claims to be a "Christian") would never admit, in words, that she "wanted" this entity, but the words indicating -deep-desirous-emotions- usually betray her true heart. Remember Paul's words about "silly women loaded with sins, led away with different -kinds- of -lusts-" (2Tm3:6)

In case you think this is getting a bit "far-fetched" consider Eve. When the serpent approached her, the subject was the "fruit" of the tree. But Eve's emotions were ones of "desire" (Gen3:6) Observe the next thing they noticed...THEY'RE "NAKED" (vs7) What did fruit or obedience have to do with -nakedness- unless something -else- was going on in that encounter? Either in reality, or simply with the emotions?

Keep in mind... a high percentage of the demonic "alien abductions" include sexual/reproductive "experiments".

What should you do if you have one of these experiences? Remember that it is -NOT- "Jesus"!! In addition to the fact that He will be coming "like lightning" when He comes, Jesus would -never- stir up sensual, sexual desires like that. He -specifically- stated about heaven that "they neither marry nor are given in marriage." (Mt22:30,Mk12:25) Jesus is not going to

ask something of you that He has stated, in Scripture, does not exist in that realm.

Since it's not Jesus, you know it's a demon "transformed as [a] minister of righteousness" (2Cor11:15) appearing as that "handsome hunk". And since it -is- happening, and Jesus said that angels -don't-, you can know that it is another case of them not keeping their "proper place". When they come to you in this manner, they are exceeding their proper bounds. They are doing so in -disobedience- to God!

Do what Jesus did when confronted by Satan... "GO, SATAN!!" (Mt4:10) "Get outta here! Leave me alone!" Remember, if we "resist the devil..he will flee.." (Jas4:7)

If you were to allow such an encounter, what would be "so wrong" with it? Well, remember "two become one..." (1Cor6:16) What happens if you become -one- with a demon in such a fashion? Does such an act forfeit one's salvation? (For newer subscribers, recommended reading: "Twelve Kinds of People" esp #11. under Aug'97 commentaries) I don't know if there is any Scripture that says one way or the other. But, why dabble around with fire and take chances, for momentary euphoria?? Is this where the expression, "selling one's soul to the devil" comes from?

Don't think, for a moment, that just because you are a "Christian" that it can't happen to you!! Satan would like nothing better than to lure you away from God. If you resist him "by faith" you will "live". But if you "draw back" God says, "My soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb10:38) And if you do "withdraw" from God (vs39) that's it! You can -never- come back to Him! (Heb6:4-6) You're finished! Forever!!

Thus, Peter writes -to- BELIEVERS...

"Be sensible and vigilant, because your adversary the Devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking someone he may devour, whom firmly resist in the faith..." (1Pt5:8-9)

And Paul... "neither give place to the devil." (Eph4:27)

the Seed: © 2005

" the Seed: Birds of the Air "

"Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air came and devoured it." (compiled from: Mt13:4 & Lk8:5)

Back in August,1997 a commentary was presented, "Twelve Kinds of People". It discusses all the various sorts of people, saved and unsaved, describing them from the Scriptures. Regarding the saved: the various conditions, from the newly saved and excitedly growing, to the mature Believer who has grown to maturity, to Believers who are living in carnality, backslidden, in rebellion; nevertheless are saved, etc. And the unsaved: those who have never heard, those who have heard and rejected, those who pretend to be Christians knowing full-well they are not but are wolves in sheep's clothing, and those who genuinely think they are saved but are not due to having been deceived, etc.

In this series for the next four months we take a look at a similar sort of comparison that Jesus taught; only, narrowed down specifically to the Gospel message. As we learned in the Matthew series, Jesus explains that the "seed" in this parable is the "Word of the Kingdom" (Mt13:19), the "Word of God". (Lk8:11) Jesus taught that nobody can come to Him unless the Father 'draws' them. (Jn6:44) And as Jesus is presented to the world in various ways, we know that the basis for salvation is the Word, "So then faith is of hearing, and hearing through the Word of God" (Rom10:17); through Jesus Christ; there is "no other name" by which to be saved. (Ac4:12) And even if a person hasn't heard the name, Jesus, God has left Himself a witness to the whole world through creation. (Rom1:19-20) Thus, "have they not heard? Yes indeed: Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." (Rom10:18,Ps19:1-4,98:3)

In the Matthew series we offered that the differences are not in the 'seed'; it is one "sower" (Mt13:18), the "Son of Man" (Mt13:37) and the seed all comes out of the same pouch. God's Word "stands firm in the heavens" (Ps119:89), it is unchanging. Jesus Christ is the "same yesterday, today, and forever." (Heb13:8)

We also suggested that the various soils do not change. They are what they are. But God "knows those who are His" (2Tim2:19) God "foreknew" those who are His. (Rom8:29) God has a "purpose" to everything. It is not His purpose that "any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2Pe3:9) But for those He foreknew to be sons of destruction He also has a purpose, to display His wrath upon the "sons of disobedience" (Eph5:6,Col3:6) But He does not do as He is often accused of by the scoffers: indiscriminately condemning the poor ignorants to hell;

but He demonstrates His wrath only after enduring the vessels of wrath with "much longsuffering" (Rom9:22) as He did with Israel, sending them prophets to plead with them to repent, "Turn! Turn from your evil ways! For why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezk33:11) ..."rising early and sending them" (Jer25:4)

And so, when the Sower, the Son of Man, spreads the Word, He knows that some of the seed will grow. And He equally knows that other things will happen to the other seed...His Word will be treated in various ways by those who hear it, according to the makeup of their heart...that in the end, the hearts all become revealed. You see, the "Word of God...is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart...all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we must give answer." (Heb4:12-13)

Thus, when God sends out His Word, for the various purposes, even though it is 'scattered' as a sower scatters seed, each kernel has a specific mission: "so shall My Word be, which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall succeed in that for which I have sent it." (Is55:11)

As introduction...

In past years, in connection with other topics, I have shared my observations of the neighborhood sparrows and crows. My neighbor has a feeder which is kept continually stocked with bird seed. This year she asked if I could build a bird house, so she could provide a place for them to raise their young, so that she could plug up the holes where they go into her attic and make a mess around her house. So, while I was at it, I made two; the second one for myself. You see: I also throw out pieces of bread for them. When they have young in the nest, they -really- like the bread, as it is easy to break up into little pieces, stuff their beaks, and fly up to feed their young. Mine was setup about 20ft from the kitchen window, so I've had a front-row-seat as they built the nest, laid the eggs, the first hatchling died, but the other three made it (a male and 2 females), fed the young, and then the young departed. After having followed the whole process for 3-4 weeks, I now understand what "empty nest" syndrome is... literally; when I came home from work one day and that 'last' baby had flown out, and the nest/house is now empty...deserted.

During the height of the nesting season, the parents flock around for the bread. Some even become 'attached': if I go for a walk and arrive back home from around the block, this one female would come along when I was yet a couple houses away, and 'escort' me back home, fluttering/hopping alongside the way where I was walking. They see me come in the driveway on the motorcycle, and come hopping along the fence expectantly. In the morning when I get up, they always seem to know 'when' I am coming out the door. The same female would always seem to be perched on the roof, just above the door, and would almost

'follow' the first piece of bread down to the ground, and snatch it up. On a couple of occasions she has even almost caught the bread in mid-air.

Sparrows are also like watching children. A couple years ago I shared how that one male came and "buzzed" me as I was sitting on the back porch, reading, and was then proudly strutting up on the neighbor's roof, chirping/bragging at what he had just done. A few days ago (as this is being written) we had a hot 90+° (F) day going, and I didn't see anybody running their sprinklers, so I set the watering hose at the end of one of the garden trenches, and ran a slow stream for the birds. They saw it immediately, and flew down nearby...and then 'hopped' quite a ways from where they landed, to the water. I've discovered you can tell the 'mood' of sparrows by their hop. These little guys all converged, hopping 'springily', just like children rushing to the swimming hole (last one in's a rotten egg!), in eager anticipating of some 'splash' time in the water. It's fun to watch.

Anyway, all this 'extraneous' introductory stuff to get to what we want to observe. Jesus told stories from real life in His parables; I think we can do similarly to set the stage. Yes?

During the height of nesting season, the sparrows are voracious for food: both for their own sustenance (do you know how much flying back and forth they do to feed their young?), and also for filling those eager, assertive, cheeping beaks in the nest.

On a couple of occasions, as I would approach the door, I would be looking out the windows to see 'who' was perched around, but not seeing much of anybody, would step on out to the back step... and then as I would flick out the first piece of bread... WHOOOOSHHH WHOMMMPPPPP!!!! Seemingly the entire neighborhood of sparrows (dozens of them!) all converge upon that single piece of bread, in a single instant! There is a mad scramble in the middle of this mayhem as several snatch it from each other, and eventually one gets a good beak-hold and successfully flies off with it.

-THAT- is the mental picture that came to mind as I was reading this parable in Luke recently.

Another thing I've discovered...I can't go feeding them TOO MUCH, otherwise when they gather around in their hords, they also begin to fight with each other.

But there is one thing that is a -given-. They may leave 'messes' where they perch. But I -never- need to sweep the driveway (where I throw the bread) of crumbs. Never! They pick it SPOTLESS! Even if crumbs were left after they tore the pieces into smaller beak-sizes, and flew off to feed the young, eventually 'somebody' comes back looking for more, and they pick even the tiniest crumbs... clean off!

Is this not what we see in the world today? You talk with somebody about the Word, and what is their reaction? A blank look, a blank stare. What are you talking about? Duh! Never heard that! God's Word is being 'swooped' upon and snatched away so that people don't have a clue. Sure, they may know about "churches" here and there, all over, but they haven't a clue regarding the Scriptures... God's Word.

This snatching happens in many various ways: Years ago the Bible may have been viewed in schools as mere 'literature' and respected. Eventually it was banned totally. Different 'translations' began to emerge. Then, 'paraphrases'. Now some, like the "Message", don't even resemble God's Word. Bible studies and classes little by little shifted from a teacher teaching, to everybody sitting around and 'discussing'. Through that process the Word was shoved into the background, as personal 'opinion' began to take precedence. Those same people then adopted 'worship' and 'praise'; no longer reading or studying the Word at all; but 'praising'. This praise more and more became the realm of the world's demonic rock concerts, complete with satan's drum beats, and sensual dance. So-called "christian" chatrooms would disallow the posting of pure Scripture, instead embracing 'discussions'. Ministers graduating from seminaries go into ministry embracing the notion that strict adherence to "Sola Scriptura" (Scripture only) is a sure-fire way to get into error, that a person must read the writings of various great men; thus they view the Scripture through these "lenses"; a lens, by definition, a tool which 'changes' that being viewed to look 'different'; thus, Scripture ceases to be Scripture, because in the minds and hearts it has been changed by all the lenses of the famous ones they prefer to hear, rather than God. They trample upon God's Word, making a mockery of it, embracing commentaries, eastern religions and world philosophies.

Jesus spoke of the end times, when it would be time for Him to return, and asked, "when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Lk18:8) What did God prophesy? "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord Jehovah, that I will send a famine into the land, not a famine for bread, nor a thirst for water, but rather a famine for hearing the Words of Jehovah." (Am8:11)

You see, this is not only by God's 'permission', but by His design. On a side note: I have sometimes wondered 'why' the Lord is not opening the door to get the VW-edition printed. Within my spirit He has prevented me from pursuing the matter. Sometimes God "forbids" His Word to be given to certain people. (Ac16:6-7) And this is why Jesus spoke in parables, IN ORDER THAT some "may not see" and "may not understand" (Lk8:10)

Remember, the sower didn't -need- to throw seed by the wayside. He was not that 'sloppy' that, "Oops! some fell there 'accidentally'" In God's design, in His foreknowledge, He -purposely- drops His Word where He -knows- it will be snatched away by satan... "...the devil comes and takes away the

Word out of their hearts, -THAT- they should not believe and be saved" (Lk8:12)

Jesus told Peter, "Behold, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat." (Lk22:31) Remember, God allowed Satan to torment Job. (ch1-2) When He needed to destroy Ahab, He sent a "lying spirit" from among the fallen angels gathered before Him, thrown to persuade Ahab to do what was wrong, in order to be judged. (2Ch18:21-22)

Many Believers wring their hands bemoaning the apostasy. But God knows all about it. In fact, it is part of His purpose, to reveal true colors. When the 'church' cries out, "Lord, Lord..." didn't we do all sorts of wonderful ministry "in Your name" and He replies "I never knew you" it will be because -they- are the very ones who snatched away God's Word, and refused Sound Doctrine.

The Word is snatched away when people go forward at invitations, having had their 'emotions' manipulated, so they then never again listen to God's Word, because: they "went forward"; they did the ritual. The Word is snatched away when so-called soul-winners press the person to "repeat-after-me" -the- prayer (a prayer which is not even in the Scriptures); and they are informed, "Sh'zamm! You're saved!" And then as they learn to become good little pharisees, they follow the 'traditions' rather than God's Word; they rest on "KJV, KJV, KJV", but don't actually know what it says. The Word has been snatched from their -hearts-. The Word is snatched away when everybody is reading the latest translation du-jour where God and Jesus are obliterated (trampled) as they worship "Judith Christ". Not to mention where they are too busy 'worshipping' to spend any time in the Word...of -any- translation or paraphrase.

And without God's Word, any claim or profession of "salvation" is false. If the invitation was manipulated by emotions, it was not true salvation. Salvation (the faith) is "through the Word of God" (Rom10:17)

Really, when it boils right down to it, the coming antichrist won't even -need- to confiscate Bibles, because in reality, already, nobody is actually reading and obeying God's Word, anyway. Well... other than the "few" Jesus mentioned. (Mt7:14)

Do we even need to itemize how the Word has been snatched away from the world? They don't even make claims to Godliness. And what they see of so-called "Christians", God's name has been "blasphemed" among them by those claiming to be saved. (Rom2:24) Jesus was giving these parables to Israel, God's chosen people. He didn't go to Gentiles, He didn't preach to non-Jews (except as they may have happened to be in the crowds). It is of those claiming to belong to God, today that would be those claiming to be "the church" with the label "Christian", of whom He says that Satan snatches away the Word, like a storming flock of birds. And let me

tell you, when the sparrows play tug-o-war with that bread, it is with vengeance....for keeps.

"Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time left." (Rev12:12)

This is not 'me' saying this; these are the words of Jesus. And Jesus would often cry out: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mt13:9)

Amen!

" the Seed: Rocks "

"Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. And when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root (because it lacked moisture) they withered away." (Mt13:5-6, Lk8:6)

This is the one who "hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when affliction or persecution arises because of the Word, immediately he stumbles." (Mt13:20-21) These are the ones who "..draw back away" (Lk8:13b)

Let us analyze a couple of points, and then make application...

Notice first of all that this seed springs up; it sprouts. There is life. It doesn't get snatched up by the birds. It doesn't rot away. It is not part of the non-germination statistic where a certain percentage of seeds do not have the necessary genetic germ. This is God's perfect Word. God's Word is 100% genetically potent. (Is55:11) And it sprouts. When a seed sprouts, all things being right, there is the potential for it to grow and bear fruit. This is a TRUE CHRISTIAN. By definition. Sprouting is the indication of 'life', and Jesus is "the life". (Jn14:6, 1Jn5:11)

But then, the sun comes out. In the evening when there is dew, even the cracks full of dust become moist. That moisture is enough to make seeds sprout. But in the rocks there is no moisture down deep where the roots need to grow. A sprout in such a situation, with lack of moisture, withers and dies. It is not by the "rivers of water" (Ps1:3) where the soil is moist clear down deep. Jesus likens this sun and lack of moisture to "affliction or persecution". And here is one support for the argument that Luke might have been the writer of the book of Hebrews. He uses the same expression to "draw back away". Heb10:38 speaks of "...if anyone draws back, My soul is not pleased with him." This is the one who puts their hand to the plow and looks back, who is "not fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk9:62) In a factory setting, the quality-control person tests each part: the ones meeting spec go in the 'good' pile, the ones coming up short are 'rejected',

they are "not fit" to be used; they don't make it. Like Jesus spoke of a dragnet; sorting the good from the bad, and throwing the bad out. (Mt13:47-50)

This is the person who becomes a Christian with great joy. They have made that "leap of faith". But they did not first "count the cost" of what they were getting into. (Lk14:28) These are ones who hear the message and go forward, and in their heart they -truly- are saved. But they are not fed, they are not given the Scriptures by which to grow. Those around them are some of the ones the birds (from last month) are snatching up around them. Instead of being exhorted to read the Bible and seek out a group of Believers, they are sent back to the same church of unregenerates from which they came. They announce that they got saved, and immediately their faith is brought under scrutiny. And since they don't know the Scriptures yet, and all these church leaders are 'experts' with many university and seminary letters behind their names, the new convert succumbs.

You see... there is a reason Paul exhorts that brand new Believers should not be in positions of leadership, "...not a new convert, that he not be puffed up with pride and fall into the same condemnation as the devil." (1Ti3:6) This "joy" surrounding a person's new conversion can often be a source of pride. Like an adolescent has 1000% 'confidence' of invincibility, but only 10% experience...and then falls flat on his face. Remember that the devil at one time was "perfect in beauty" the "anointed cherub that covers" (Ezk28:12,14) ...that which the golden cherubim symbolized, covering the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant, symbolizing God's presence. If anybody was on the 'fast-track' to Eternal Life with God, it was the one we now know as Satan...now, bound for the Lake of Fire.

So... what do we have at this point? We have those who were never saved in the first place, symbolized by last month's birds. Now, we have those who truly were saved, but fell away. And these (both) are in the churches, often as leaders; but whatever the case, they have the label "Christian"

So then... as we see these, should we who truly do know the Lord -pray- for them? Should we be praying for 'revival'? Many True Believers stay in these groups, hoping to convert them.

If a seed sprouts and then withers, can -that- seed do anything more? It is done for!

"For it is impossible for those who at one time were given understanding, and have tasted the Heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and also turn aside, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and expose Him to public disgrace." (Heb6:4-6)

If you continue reading that passage, you will see the interesting connection with Jesus' parable about "rain", cultivation, thorns and briars (which is next month's lesson). And then it says, "But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, indeed, holding fast to salvation, though we speak in this manner" (vs9)

We are to "hold fast" to salvation. But when a person does the opposite of "holding fast", in other words "letting go" (NOT "losing", but as Luke writes, "drawing back away"), it is "impossible" to get it back. If it is impossible, then is not prayer for such a person fruitless! When Israel had reached that point of deliberate rebellion, saying ultimately "we will" worship the Queen of Heaven, "we will" go to Egypt instead of obeying God and staying in the land (Jer44:17,25)... of that bunch God told Jeremiah "Do not pray for this people" (Jer7:16, 11:14, 14:11,etc)

In addition, if a True Believer remains in such a group, what are the chances that due to the drought of their surroundings that they, themselves, wither up and die? (understanding the symbolism of this parable) Thus, the exhortation is "do not pray for this people"; do not try to revive them (seed that is dead cannot be revived! but is sitting there, rotting!); but rather, "Therefore, Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." (2Co6:17)

So then, for the Believer....

When persecution comes, at what point has a person thrown away their salvation? Peter denied the Lord, whereas Jesus had said, "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father in Heaven." (Mt10:33) Jesus also told Peter before it happened, "Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat." (Lk22:31) and tells Peter, "But I have prayed for you, that your faith does not fail; and when you have returned, strengthen your brethren." (vs32)

Jesus says, "But he who endures to the end shall be kept safe" (Mt24:13) and the tribulation saints are memorialized, "they did not love their lives unto death." (Rev12:11)

The early martyrs understood that there was no such thing as recanting. From the 3rd century, Fox's "Book of Martyrs" records an incident: "Nichomachus, being brought before the proconsul as a Christian, was ordered to sacrifice to the pagan idols. Nichomachus replied, 'I cannot pay that respect to devils, which is only due to the Almighty.' This speech so much enraged the proconsul that Nichomachus was put to the rack. After enduring the torments for a time, he recanted; but scarcely had he given this proof of his frailty, than he fell into the greatest agonies, dropped down on the ground, and expired immediately.

"Denisa, a young woman of only sixteen years of age, who beheld this terrible judgment, suddenly exclaimed, 'O unhappy wretch, why would you buy a moment's ease at the expense of a miserable eternity!' Optimus, hearing this, called to her, and Denisa avowing herself to be a Christian, she was beheaded, by his order, soon after."

If a person 'caves' at persecution, does that indicate a heart that is not truly saved...? At what point has a person stopped 'stumbling' (as Peter did, but then he went off and wept) to where they have 'fallen' (with brazen, stony heart Ezk36:26)? Our Lord knows each heart.

What if, with today's technology, with the various chemicals they have, the mind-altering drugs, the Believer is subjected to such a session (as has already happened in communist countries of the old Soviet empire), and in this chemically mind-altered state, they deny the Lord? After all, the person is no longer in control of themself...?

I don't know the specifics of chemicals. But speaking from a Spiritually Godly perspective, I would suspect that the person's -true- spirit would come forth, even in such circumstances... please note these next words I have all-capped for emphasis.

"Therefore settle it in your hearts not to premeditate a defense; for I will give you a MOUTH AND WISDOM WHICH ALL YOUR ADVERSARIES WILL NOT BE ABLE TO CONTRADICT OR RESIST. And you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all because of My name. But not a hair of your head shall at all perish. By your steadfastness possess your souls." (Lk21:14-19)

"Behold, I give you authority to tread over serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." (Lk10:19)

Jesus said to not fear those who can kill the body, but to be subject to Him who has authority over both body and soul. (Mt10:28) When they inject chemicals, and manipulate the mind, all they are playing with is the -body-. But God is the one who knows the "soul and spirit" (Heb4:12) Since the Holy Spirit indwells the heart of the Believer, I truly believe He can also override those chemicals they inject into the blood (soul), which in turn 'operates' the brain, to cause the mouth to speak.

"But when they lead you away and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is NOT YOU SPEAKING, BUT THE HOLY SPIRIT." (Mk13:11)

" the Seed: Thorns "

"And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them" (Mt13:7, Lk8:7)

They "[hear] the Word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, and pleasures of life choke the Word, and they bring no fruit to maturity" (compiled from: Mt13:22 & Lk8:14)

A companion to this third item is the next parable Jesus tells. You can read it from Mt13:24-30. A farmer plants good seed; while people were sleeping the enemy comes along and sows tares; and so the seeds sprout with both wheat along with weeds. The servants ask, "Do you want us to go and gather them up?" And the farmer says, "No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them."

There's two kinds of weeds. There's the willfully carnal, and there's the plants. In this case the word "plant" being used the same way an organization infiltrates another with "plants". People sent ('planted') in to pretend to be part of that organization, but their real purpose is either to garner classified information by stealth, or to do deeds of subterfuge.

I dare say this category makes up easily 90% of today's church, of the ones who are saved. Yes... "saved" because they did sprout, but the weeds "choked" them. Choking cannot happen if the seeds did not sprout; choking is not done to something that is dead; by definition. But the good seed sprouts, but when a person looks in their direction, all one can see is weeds. This is the person that, if you saw them next to a person of the world, you would not be able to pick them apart from the world. They dress the same, they makeup themselves to look like prostitutes the same, the "slang" out of their mouths is the same, they still go to the same parties, and never seem to see the need to kick old habits like smoking, drugs, drunkenness, etc. They still sleep around. When you turn on the TV and see a musical group performing on stage, where the volume happens to have been on mute, you see them dressed and gyrating around just like any other of the world's groups of the day...only, when you turn up the volume do you hear words like "Jesus" and such, to realize they are presuming to be a "Christian" group. (I've often mentioned that there is nothing I write about, but what I've either been there, done it, or witnessed it. This last example I experienced back in the 70s during my college years. I was at 'home' with my parents for the summer, and happened to come downstairs and the TV was on, with the volume turned down. The group was gyrating around, the girls in their miniskirts...and when the volume was turned up, and a bit of listening took place, it became revealed that this was a Campus Crusade group doing a TV special.)

Now, let's add to this the supporting parable. You plant a field or garden, and then at night, or while you are away, somebody comes along with weed seed, stirs around in the dirt with the rake and hoe, planting other

things. The seeds sprout. Where you planted some discretely spaced hills of cucumbers, now the entire area is overgrown with gourds. Where the farmer planted a field of oats, what comes up is wild oats. The farmer planted alfalfa, and the field is full of mustard. A landscaper planted a lawn, and up comes crab grass.

In these scenarios what happens to the 'good' seed? Several different things. If the weeds are of a broad leaf variety, and the good seed was of diminutive proportions, the weeds can actually "choke" them out. By definition, "choking" is one method of making somebody cease to be alive. They die. Just like the seed in the rocks, they wither away. They -never- truly 'left' the world. They make an initial "claim for Jesus" (with their 'mouth' Ro10:10), but never follow through; and eventually they, too, forget their 'claim' and in their heart they -are- 'of' the world. Due to their proximity to the weeds, they "forgot their Creator" and now "have no pleasure in [Him]" (Ec12:1)

In other cases, the weeds overgrow...but if you pull the weeds aside and look very carefully, you can see the little 'runt' of the good plant there. But it is helplessly overpowered by the weeds. It just sits there and stagnates. It never produces fruit.

In some other cases it produces the 'nubbins' of fruit. There is a nubbin where the flower should bloom, but it never comes out to bloom. And when there is no flower, there is no fruit. Although, in some cases, like radishes, there might be something under the ground...but there is no production of new seed for the next generation.

Jesus taught: "...from their fruits you shall know them" (Mt7:20) And of the unfruitful ones what does He proclaim? "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work out lawlessness!" (vs23)

In other words, those who "make -claims- for Jesus" and who are unfruitful "runts" will hear from Jesus, "depart from Me!" Neither of these are bearing fruit. They are not abiding in the Vine. They are not bearing fruit, so the Vinedresser prunes and "takes [them] away" and they are thrown "into the fire" (Jn15:2,6)

What about the nubbins? God knows each heart. Perhaps they are part of the makeup of next month's "thirty-fold"? (compared to the "hundred"?)

What is the cause of this? "While men slept" the weeds were scattered. (Mt13:25) Jesus commands us to "watch therefore" because we don't know when He is coming. (Mt24:42) Of the one who is not watching, that is the one whose house gets dug through, and they get robbed. (vs43) In the spiritual warfare where the "enemy" is coming at us, we are exhorted: "...and, having done all, to stand" (Eph6:13) We can't 'stand' if we are 'sleeping'!!

There was a ("christian") song some years ago that caused many to chuckle. I don't remember all it's lyrics, now, but the main ones were: "Weeds, we're all just weeds..." in God's garden. Thus, unwittingly proclaiming themselves the enemy's implants. God doesn't grow weeds. Weeds are the domain of the devil.

Most congregations today are almost totally overgrown with weeds. Some have nothing but weeds. But some others still have some good plants. What is the solution? Get out the hoe and rototiller and dig all the weeds under? Well, in the parable the farmer says, "No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them" (Mt13:29)

In a mixed congregation where there is a primary Godly witness, what does one do about the weeds? Kick them all out? No. Whilst kicking, some True Believers may, thus, also end up on the street. There -are- True Believers whose works are of such a nature that they all get burned up, and yet -they- themselves are truly saved, "yet so as through fire" (1Co3:15) You don't want to uproot them such that they wither completely. You want, if possible, to "snatch them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh" (Ju1:23)

Remembering that the "Lord knows those who are His" (2Ti2:19), there are cases where suspected unbelievers are allowed to remain in the congregation, pretending to be "christians", in order to not destroy those who, looking for everything to be of the world, actually are Believers. Sometimes the two are growing so close together that it is impossible to pull the weed without also damaging the root of the good plant...the roots are sooo intertwined. Jesus knows the "soul and spirit" (Heb4:12) And in the end, at the harvest of the world, God sends His angels to reap the harvest, throwing the weeds into the fire, and collecting His children to be with Him. We do not "judge another's servant" (Rom14:4) Like with oats, we may not be able to tell, from the plant, whether it's oats or wild oats; until the 'fruit' is inspected when the head is threshed out at harvest; oats is white, and wild oats is black. We are not the harvesters, the angels are. We are part of what gets harvested.

Of course... if a lone 'good' plant is in a church otherwise totally filled with weeds, the exhortation to the good plant is to "come out of her My people" (Rev18:4)

However... what is the 'best' solution?

Over the past few years I've discovered, and developed a different strategy in gardening. I don't wait for the weeds to grow, to -then- get out the hoe to start weeding. I start hoeing before any weeds ever appear. As soon as the 'good' seeds have sprouted, so I know where the 'good' plants are growing, I begin hoeing the rest of the dirt around them. That way, the weeds don't even get a chance to sprout. And furthermore, the soil is much more 'compliant' to the hoe when there are not also weeds to be

chopped and dug. Thus, I can hoe my entire garden in about 15-20 minutes in that state, when the dirt is soft. But if I let the garden become overgrown with weeds, it would likely take several evenings to weed it all, having to also be careful not to uproot the 'good' plants. When I PRE-hoe like that, the only weeds I ever see are the occasional 'lone' ones, here and there, which require only a mere stoop over and 'pluck'...and it's gone. My garden consists of 'good' plants, and 'dark' earth.

But if I were to "sleep" and ignore the garden, it would be a different matter.

Do you get the picture?

Do you (you who often scoff at some things that are said around here) now begin to understand past writings to "keep the unsaved out"? Don't invite them into your congregational meetings. In the O.T. the unclean came into the temple at the peril of their lives, as they stationed armed guards to keep them out. (2Ch23:19) If the weeds are not even allowed entrance, as you pre-hoe, they cannot ever overgrow the 'good' plants.

The excuse most-often given is that the weeds need to be 'saved'. Well..weeds are weeds. Weeds are implants from the "enemy". They are not from the Sower's seed pouch. You will not 'save' them; but they will 'choke' you! That's why vigilance to obedience is necessary.

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH, to fulfill its lusts." (Rom13:14)

God said to Judah: "For thus says Jehovah to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, BREAK UP YOUR FALLOW GROUND, and do not sow among thorns." (Jer4:3) "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in kindness. Break up your fallow ground. For it is time to seek Jehovah, until He comes and rains righteousness on you." (Ho10:12)

"Seek Jehovah while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Jehovah, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." (Is55:6-7)

Amen!

" the Seed: Good Soil "

"But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: this indeed a hundredfold, that sixty, that thirty" (Mt13:8, Lk8:8)

"he...hears the Word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces...having heard the Word with an honest and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with steadfastness" (Mt13:23 & Lk8:15)

How does a person 'understand' the Word? The Ethiopian invited Philip up into his chariot to have it explained to him, after Philip had asked, "do you 'understand' what you are reading?". (Ac8:30-35) Through "preaching" (Rom10:14) By definition, what is preaching? Is it not a process of proclaiming and informing? What is another word for 'inform'? To "teach" Again, by definition, "doctrine".

Oh, but... Doesn't -doctrine- "chase them away"? That's what today's apostasy proclaims. In each of the three preceding seeds, do we see any sort of "understanding"? If it was there I missed it. In fact, Jesus' description of the 'birds' is that they DO NOT UNDERSTAND it. And we concluded that those are the ones minus God's Word; it has been snatched away; they are NOT saved. How does a person know how to "count the cost" if he does not understand 'what' it is of that which he is counting? This sort can -only- come through the doctrine of the Word. (1Ti5:17, Tit1:9)

How much understanding is there from a 5-minute chat, and a tract shoved under one's nose, where the person is exhorted to "repeat after me" this (ritual) prayer, and now, Voila!, you're 'saved'! Many do not even understand the true nature of the Most High, -the- Creator of the heavens and earth, and all things on the earth. It would take 'time' to explain even those basic truths...how in the world can the entire scope of original sin, rebellion, death, Jesus' substitutionary atonement, repentance and faith all be crammed into a -quick- 5-minute "soul-winning" session, and then proudly count coup to the fellow soul-winners back at the barn? Such a 'convert' did NOT 'understand'. They are not a TRUE believer! Due to the 'quick' nature of the strategy, if you recall the lesson, they were some of the 'birds'.

When a seed is planted, it is not like Jack's 'beanstalk' where the very next day the seeds had sprouted into a tall plant. Radishes may sprout within a few days. But corn takes over a week before you begin to see the 'spears' poking through the ground. The world does not know the Most High. They are so busy with their spirituality and self-deification, that they are in ignorance of the True God. He must be described and explained to them. When the US dollar bill says "In God we Trust", to most people that is -not- the Most High, creator of the universe. It is something else of their own imaginations. To change their understanding around it takes 'time'.

Do you get the picture? You (so-called) soul-winners... are you understanding?

Next: the Word must be 'received'. It is only those who "receive" Jesus who become children of God. (Jn1:12) It is received with an "honest" heart. It does not see the soul-winner coming, utter a curse under their breath, and play-along in "repeat after me" in order to "get rid" of the harassment. But when they hear with understanding, they "keep" the Word.

And then: their growth is with "steadfastness". The writer to the Hebrews spoke of the need of "endurance": "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:" (Heb10:36) Jesus said that the one "who endures to the end shall be kept safe" (Mt24:13) (Different context, perhaps, but the same principle)

The True Believer; the Fruitful Believer is one who: 1) understands due to proclamation of doctrine, 2) receives it with an honest heart, and 3) endures to the end.

It is faith. In the same context Jesus speaks of the mustard seed; in this case not a 'weed' as in the previous lesson such as proliferates in N.American farm fields, but as a garden herb plant. A tiny seed, which compared to other seeds is not noteworthy. But when it grows it is of such dimensions that birds will come and perch on its branches.

Jesus told this parable to illustrate these four scenarios we have just observed. I also see another little truth. In the first lesson we observed how God's Word is presented to the whole world. Whether every human being knows the name "Jesus", God has left a witness of Himself. But not everybody is saved. In fact, only a "few" are. (Mt7:14)

Many people who call themselves "christian" think the best way to evangelize is with the stadium crusades, where thousands of people come flocking to hear; where, in turn, people are invited to come "forward" by the "hundreds...from where you are sitting". One evangelist in particular used to always proclaim how Jesus always invited people "publicly"; therefore he did, too.

But you see...when the seed is scattered widely and wildly, what is the result? The birds snatch it up, it ends up on dry rock, it ends up in the weeds. All of those scenarios, when a person is "saved", and then fall away because they did not have the "full true knowledge" (Ro1:28); that -great- evangelistic campaign was actually a DIS-service to those souls. The ones who got saved did so -quickly-, based on the emotions of the moment, as the evangelist was inviting, "I want -hundreds- of you to come!"...but then, when they fell away and drew back, they can never -again- be saved. (Heb6:4-6) That evangelist actually consigned them to hell! He was satan's messenger of doom ...because He did not follow Godly Scriptural principles!

But when the seed is carefully 'planted' where the rich soil is ready to receive it and nurture it, where the gardener is pre-weeding, the plants grow lush and produce to overflowing. And the most the birds can hope for is to sit on the branches and 'cheep' a lot. Maybe they can munch on the corn tassles...but their munching only 'helps' the pollination process of the corn. Where the enemy had hoped to snatch away God's Word, his emissaries instead 'help' the growth of God's garden.

"Blessed is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor has stood in the way of sinners, nor has sat in the seat of the scornful"...he's not being choked out by the weeds..."But his delight is in the Law of Jehovah; and in His Law he meditates day and night"...with steadfastness. "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water...in the fruitful soil...that brings forth its fruit in its season, and its leaf shall not wither, and all that he does shall prosper." (Ps1:1-3)

And to the one who prospers, "more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him" (Lk8:18) He - seems- to be a Christian, bound for Heaven...but is not...and will find himself in the "outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" That's the "sons of the kingdom" Jesus is talking about. (Mt8:12) The ones crying out, "Lord, Lord" didn't we do all sorts of impressive ministry and miracles? And Jesus retorts, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work out lawlessness!" (Mt7:21-23) as they are "cast into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt13:42)

Thus... "...from their fruits you will know them" (vs20)

Jesus often closed His discourses with: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mt13:9) But it's not enough to merely 'hear'...

Not only the ears, but also with the heart... "take heed -HOW- you hear" (Lk8:18)

Amen!

Soooo many Weeds! - (Mt13:24-30) © 1998

In Matthew ch13 Jesus gives object lessons. The "Kingdom of Heaven is compared to..." And then He gives an example of something "worldly" that His hearers would understand. Pictures and object lessons. When He speaks of the weeds being sown amongst the wheat, I wonder if we have an accurate picture of this. Let's bring it down to simple terms that most everyone should be able to visualize.

A garden is tilled up to where everything is dug "under." There is a nice "clean" surface of dirt to work with the rake and hoe. Neat rows are made, and little "troughs" in which to plant the seeds. Because the produce needs space to grow, there is proportionately some "distance" between rows, so that as the plants grow, they can bush out properly in proportion to their species, and bear fruit.

The seed is planted and covered with dirt. A couple weeks go by, and little by little, the seeds sprout, and tiny leaves appear above the ground. As time passes, more leaves appear...but these are NOT in the rows. Just as thick (or thicker) as the seeds were planted, weeds are growing between the rows and even "in" the rows. If this condition is allowed to persist, in time, all one sees is weeds. Proportionately, there are "thousands times" more weeds than produce.

Remember how Jesus said, "the kingdom of heaven is compared to..." Just as there are "zillions" of weeds compared to what one attempts to grow, in just the same fashion there are "many..who go in through" the "broad way..that leads to destruction." Just like, if no weeding has been done, you look at the garden and see "nothing but weeds" ...so is it that "there are few who find" the "narrow gate..which leads to life." (Mt7:13-14)

So, when Jesus says "in that day" to those who had been look-alikes right alongside the produce, but were weeds, "Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!" (vs23) ...just picture the Vast Multitude that represents!!

"Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, come down; for the press is full; the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision; for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision! (Joel 3:13-14)

Smooth tongues (Mt13:31-33) © 1998

When we speak of "pervasive evil" and how it infiltrates quietly like "leaven", we often exhort and hear exhortation regarding adherence to "Doctrine." Paul's exhortation to "all speak the same thing...that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment [doctrine]." (1Cor1:10) That if Christians find themselves in fellowship with unbelievers, to "come out from among them and be separated..and do not touch the unclean thing..." (2Cor6:17) And, as a final understanding of the plumbline against which to discern spiritual matters, we understand that the unregenerate are "making divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned" and we are to "avoid them." (Rom16:17)

But we often stop at vs17. However, they are described in more detail in vs18. "For they who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple." (vs18)

Often at VW here, I am attacked for labelling certain Categories of people as being "Unregenerate." These categories many Christians have considered for years to be, merely, of "slightly different persuasions...tending to 'lean' in certain directions...but being 'Christian' nonetheless." In fact, I used to be similarly deceived for many years. You know, no harm done. So, they "believe a little differently" but that's OK. After all, Scripture has so many "gray areas."

But there [IS] "Correct Godly Doctrine"!!

Notice that those who "cause the divisions" by "not adhering" to that Doctrine, are first of all, "NOT CHRISTIANS." This passage said it quite plainly, "such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ." If they do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, whom do they serve? Jesus said, "The one who is not with Me is against Me, and the one who does not gather with Me scatters." (Mt12:30) "Scatters" being another way of saying "making divisions." And if they are "against" Jesus, there is only one other master!

Furthermore, notice their methods. "good words and fair speeches." They speak of "luuuuuuv" and "graaeeeeesssss." They are the first to come up to shake your hand, and pat you on the shoulder warmly. And they are Oh, soooo concerned about you. And they "accept you just as you are" along with your sin, and will encourage you to continue in it, because they have "crept in secretly...perverting the grace of God for unbridled lust, and [deny] the [ONLY] Master, God, even our Lord Jesus Christ." (Jude4) They whisper "graaeeeeesssss" in your ear, and teach "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes.." as they reject "but the

Lord ponders the hearts."(Pr21:2)

They deceive the "simple." Paul exhorts, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (Eph5:17) How is this accomplished? "Awake, sleeping ones! ..walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (vs14-16)

And finally...

"..be filled with the Spirit." (vs18) And we must define terms, because the enemy has distorted this most precious concept. This is not being "spirit-filled" as the charismatic leaven has permeated. But rather, having the [HOLY] Spirit indwelling, with full control of our lives. (Rom8:9-10) and teaching. (Jn16:13)

Chatrooms and "birds" (Mt13:31-33) © 1998

This is mostly an "object lesson" regarding the "birds" in this week's Matthew study. (13:32) A subscriber recently wrote in about something-or-other, and shared experiences had in a "Christian chat room." (I don't remember the name of it, and wouldn't want to jeopardize individual identities, anyway.) While I've never had much use, personally, for "chat rooms", my Internet experience did begin with CompuServe's Religion forums. And I would say similar things happen there.

This particular chat room allegedly had legitimate "Christian" leanings. It was reported that, on average, five (or so) people a week would come to Faith in Jesus Christ through this chat.

Then, some charismatic people "showed up" and began introducing "emotions and experiences" and links to charismatic web sites. If a "SERIOUS" conversation was going on between a couple of people, these "birds" would "flutter" in, interrupt and disrupt. Now, there are "NO" Conversions taking place through this particular service.

Emotions and Experiences! That's all it is for them. Something received via e-mail a while back, I've been saving in a folder, "now" is the time to share...

Students at United Methodist-related Emory University's Candler School of Theology as they study TV ads, music videos and current films to learn more about the ways in which electronic media are providing -- or not providing -- images of religious and moral life; One of the students went to a contemporary worship service and overheard someone say: "Wow, that was almost as good as a movie!"

You see, folks! From the mouth of one of the "feel good worshippers." People go to movies to be entertained. That's what modern "worship" is. And often when these services have gone on a while, the pastor will say, "we won't have Scripture tonight...we've had the 'spirit'." This began decades ago. The songs had words something like, I didn't come here to study, and be preached to from God's Word. "...I just came to PRAISE THE LORD!" In context, "praising the lord" was totally engulfed with emotions, jumping, dancing, shouting...often with sexually ungodly bodily movements; emptying one's mind (shamanistically) to open the doors for "the spirits" to enter and "fill."

What is the result when all this gets in the way of God's Truth?
People are NOT SAVED! They REMAIN LOST!

"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."
(Jer8:20) What a sad commentary for today!! "...I am broken; I am in

gloom; horror has seized me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the healing of...My people not come?" (vs21-22)

Among other things... "birds" and "leaven"

Combines and Wheat (Mt13:47-50) © 1998

As we considered the separation of the weeds from the wheat, to be burned, and see repeated the concept of "wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Mt13:42,50); not a whole lot is said in this conjunction about the wheat, and it's "path" to the "granary." (vs30)

Since this week's Matthew study spoke of a "combine" let's continue with that theme. In the US and Canada (and many other countries) where farms exist as "thousands of acres" over the years very large equipment has been developed to deal with the labor. The term "combine" came about when a single machine would "combine" the tasks of "cutting, swathing, threshing, sifting" in one operation.

When the crop is cut, it is funnelled into the "cylinder." This is a device which spins at a very high speed, and contains "bars" which whiz by a "beater bar" at very close range. The purpose is to "smash" everything into tiny bits, and break the wheat kernel loose from the husk of the head. This process is so "violent" that farmers who had momentary lapses of carefulness have lost limbs, and sometimes their lives, when their hand or foot has been caught in it. This cylinder/bar combination is "adjusted" so as to separate the wheat kernels from the chaff, without pulverizing the actual wheat kernels.

As a Christian, do you often feel "stomped" upon? In ancient times the function of the cylinder was done by oxen "treading" the grain. (De25:4,1Cor9:9,1Ti5:18) Paul spoke of the "sufferings of Christ" like being "pressed out of measure, above strength; so much so that we despaired even of life." (2cor1:5-8)

Once past the cylinder, everything is processed through the shakers. A huge fan blows, and the sieves shake. Straw and light chaff get blown right out the top. Other smaller items like husks, contaminants, weed seeds, and wheat process on down through several layers of sieves. Eventually the lighter husks, weed seeds get blown out the intermediate layers; and the wheat, being the heaviest, passes down through all the layers to the bottom where, hopefully, it is by itself...and gets augered up into the hopper (storage container).

The air supply from the fan, and the sieves are all adjustable. If there is too much wind, some of the wheat will blow out the back. If there is not enough, some of the debris will end up in the hopper along with the wheat. So the farmer, while getting set up for harvest, stops periodically, looking on the ground behind the combine to see how much wheat is ending up on the ground; and compares what he sees there, with how "clean" the wheat in the hopper is.

Sometimes, this "balance" is such that the lighter, less-mature grains

of wheat simply cannot be accommodated, and there is no way to keep the hopper clean, and also retain the light kernels. They must simply be considered part of the "loss" of the harvest.

In ancient times once the ox had treaded the husks away from the straw, on a windy day, the pile of wheat, chaff, husks would be repeatedly tossed in the air with large "scoops." The wind would "drive the chaff" away. (Ps1:4)

However, if the wind was strong enough, the lighter, immature wheat would also blow away. Paul exhorts, "...no longer...be infants (immature), tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine.." (Eph4:14)

You see what the wheat must endure before ending up in the granary? Not only is it in peril while growing; from weeds, birds, drought, etc. But the harvest process is also trying. Paul speaks of our works being "revealed. For the Day shall declare it." (1Cor3:13) If you thought that the Christian life is "sunshine and roses" and everything is "happy as a lark" with a life of ease as you simply go to church to "Praise the Lord" and get all "pumped up" ...think again!! EVERY KERNEL of wheat that makes it into the granary goes through this same process. Jesus said, "in this world you SHALL have tribulation." (Jn16:33)

Our wills must be broken through the cylinder as we learn, "not my will but Yours be done." (Lk22:42) And all along the way we are blown, shaken, dropped, shaken some more, blown on again, and fall again; experiencing God's "discipline" of which "all" are partakers. (Heb12:8) "...for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and He scourges every son whom He receives." (vs6)

However, this process is not a random willy-nilly thing. The Lord "adjusts" that cylinder and those sieves "just right." (Heb12:10) Typically, the hired hand/s do not make such critical adjustments. The harvest and the "profit" for the year are too much at stake. While the hired hand will drive the combine (angels Mt13:41), the Farmer, Himself, (13:3,18,30,37,41) makes the adjustments, and crawls around behind to see how much is escaping out the back. Or how many kernels were crushed by the cylinder. The Farmer is "experienced" in these matters. He "will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able" (1Cor10:13) because He has experienced it "in all points just as we are" (Heb4:15) as we follow in His example. (1Pt2:21-24)

He "chastens" us "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." (Heb12:10) Truly, it is not always "joyous." But in the end "it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised by it..." (vs11) Thus, we can entrust our souls to our "Shepherd and Overseer." (1Pt2:25)

Finds 'Fingerpointing' offensive: (Mt15:1-20) © 1999

Reader Comment:

I found your newest mailing of interest and usefulness in my walk with the Lord. However, I detected a hard tone: fingerpointing again and again at KJV only believers as if this is some cancer that you have been ordained from heaven to cut out.

Now, please don't get defensive on me. Go back and read what you wrote and pretend you are a KJV believer who DOES NOT fall into legalism. How would you feel? Then, humor me if you will and reread it with all mention of KJV clutching taken out (except for the one congregation you mentioned who ignored the widow-that was a good example, though they might as well been using the RSV, NIV, NASB or NKJV for all that had to do with it). What you will see is a much stronger piece (I tried it, I know whereof I speak) that DOES NOT OFFEND INNOCENT brothers and sisters.

[Editor: There was considerably more to this note. But I think this truncation represents the concern adequately.]

ANSWER:

First of all, let us notice that this study was "Phariseeism: of the heart" The Pharisees asked Jesus about ceremonial washing. He retorts about their money-grubbing. Were the two related? Not directly. But indirectly, because He was pointing their -heart- condition to them.

The Jews had a couple of -pet- laws they judged everything by. Circumcision and Sabbath. Today's 'pharisees' also have several things, uppermost on their list being "KJV-only". Just as the Jews rejected the "Lord of the sabbath" (Mt12:8) the ones today place 'KJV-only' above all else. Is the problem "KJV-onlyism"? No. It's the -HEART-.

Was Jesus condemning circumcision? No. He was circumcised. (Lk2:21) Do we condemn the reading of the KJV? No. Because of its connection to Strong's numbers, I use it on a regular basis. Is it "inspired"? No. It is a "translation". And as such sometimes I have to pull out the Interlinear, because KJV-Strong's omitted some words here and there that should have been included. MKJV/LITV tend to be more faithful in that regard.

Did the article "point fingers at" -isolated- incidents? Well, certainly, they were -an- example. But remember, I "grew up" in the middle of this bunch. Space would not permit me to expose, nor would you want to read, the complete litany of things I -could- say, or that others have told me about. While I've never been "KJV-only", I know everything else about "phariseeism" -first-hand-. I -was- one! When I "point fingers" I point at what I used to be. If it seems like I'm on a 'campaign' against them, well, the recent revelation regarding "repentance" opened my eyes. Although I

haven't been fellowshiping with them for some time, I've been going a 'little easy' on them because in my mind, on account of my background, I have thought there was still "Truth" in them, if there was going to be in - anybody-. I somewhat -still- "looked -UP-TO-" them.

But I know these people well. My ex-wife knows the loathesome lust-filled glares she used to receive from the KJV-toting men when we would go visit their churches (plural). And their wives would "hate [her] because - she- was beautiful". (Not their husbands for being full of lust!) [Ed: This kind of thing did -not- happen so much in other 'non-KJV' churches.] I know what it's like to be shunned over the KJV issue; both in person and on the internet. I know what it's like to be "politicked" out of these places by the pastors, when I began to see error, and became vocal about it against their 'highnesses'. (Being kicked out of one of these places isn't at all unlike 'excommunication' from a RCC. As the 'Circumcision' excommunicated the one "born blind" -Jn9:34) You see, "KJV-only" is -not- the issue. It never was when I left these places under less-than-ideal circumstances. (I was using KJV then) It is not the problem. It is merely a symptom. I was a Believer, trying to fellowship amongst people I didn't realize at the time were -wolves-...and the darkness rejected the Light. (Jn1:5) -THEY- are the ones who make "KJV" the issue. -THEY- are the ones who make it the 'definition' of themselves as an entity. -Their- "label". But their -HEARTS- are what is the problem. The March article on Romans ch3 will touch on this some more. And be sure, as we progress further along in Matthew, Jesus is going to get even "nastier" against them. So, when we speak of them, we use -their- label of themselves ["KJV-only"] and proceed to address the -heart-issues-, as Jesus did to "THE Circumcision". (Rom3:29-30,Acts10:45,Gal2:7-8,etc.)

Just as an aside here: ..there are variations of these groups. "Landmarkism", "independent", etc. But the one thing that seems to be a common thread amongst them is "KJV-only-ism", in pretty much the same way the Jews clung to "circumcision".

Don't be too concerned. The only people who will be "offended" are those who are -NOT- True "Brothers and Sisters". I know of several people who are 'KJV-only' and proclaim themselves as such on their websites. But I also know that they are True Believers in Jesus Christ. They use KJV for the right reasons; because it came from Masoretic/Textus Receptus manuscripts. Not, because it is their "holy grail".

Yes, the others probably -will-be- offended. The disciples suggested this to Jesus (Mt15:12) but He said that His "heavenly Father" had not "planted" them. (vs13) As we progress, He is going to label them "whitewashed tombs" being "full of dead men's bones" (23:27)

Many of you have come out of Catholicism, or JW'ism, or ???ism. I came out of Phariseeism. After growing up in the surroundings you did, you struggled with "how can they be ALL bad?" And you dragged your feet in

some cases. Or, after you left, your mind still looked back, not wanting to - have-to- believe they were 'totally corrupt'...because you had a lifetime of trusting in them for 'truth'. Eventually the Lord allows you to see 'something' which makes it all -click- for you. The recent jolt regarding "repentance" was that "click" for me. I addressed the issue of -one-website. But the "click" was based on a life-time of memories. The website was merely the catalyst.

Just as ex-Catholics who have come to Christ tend to be quite 'militant' regarding exposing RCC error, you can expect the same from me regarding "Phariseism". And this is 'fitting' that this should have all clicked for me recently, as we progress further along in our studies in Matthew in the coming weeks. Yes... some of you will 'crucify' me for this in your hearts, and dissect me via e-mail. But then, that's what they did, ultimately, to Jesus, isn't it..

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, The servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept My saying, they will also keep yours" (Jn15:18-19)

What/Whom do we believe in? Are we "KJV believers"? (I challenge anyone to find such an expression anywhere in the Bible, even a KJV) Or, do we "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"? (Acts16:31)

"..I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1Cor2:2)

Gates of Hell shall not Prevail © 1999

The following is excerpted from a 'Portion' which was written in June, 1999, stemming from a discussion with an individual. This excerpt begins mid-way in that narrative.

Excerpt:

At this point I ask him "where?" "Spokane." "No, where -IN-SCRIPTURE-" did he "find this command" to be in "offensive warfare" in Spokane?

"..[the] church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Mt16:18)

This little phrase, to him, encompassed God's command for the "church" to be on the "offensive" to do spiritual warfare. So then I tried to reason with him a bit, about basic grammar and words. -Who- is trying to "prevail" against -whom-? That the "gates of hell" are on the "offensive" AGAINST the -Church-.

Well, he went into the little 'funny-ha-ha' thing the charismatic preachers do with this one. And -here- we come to the first matter that I hope we can glean some understanding from this lengthy narrative.

How many times have you seen Benny Hinn, etc. talk about this, during the rare moments they are "teaching", and not blowing people over "in the spirit" or "healing" people? They will stand up there, and don their 'comedian' hat, and ask, "When was the last time you saw -GATES- running and chasing after people!?!?" And with their comedic 'cleverness' the whole congregation is in fits of laughter, hardly able to contain themselves at the ludicrousness of such a thing. Ha, ha, ha!!! And so, since -gates- are "stationery" devices, it MUST BE THE CASE that the "Church" is on the offensive.

So, Dear Believer...

How do you answer such a taunt of the unregenerate scoffers? It is a matter of understanding the meaning of the word "gate".

In Ruth4:1~ Boaz gathered the "elders of the city" at the "-gate-" to conduct some legal business regarding taking Ruth to be his wife. When there was civil war in Israel, and Absalom was killed; when David went to re-unite the people, he went and "sat in the -gate-". (2Sam19:8) The husband of the virtuous woman is "known in the -gates-, when he sits among the elders.." (Pr31:23) The "gate" was the seat of political governmental power. Much as the "Whitehouse" is a symbol of America's power. e.g. if a reporter says, "A statement was issued by the Whitehouse..." it does not mean that the -building-, made of cement, paint, windows, carpet, plumbing, etc., is making this statement. No. The -one- in authority -in- the Whitehouse is making the statement. As Jesus proclaims

about the Altar and Temple, "...whoever shall swear by the altar swears by it, and by all things on it. And whoever shall swear by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who shall swear by Heaven swears by the throne of God, and by Him who sits on it." (Mt23:20-22)

Who was "hell" created for? "for the devil and his angels" (Mt25:41) Who is it who is on the offensive? "...your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking someone he may devour." (1Pt5:8) So, if a "gate" represents a "power", who does the "gates of hell" refer to? Satan. No, the "gates" are not "running after people" ...but Satan is! Which is why we are provided with -defensive- "-ARMOR- of God" (Eph6:13) We are not on the offensive and -attacking-, but are commanded to "withstand" and to "stand". "Therefore stand..." (vs14) In other words, "make your stand and defend..."

No, our defense is not against -physical- "gates" with hinges and bars; but "against principalities, against powers, against the world's rulers, of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Eph6:12) Yes, Satan is still in "high places" until he is eventually "...cast out into the earth.." (Rev12:9)

Let the little children come... ©1998

"Allow the little children to come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven." (Mt19:14)

Oh, the recent joy...! A friend e-mailed, telling of the conversion of his little 5 year old daughter as she received Jesus into her heart!

Even in a little one such as this, the change was obvious. While she had been accustomed to singing Christian songs, and whatnot, "now" her talk was of "Jesus" and a "spark in her heart" was apparent.

"Likewise I say to you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Lk15:10)

But guess what. Just as there is joy in heaven over a conversion, there is, likewise, Wrath on the part of the enemy. Within an hour after this new birth, the girl fell down the stairs. (Not injured, mostly scared.) And then by that evening, a virus infection had grabbed her.

We have considered in Matthew 13 the seed snatched from the wayside by the birds. The weeds sown amongst the wheat. And we have considered our own experiences. One other scenario we also want to observe.

After the garden has been planted, and seeds have started to sprout, have you ever sometimes noticed the "holes" in that fresh dirt? One year, there were holes down the rows of peas, the size of a bird beak. That year, also, there were hardly any peas that broke the surface of the ground. The birds, apparently with their acute sense of hearing, could hear the seeds sprouting, and were picking them out of the ground, while they were still "under" the surface.

"In this world you SHALL have tribulation." (tests, trials, persecution) (Jn16:33) The test to see "what kind it is." (1Cor3:13)

Yes, it's a cruel world. There is "joy" in knowing the Lord. But equally, and swiftly...testings. The enemy would like nothing better than to snatch that freshly planted Word out of a young convert.

But while Jesus promised "tribulation" He also exhorted, "be of good cheer." (Jn16:33) The victory is not dependent upon us and our striving. He says, "I have overcome the world." Paul affirms, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom7:25) We are to remain "steadfast, immovable..." (1Cor15:58) "...looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith..." (Heb12:2) When those "birds" come along, we cry out "Lord, save me!" (Mt14:30) And He swoops down to "rescue those who have been tempted [tested]." (Heb2:18)

Church Discipline © 1999

READER QUESTION:

please address church discipline who, how, where & to what extent . . .

VW ANSWER:

On the individual level, where there is 'personal' conflict between individuals, the pattern is given in Mt18:15-20. The person committing the sin should be confronted by the person wronged. When that fails to bring about change or repentance, take a few people as witnesses. If that fails, take it before the whole congregation. If that fails...treat him "as a heathen." (vs17)

In 1Cor5 Paul addresses an issue where there was sin (fornication) of a nature that everybody in the church knew about it. There, his exhortation was rather forthright. Get him outta there. "Deliver [him] to satan" to deal with him. To "purge out the old leaven". (vs5,7) Don't associate with him. (vs9,11) Expell him from the fellowship. (vs13)

This kind of action should be taken by a small 'group' of people. In Mt18 Jesus talks about "two or three" (vs19-20) In the context of 1Cor6 it seems like Paul is suggesting that people be appointed for the purpose. (vs4)

Now...if this disciplinary action results in the guilty person repenting, then Paul is equally insistant that the repentant one be received back in forgiveness, love and comforted. (2Cor2:6-8,7:8-16) And in this case, even though Paul was not -right- there to oversee the discipline, since the church had conducted it, there was repentance, and they then forgave the individual; Paul did, too...based on -their- forgiveness of him.

Already forgiven? © 1999

READER QUESTION:

I was having a conversation with another Christian. I am not sure what really led up to this but here goes. He said that he does not go to God to ask for forgiveness. He said because He has already forgiven him all of his sins. I said, there are times you feel guilty for your sin and you pray to your Father and ask Him to forgive you for your sin. He then told me that guilt is an evil conscience and asking forgiveness is blaspheming what Jesus did not the cross which demonstrates unbelief. So basically I have been called an unbeliever with an evil conscience who blasphemes Jesus.

VW ANSWER:

NO! Jesus' death on the cross did NOT 'forgive' the whole world, without them repenting.

What the Scriptures tell us is, "For You, Lord, are good and ready to forgive, and rich in mercy to all those who call on You." (Ps86:5)

Also, Jesus is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn1:29) Which is why God sent Him. (Jn3:16)

But notice, it is for "whoever believes in Him." To "as many as received Him." (Jn1:12) To those who "call" on Him. (Acts9:14)

For the unregenerate the requirement is "repentance and remission of sins" (Mk1:4,Acts5:31,Lk24:47)

For the believer, who needs Christ's advocacy for His "little children" (1Jn2:1) it is, "IF we CONFESS our SINS...He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.." (1Jn1:9) Jesus makes it quite plain, -IF- there is Repentance, -THEN- there is forgiveness. (Lk17:3-4)

Jesus came to provide salvation for -ALL- who CALL UPON Him. (Rom10:12, 1Cor1:2) Not just some "limited" few. For "whoever" believes in Him. (Jn3:16) Because He is not willing that "any" should perish. (2Pt3:9)

And for those who do call upon Him, He promises to be "near" them. (Ps145:18) To have fellowship. (1Jn1:7) As we are abiding in the Vine. (Jn15) And have the indwelling Holy Spirit. (Jn16:7,Rom8)

But until we "call upon the name of the Lord" to be saved (Joel2:32), that salvation hasn't been applied to the person yet. (Rom4:5) And so, God is AT-THE-READY. "For You, Lord, are good and READY to forgive, and rich in mercy to all those who call on You." (Ps86:5)

And yes, for the Believer, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1Jn1:8) Therefore, we "confess" (vs9) as we pray, "forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors." (Mt6:12)

'Trouble is... most people who believe in this kind of "universal forgiveness" believe such because they harbor sin in their hearts and lives. They want a 'perception' of salvation without having to "humble" themselves. (Jas4:10) They want to have heaven in the sweet-by-and-by, but they want to live the way -they- 'want to' in the here-and-now. That is idolatry. God says to them...

"Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face. SHOULD I AT ALL BE INQUIRED OF BY THEM?" (Ezek14:3)

True Repentance results in actions © 1999

[Response to study: Matthew 18:15-20 on "Not Forgiving"]

READER COMMENT:

Your message here is wonderful...and truly biblically accurate. One more step needs to be added and that is words alone do not prove a repentive heart...actions do. Many times someone will say I am sorry to get off the "hot" seat in any one situation...merely to go out and repeat the same offense. It is in the actions that show true sorrow and a repentive heart and in that the completion of forgiveness is at hand.... Thank you

VW ANSWER:

Exactly! As Zachaeus came down from the tree, he didn't use the words "I repent" ... but rather, he listed off all the things he was going to do as a result of his repentance; how he was going to repay those he had wronged. And Jesus said, "This day salvation has come to this house..." (Lk19:8-9)

This is something lacking in today's "justice" system. The criminals "serve time" and it is called "paying their debt to society". But they are not required to pay back what they stole, fix what they broke, etc. And the victim usually is left to fend for himself...and hopefully he had insurance!

John the Baptist retorted to the self-righteous crowd, "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance." (Mt3:8) While salvation is a free "gift of God" and "NOT -OF- works" the results are "-UNTO- good works" (Eph 2:8-10) Also see: Jas 2:14-26

Resurrection and Christ's Elect © 1999

Two Scripture passages seem to cause confusion for many people; and thus, false doctrines are promoted. Mt24:31 speaks of the Son of Man's "elect" which are gathered "with a sound of a trumpet". This, of course, - follows- the "affliction of those days" (vs29) where the stars fall and the powers of the heavens are shaken where God's wrath is poured out. Around this same time frame, when satan is bound for a thousand years, there is a resurrection that is called "the first resurrection". (Rev20:5b)

Forsaking all the other -multitude- of clear Scriptures which speak of the Lord delivering the Church out of the world before the 70th week, they think these two combination of verses mean that the resurrection, and thus also the Rapture of the Church (1Th4:16-17), occur at the -end- of the 70th week ("The Tribulation"). If it is -Christ's- "elect", it must be the "Church". If it is the "first resurrection", it must also be the "Rapture". Scripture does not contradict itself, but 'they' typically choose to believe what they think these two passages say, ignoring the dozens of other passages that clearly teach a "pre-trib" Rapture/Resurrection of the Church. And as a result, they also apply their views of these passages to many of those other passages, making them say things other than what they actually say.

I have often wondered how to answer people about these two passages the way they interpret them. We have addressed it a bit in the past. But in the context of beginning this section in Matthew starting with ch24, having received some e-mails about this raising the question anew, the Lord has now suddenly made it clear. And I think we have a -simple- explanation for how to understand this matter properly. So we'll interject this parenthetical study into the Matthew series.

Let's go back to that "painting". (Study from Mt24:1-8) For the sake of illustration, let us suppose it is a pastoral scene with a couple of "fences" running across it. There is a fence in the foreground, and another further back. The one in front is obscured in a few places by trees, buildings, etc. But you know it's all part of the -same- fence, whether you see the part over on the left end, or the part sticking out of some bushes in the middle. This fence in the foreground, if we were travelling along, we might call the "first fence", and as we went further, we would come to the other, which we might call the "second" fence, where the farmer might dump his garbage over that fence. The "first" fence is for the "sheep"; the "second" for the "goats". Now, keep in mind how we see -sections- of the "first fence" as we look at the painting.

Another example: a tour bus is carrying a group of people on a trip. They stop for lunch. Now it's time to get back on the road again. It is "boarding" time. One group of people get on the bus and settle in. Another group comes along a few minutes later. Eventually, the final 'stragglers' get on board and as they are climbing aboard the tour guide says to the driver,

"this is everybody." After making a head-count, the leader confirms, "that's everybody". The bus is now "boarded". The "everybody" was not that last group of stragglers getting on while he was making the comment, but rather, once they were on it meant that "everybody" was -now- on board.

When Rev20:5b proclaims, "This is the first resurrection" it is like the tour guide telling the bus driver, "that's everybody". The last of those belonging on the bus are now on the bus.

They got on at different times, even though it was -one- 'boarding'. That fence is 'one' fence, but we see different 'parts' of it.

The same with resurrection. Just like the two fences, there are -TWO- resurrections. (Acts24:15) The "first" is of those who are "saved". The "second", while not being labelled as such in Scripture, is understood by the context. The unbelievers are resurrected in order to receive judgment at the "great white throne" (Rev20:11) and end up in the "Lake of Fire". (vs13) And it says, "This is the second death." (vs14) The "second death" corresponding to, and coming after the "second resurrection" ...the resurrection of unbelievers.

The "first resurrection" happens in stages. The first stage has already occurred; right after Jesus' resurrection. It says, "and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth out of the tombs after His resurrection, they entered into the holy city and were revealed to many." (Mt27:52-53) The second stage is the Church, when the "dead in Christ" rise (1Th4:16), at the same event as the Rapture when "we who remain alive will be caught up.." (vs17) The final stage is when those saved during the 70th week "beheaded because of the witness of Jesus..and had not received the mark on their forehead..and hand" (Rev20:4) are raised to reign with Christ 1000 years. This final group is the same one mentioned in Rev7:14 "coming out of - the- great tribulation.." When these martyrs are resurrected, the living Jews, yet in unbelief (Is45:2-6), will be gathered back to their land, (Mt24:31) where they will be given new hearts. (Jer31:31-34) All three of these 'stages' are part of that -same- "fence". Part of the "first resurrection". And when the final group has been resurrected, it is pronounced, "this is the first resurrection". "This is everybody"... "Everyone is on-board"

Does Jesus mention these like this anywhere else? The "certain man" made a supper. (Lk14:16-24) Those who had been invited (Israel) refused to come when it was ready. So, when they wouldn't come, the "man" instructs that the servant go to the "streets and lanes" to find people. (Gentiles) (Acts28:28) And when all their 'number' had come in (Rom11:25) there was still more room. And the "man" wanting "that my house may be filled" (Lk14:23) instructs that they go to the "highways and hedges and COMPEL THEM to come in.." This is that "everlasting gospel

of the kingdom" (Mt24:14) to "every nation and tribe and tongue and people" (Rev14:6) during the 70th week.

All three of these groups end up in the banquet hall; each with their own -stage- of the "first resurrection". And notice that Israel who initially rejected, the "remnant" (Zec8:11, Rom9:27,11:5) gets in on the final one with 12,000 from each tribe. (Rev7:4) But all participate in the "first resurrection" at their own times, until it is complete. The "bus is boarded" once all the 'boarding groups' are finally in their seats; one group boarding, another boarding a few minutes later; it's all -one- "boarding". And remember how that "painting" covers 3000 years of time. That whole "painting" of 3000 years is the "Day of the Lord". That "fence" stretches across various 'parts' of the painting. It is -one- fence within -one- painting.

The Mt27:52-53 resurrection fulfilled the O.T. saints. 1Th4:16-17 will fulfill the Church. And Rev20:4,6 will fulfill those "calling on the name of the Lord" (Joel2:32) during the Tribulation/70th week.

Now... let's understand the "elect" from Mt24:31 a little more clearly.

The argument many give is that, if the "elect" in context belong to the "Son of Man", that must mean the "Church", because the Church is made up of CHRIST-ians. We are "in Christ" (2Cor5:17), etc. That Israel was under "God" in the O.T., not "Jesus".

Paul clears up this misunderstanding for us. Speaking of Israel in the wilderness, their eating and drinking... "that Rock was Christ." (1Cor10:4) Any -physical- manifestation of God's presence to Israel in the wilderness was Jesus Christ, because He is "the shining splendor of His glory, and the express image of His essence" (Heb1:3) Israel was following Jesus Christ in the wilderness. And when Jesus came "to His own" (Jn1:11) He was born as a "Jew". His "own" was Israel. He was born "in the flesh" (1Jn4:2-3) "out of a woman" (Gal4:4) as He came "under Law, that He might redeem the ones under law" (vs5) Who was "under Law"? Israel. Of the "Seed of Abraham" (Heb2:16) as He became "like His brothers".(vs17)

Ps22:22 says Messianically, "I will declare Your name to My brothers.." His "brothers" being, again, Israel. Israel was a nation of "brothers", the 12 tribes having been sibling sons of Israel. The term in Scripture "brother" or "brethren" is most often a "Jewish" expression. When Jesus comes back and judges the nations, He will judge based on how they treated "the least of My brothers.." (Mt25:40) Israel.

Thus, when we gave the detailed account of how the "elect" in Mt24:31 is Israel, it should be clear that they belong to Jesus Christ. And again, for those who will accept it; they are 'gathered' from the "four winds" to which they had been scattered. The Church was not scattered to the winds like stubble (Jer13:24); Israel was. Thus, the Church is not going to be gathered from those -same- "winds", back to the land of promise; Israel is.

(Ez36:24, Deu30:4, Is11:12, Jer23:3, 31:7-11, 32:37, Ez34:11-16) Remember that Jesus is the "True Vine" (Jn15). Yes, Israel was pruned off that Vine, Jesus, for a time so that the Gentiles might be grafted in. (Rom11) But Israel, when they are gathered from the "four winds" will be grafted back in TO JESUS again. (Rom11:23,26) So, again, Mt24:31 is NOT the Church. It is Israel.

Of course, there will still be those who will simply not accept this; no matter how many different ways we come up with to present it. No matter how many angles we approach the subject. But then, Israel rejected Jesus, too; no matter how many parables He told, or signs He performed. (Jn12:37)

When Jesus said to the woman of Samaria "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn4:22) He said a whole 'mouthful'. God brought salvation to the world -through- Israel in the Person of Jesus Christ, a Jew.

Sadly... just as Israel rejected their Messiah (Jn1:11), many who claim to be "christian" reject Him, too. How? How do we know this? They reject the "pupil of God's eye". (Deu32:10, Zec2:8) Remember how He says, 'if you did it to My brothers...you did it to Me'? We know we are saved "by grace through faith" (Eph2:8), but our works -manifest/reveal- our faith. (Jas2) "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers. The one not loving the brother remains in death." (1Jn3:14) We usually think of this expression as referring to love for fellow-Believers; which is only partly true. If we realize that Scripturally, typically, "brothers" is a Jewish expression, we should understand that part 'n' parcel of being a Christian is also a love for God's people. Let us not forget that Israel was a "natural" part of the vine. (Rom11:21,24) The Church came from the "wild olive" and was "grafted in" ... "contrary to nature". Israel was the "elect" beginning with Abraham. They are the ones who were "invited" to the banquet. The primarily -Gentile- Church was invited when the Elect gave excuses for not receiving Christ. And Paul says, "Do not be highminded, but fear.." (Rom11:20)

If you refuse to accept God's present/future workings with Israel, and to believe what God says, that He will "gather" -them- again (Mt24:31) you are on very shakey, scary ground!! Jesus was a Jew. If you do not accept Israel's legitimate place, then, how can you claim to accept Jesus' proper place? In a round-about sort of way it could be said that if you reject Israel, you have rejected Christ. You are not a Christian. If a person is In Christ, he will also love Christ's "brothers", Israel.

Jesus teaching "works"? (Mt25:14-30) © 1999

READER QUESTION:

Anyway-getting to the subject-from this teaching I get the impression that this is Jesus+...works. I always believed that we do things for the Lord as led by the Lord because of our love for Him. And I always believed that you must be born again and be under the blood to be with the Lord for eternity. So, then, is this a works teaching or have I missed it completely?

VW ANSWER:

Salvation is NOT by works. It is a GIFT from God. (Eph2:8-9) It is not -our-works that saves, but -His- mercy (Tit3:5) through Jesus' shed blood. (Rev1:5)

But how do we know that we have been saved? How does -another- person know we are saved? If it waddles, quacks and swims; it's likely a "duck". If it meows, hisses, scratches and climbs trees; it's likely a cat. How do we know if a person is a Christian? By their works. (Jas2:14-26)

The duck did not make the egg from which it was hatched; its mother did that. The cat did not form itself; its mother birthed it. Both of these come to life of the form of their parents.

The Christian is given the new birth, from God (Jn3:3) through the Holy Spirit (vs8) The form and nature is based on the nature of God. He is a "new creation" because he is "in Christ." (2Cor5:17) This new "creature" he has become is of the nature of Him Who birthed him; the "spiritual" man. (1Cor2)

How do we make sure that a 'chicken' egg was not slipped under the mother duck? We know by what hatches out of the egg. We are told to "not believe every spirit but test the spirits" (1Jn4:1)

Believers' -works- are likened to building on the Foundation of Jesus Christ. (1Cor3:11) Of what sort is it? Gold, silver and precious stones withstand the trying fires. Wood, hay and stubble gets burned up. But notice that that trial does not indicate 'savedness' or 'lostness'. The ones whose works are burned up still "make it" but "yet so as by fire". (vs15)

That's the various levels of "talent". Some build according to "5 talents". Others, by one and two talents.

The problem with the one who had been given "one talent" in this lesson was that he didn't do -any- building; good or bad. Not only did he not build with gold, he didn't even muster up himself to pull a few scraps of straw together. He had NOTHING. His works (or -lack- thereof) showed him to NOT be a "builder". He did not belong. His lack of works did not condemn

him; but rather, illustrated of 'what-sort' he was. He was tested, and found wanting (lacking).

Since he was given the talent, he must have originally been a "builder". He's originally called a "servant". But along the way when he evaluates the Master's nature and qualities (a "hard man") and has figured out the "cost" (Lk14:28), decides he doesn't want to be a "builder" under -this- particular Master, so 'walks-away' ("draws back" -Heb10:38) from the "job"... empty-handed!

Jesus 'priest' from Judah, not Levi? © 2000

READER QUESTION:

There is something that has confused me from the scriptures, and i wanted to ask you, as im sure that you can help. I know that Jesus had to live a life without sin, (which he did) and i suppose that this means that he would have to of not broken any of the Mosaic? law. I thought that the preisthood was ordained to the levites, and i see that jesus was from the tribe of judah. why was he from the tribe of judah and not of levites?

ANSWER:

Jesus was not of the "Levitical priesthood". The Levitical priests were of human appointment, being descendants of Aaron. (Heb5:1) These would die when they got old, and their offspring would rise up and take over the office. But being the Son of God it was prophsied of Him, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." (Heb5:6, Ps110:4) If you read in Hebrews ch7, you see how there is no record of Melchizedek's lineage, and how Melchizedek blesses Abraham...the g g g g g g g great....grandfather of Aaron. If the "better" blesses the "lesser" (Heb7:7), the "Order of Melchizedek" is a -higher- priesthood than the Levitical one. And, as you read through ch7 you will see the writer's argument about the "tribe of Judah" also. (vs14)

Jesus' Spiritual or Physical death more important? ©2000

READER QUESTION:

Could you possibly tell me if Jesus Christ died spiritually as well as physically on the cross? and if so which is considered the more important of the deaths, for our salvation?

VW ANSWER:

Rom8:9-11 speak of the indwelling Holy Spirit due to the raising of Christ from the dead, which is expounded in Rom6:4+. When He cried out "My God...why have You forsaken Me?" that was the moment He was bearing our sins. He was spiritually dead at that moment, even though His 'physical' body was still alive. When He cried out "it is finished", sin at that moment had been atoned because God saw the "travail of His soul" (Is53:11), but His body was still alive.

We know, also, that we were redeemed with His precious blood. (Rev1:5, 1Pt1:19)

Suppose for the sake of a crude illustration that these two items are two 'links' in the 'chain' of Salvation.... If you have a chain holding something up, which is the most important link? 'Which' link can you allow to break and still have the chain do its job? Can you get by without one of the chain's links?

It's the "complete package".

Addendum 5-18-00: (due to responses to the above answer)

I was rather amazed at some of the responses to Sunday's Q/A regarding Jesus' death. The "spiritual" vs "physical". And, right 'now' as I'm sitting here is the time I would normally be mailing out tonight's mailing...but am - just- now writing this. So, if this is a bit less polished than normal, please understand.

First of all, there were several who did some name-dropping: Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, etc... suggesting that Sunday's comment that Jesus died 'spiritually' on the cross was sounding awfully close to the teachings of some of these people. And let's take the error down the path that many take it, to expose it. I am not a student of the various ones named... but there is a teaching out there that says, also, that Jesus while He was dead, was in hell being "tortured" by satan.

Let us understand something... and this applies to -any- doctrine that one might consider. Just because certain false prophets teach something, doesn't necessarily make it -all- 'false'. Suppose they teach "X" which is

false, but also include "Y" which is truth; just because they are a false teacher and proclaim "X", does not make "Y" false, also. It is often said that false doctrine includes 99% truth. Like another person who wrote today, not sure whether to unsubscribe, because VW proclaims charismania to be demonic...and yet some charismatic friends were "praying" for a specific need at -just- the "right time" the need was there. So, what does it matter that they become "slain"...they knew the need and "prayed" for it. Well, if false prophets proclaimed 100% error, there would be no 'deception' would there. The deception comes because they appear to be "ministers of righteousness" (2Cor11:15). Sure, the demons know that a certain 'need' exists...so they can have their followers "pray" for that need at the right moment, to then be able to report that "on schedule" praying. And you see, most people are so "wowed" by what appears to be true, that they ignore the demon-possessed "slain" experiences. If they are demonic in one case, the other does not suddenly become "of God"!!! And conversely, because a false teacher proclaims error, doesn't mean that everything he says is false.

After all, Catholicism teaches (correctly) that Jesus died on the cross. But then they say that His wounds are -still- "continually bleeding" for us. But Scripture says that He died "once for all" (Rom6:10, Heb7:27) and that He rose from the dead. (1Cor15:20) Catholicism's correct teaching about the crucifixion does not make their -generic- doctrines correct. Overall, their doctrines are false, even though they contain elements of truth.

In related manner, if you hear something here that you hear from one of them, don't automatically assume that VW also teaches everything else they teach as they continue down that doctrinal path...ending, for instance, where satan "tortured" Jesus.

Now, let's get to the topic at hand...

Adam was promised that if he disobeyed, "you shall surely die". But he and Eve ate and they were still 'walking around'. Did God lie? He had said "in the day you eat"... and yet Adam lived over 900 years. God did not specifically say, "you shall die -spiritually-".

When Paul proclaims "you were once dead in trespasses and sins...even when we were dead in sins" (Eph2:1,5) Well...we were -quite- 'alive and kicking'. We were pursuing life, breathing, eating, working...blood coursing through our bodies. He doesn't specify "you were dead -spiritually-".

But notice when we receive Life in Christ, He was the "life giving Spirit" (1Cor15:45) When we are made alive we receive the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus". If we are made alive in the Spirit, then conversely, the death which precedes it is a 'spiritual' death. This is understood in the -context-.

After all, things of the S/spirit are still a mystery. Jesus describes it to Nicodemus, "The Spirit breathes where He desires, and you hear His

voice, but you do not know from where He comes, and where He goes; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (Jn3:8)

Being creatures of "flesh and blood" (1Cor15:50) that we are, we tend to look at things we can see and feel. The 'spiritual' is on a totally different level. And if we used to be spiritually dead, there isn't much use in describing it much ("the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God" -1Cor2:14)...thus, our condition and remedy is given mostly in terms we finite humans can understand. And thus, the O.T. sacrifices were -physical- ones, of shedding of "blood" of animals. And when Jesus came, He shed His -physical- blood, in fulfillment of those O.T. -physical-sacrifices. To you who quoted back to me 1Pet1:19 that we were redeemed with "the precious BLOOD of Christ..", please keep in mind that 1Peter was written to "the elect sojourners of the Dispersion" (1:1). IOW..."Jews". This word-picture about Jesus' blood was to describe how Christ fulfilled the O.T. sacrifices. The -physical- sacrifices were things they were used to.

Some other quotes were made from Isa53:4-5...of Jesus' -physical-wounds... "..with His stripes we ourselves are healed" (vs5b) While it is true that these -physical- things certainly happened to Jesus, what does it say was the "satisfaction" before the Father? You see...Isaiah ch53 goes further than just vs 1-7. It goes all the way to vs12. And we quoted part of it in Sunday's Q/A... which some of you apparently missed...

"Yet it pleased Jehovah to crush Him; to grieve Him; that he should put forth His -SOUL- as a guilt-offering...He shall see of the travail of His -SOUL-. He shall be fully satisfied." (vs10-11) Notice..."soul" is not "physical".

Where is the "dividing apart of soul and spirit"? (Heb4:12) Who knows the distinction between the two? Does humanity? They are sooo closely entwined as far as man is concerned... Jesus is the One Who knows. Again, remember Jesus' description of the "spirit" to Nicodemus. It is a mystery.

Now...when Jesus was on the cross and crying out, "My God...why have You forsaken Me??" He was VERY MUCH 'alive' -physically-. Right? If you doubt this, then this 'discussion' is useless. Now if God was 'forsaking' Jesus...what is the -only- reason, the only possible scenario that could split up the "oneness" between God and Jesus? (Jn17) What is the thing God cannot countenance? "Iniquities and sins" (Is59:2) When there is sin, God's face is "hidden". Thus, at the moment Jesus cried out as He did, He was bearing mankind's sin. Again... He was very much 'alive'...people heard His -physical- voice. Thus, while He was alive physically, He was carrying sin which results in death. (Rom6:23) The "sting of death is sin". (1Cor15:56)

Now if Jesus was -physically- alive, and God was seeing the "travail of His SOUL" (and the soul is usually associated with a live body), and He has the weight of sin on Him, and Sin equals Death...there is only one other element left, by which Jesus could have been "dead" at that moment He cried out. The spiritual.

Some comments suggested that to make these kinds of statements detracts from the Holy Spirit. But it does not. Let us never forget that Jesus was -FULLY HUMAN-. He partook of "flesh and blood". (Heb2:14) In fact, if you do not believe this, you are of the spirit of the antichrist. (1Jn4:2-3) It was the "man" Jesus who died on the cross. Pilate brought Jesus out to the people, "Behold the -man-!" (Jn19:5)

Humanity has three parts "body, soul and spirit". (1Th5:23) As Believers we are exhorted to keep all-three "blameless". As 'humanity' Jesus was just like we are...with one difference. He did not have a 'human' father. Remember a couple weeks ago the Fig Leaf about the male "Y" chromosome and Israel's priesthood from the line of Levi. The "Y" chromosome is passed down, father-to-son, generation after generation.. unchanged. If Jesus had had an earthly father, He would have inherited Adam's sin.(1Cor15:45) But Jesus was the Seed of the "woman". (Gen3:15) And as God "breathed" (Spirit) into Adam to give life into him, The Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in Mary's womb. (Mt1:18, Lk1:35) You see, we might say... the Holy Spirit conceived both Adam and Jesus (the man).

But as fully 'human', Jesus was comprised of body, soul and spirit. And He experienced everything humanity does...yet without sin. (Heb4:15) If Christ suffered "in all points" as we are...He also had to fulfill our redemption in all aspects. IOW...if we were dead -spiritually- because of sin, then Jesus (the MAN) had to die -spiritually-. He is, after all, the "last Adam" (man)

Just like Adam died "spiritually" but Genesis doesn't specify the fact 'in words' ...many of the things of the Spirit are like Jn3:8. A dimension not so readily visible to us. But if Jesus' resurrection is the "firstfruit" (1Cor15:20) to eternal life, and in giving Life is the "Life giving Spirit", does it not stand to reason that His death from which He was resurrected also contained the "spiritual" dimension?

Do not interpret this 'addendum' as placing 'more' emphasis on Christ's -spiritual- suffering. As the original answer stated, it takes "both". If you only believe in Jesus' "shed blood" (without which there is no remission - Heb9:22), you only have -physical- salvation. You will only remain on earth as "flesh and blood". And there are many who teach this error, that Jesus is -merely- returning to earth to reign, as they are allegedly "preparing a place for Him" to return to. But Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you.." (Jn14:2) and promises "I will come again and receive you to Myself". (vs3) Yes, the physical needs redeeming, because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God". (1Cor15:50) But we cannot be in God's

presence if we are not redeemed spiritually, because "God is Spirit". (Jn4:24) The Holy Spirit's indwelling is one of the defining characteristics of a Christian (Rom8:9) and is how we have bold access to God's presence (8:26-27) That occurs, even though the bodies have not yet been redeemed. (Rom8:23) How could it ever be possible to have the Holy Spirit if Christ did not also redeem us -spiritually-? He could only do that if He also suffered spiritually.

Jesus redeemed us in our totality. Body, soul AND spirit. And He did so by suffering/dying in all three... body, soul AND spirit.

I realize this barely scratches the surface of this topic. There are so many Scriptures we could investigate. But I hope this cursory view helps to clear up the questions... for now.