

John

Book Study

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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.

John

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The Word Became Flesh - John 1

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn1:1,14)

Paul writes, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" and again of his own desire, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.." (Phil2:5,3:10)

So many intone the name "Jesus". When the pretend 'christian' charismaniacs are trying to get into Heaven they will be wailing, "Lord, Lord, have we not..in Your name..in Your name..done many works of power IN YOUR NAME?" (Mt7:22) They mantracize and swoon over the name "Jesus, Jesus, Jeezzzzus...there's just SOMETHING about that name". But how many people actually know Jesus? For Paul, knowing Jesus had nothing to do with mantras, but rather the "power of His resurrection" and as he said in another place, "I now rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, on behalf of His body, which is the church" (Col1:24) What do we see in Jesus? A sugar daddy? Or our Master and partner in afflictions? What Jesus promised for us was "affliction". (Jn16:33) And this is because "if the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before you..remember..A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My Word, they will keep yours also." (Jn15:18,20) When we truly come to know Christ, and share in His sufferings, those who do not know God become manifest. "..these things they will do to you on account of My name, because they do not know Him who sent Me." (Jn15:21)

So, if we are sharers in Christ's afflictions, would it not be good if we know the One who is our Master? If we are to be imitators of Christ (1Cor11:1), should we not know whom we are to imitate?

Seven years have now past. This article begins the eighth year of this ministry. How much time remains before Jesus Christ comes to "receive" His Church unto Himself as He promised? (Jn14:3) We don't know. As we watch prophecy unfolding before our eyes, we know it is sooner and sooner. How far we may progress into this series I have no way of knowing. But until He comes for us, for a period of time, however much time remains, we will start into the Gospel of John; considering just who is this Jesus Christ we claim to know. Where the series we did on Matthew covered Jesus' "teachings", this series will concentrate primarily on the "person" and "Deity" of Jesus Christ, Himself.

These writings don't usually tell jokes. But there was one I heard the other day that hopefully will not so much make you laugh, as much as to open your eyes as we dig in: With all that modern science has become capable of, this scientist and God were having a conversation; man boasting that God's 'trick' of creating man 'from dust' wasn't such a big deal. And the challenge was made that this man and God would both take a handful of dirt and make a person, right there, on the spot, and see who could do it quicker. So, the man digs his hand into the ground and pulls up a handful of dirt to prepare for the 'start' signal, and God cuts him off short, "Uh, just a minute there! Get your own dirt!"

Man's 'wisdom' fills library shelves full of books of commentaries to explain away God. A subscriber was sharing recently his conversations with a seminary graduate who was dumb-founded that this person lets the Bible be the "commentary on itself"; that he doesn't read commentaries. Man's 'wisdom' that "does not know God" (1Cor1:21) requires university degrees to prove God doesn't exist. John, here, takes a mere four (4) verses to explain the existence of both God and the universe.

When vs14 tells us that the "Word became flesh" and its following context, we know that "Word" in vs1 speaks of Jesus. Thus, we could say, "In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. Jesus was in the beginning with God." (vs1-2) Do we have any other passage that says the same thing? When God spoke "to us by His Son" it is by this Son "through whom also He made the worlds" who is "the express image of His essence". (Heb1:2-3) As Jesus would say later, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn14:9) Thus, we must first establish that Jesus is, in truth, Deity. Jesus is God. This was the final point which condemned Him to death before the rulers, "Are you the Christ?" to which Jesus replied, "I AM". (Mk14:61-62)

And as Hebrews said, it says here, All things were made through Jesus, and without Jesus, nothing was made that was made. (Jn1:3) In other words, if something exists, Jesus brought it into being. Even that handful of dirt the scientist was going to make a man out of... even the scientist, himself. The disciples were awed, "...what sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (Mt8:27) "For by Him all things were created that are in Heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." (Col1:16-17) Thus, Jesus not only created everything; He also controls it all. And in fact, it all holds together through Him.

Just one little scientific thought here. Even way back in grade school science we all learned that likes oppose, and opposites attract. Try to put two "N" magnets together and they push each other apart. The electrons spinning around the nucleus of an atom are held to the nucleus because they are Negatively charged, and the nucleus is Positive. But the nucleus consists of many positive particles packed together in a clump. If they are

individual Protons, with 'like' charges, why don't they explode away from each other? What holds them together? Well... wrong question. It should be, 'WHO' holds them together? Jesus. "...in Him all things consist.."

And this whole discussion of God, creation, existence, etc would be impossible if we were not here with cognitive powers to 'think'. And we can only do so because we are 'alive'. Where did life come from? "In Jesus was life.." (vs4) You see, when Jehovah God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen2:7), that was Jesus at work.

Now... it says that this Jesus, the One who is God, who created all things, and gave life... "became flesh and dwelt among us.." (vs14) And this completes the package of what we must know about Jesus. That He is fully Deity; but that He also became humanity. One of the tests regarding false prophets and the spirits that 'fill' them is the "[confession] that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1Jn4:2-3) And for our salvation, (which is another topic), it was necessary for Him to "share" in our form as "flesh and blood". (Heb2:14) How did the witnesses know He was flesh? They 'heard, saw with their eyes, looked upon and handled with their hands.' (1Jn1:1) Remember, when Jesus was crucified, there was no question in anybody's mind (of the day) that He was "human". They -KNEW- that He was a man. The thing they objected to was that He "being a man, [made Himself] God" (Jn10:33) In Jesus' day the unbelievers did not accept His Deity. Today, many don't accept His 'full' humanity. But He was both.

Notice how John introduces Jesus to the people; what he says about Him. "This was He of whom I said, He who arrives after me came to be before me, for He existed before me." (vs15) Is this a bunch of double-talk?

If you read Luke ch1 (we won't quote it now), you will see from the narrative that John was conceived and born six months 'before' Jesus. Elizabeth was six-months pregnant when Mary was visited by the angel, and then goes to be with Elizabeth. Now, John is going around preaching, "preparing the way" for Jesus' arrival on the scene. The people did not see Jesus first. They saw John the baptist. Not only was John "preparing" to "introduce" Jesus to the crowds, but he was also physically older. But he says, He "came to be before me". (KJV's "preferred" is outdated for the way we use the word today.) As Jesus would later say, "before Abraham came to be, I AM" (Jn8:58), John was preparing his hearers with information they obviously did not understand, that Jesus' existence was before John was ever conceived in Elizabeth's womb.

This, thus, brings us to another point. Notice that "the Word -BECAME- flesh" (vs14) Did Mary "give" birth to Jesus? Well, certainly He arrived 'through' her womb. But did somebody "create" Jesus into existence, into Mary's womb? No, it says that He "became" flesh. In the "mind" of Christ, He "emptied Himself" as he "[took] the form of a bondservant" as He "[came] in the likeness of men". God did not humble Him, but He "humbled

Himself" (Phil2:7-8) Again, notice, "In Him was life..." (vs4) He will say later, "I have authority to lay it [My life] down, and I have authority to take it again" (Jn10:18) Just as the Father is Jehovah, the "existing One" (Ex3:14), it is given to "the Son to have life in Himself" (Jn5:26) Thus, the One who gives life to all things, has life in Himself, and came to earth in human form of His own free will.

Yes, we know that God "gave" His only begotten Son (Jn3:16), and that He "sent" Him (Jn5:36, 20:21, 1Jn4:14), but Jesus came out of His own obedience to the Father. (Heb5:8) He said, "...I always do those things that please Him..." (Jn8:29) Nobody hogtied Him and dragged Him, kicking and screaming. And when He died for our sin, He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Lk23:46) He "[gave]" His life a ransom. (Mt20:28, Mk10:45)

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (vs18) As Jesus came to earth, He came to declare the Father's "glory". (vs14)

If we were to summarize in two words what Jesus was characterized by, what would they be? Is it even possible to do so? Well, John did. Jesus is "...full of -GRACE- and -TRUTH-". (vs14)

When we think of "grace", sadly today most people today only think of those aspects where the people noticed His "gracious words". (Lk4:22) Those things whereby, when people hear them, they "feel good" inside. But Jesus came to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk19:10) Thus, His grace is actually more related to the fact that He did not come "into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (Jn3:17) as He said, "...I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world" (Jn12:47) because we are "saved by [God's gift of] grace through faith" (Eph2:8)

And then, Truth. This is something which characterizes Christ and those who are in Christ, believers. As Jesus stood before Pilate, He says, "For this purpose I was born, and for this I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the Truth. Everyone who is of the Truth hears My voice." (Jn18:37) And Pilate asks, "What is truth?" But based on this closing statement, closing the other things Jesus said to Pilate, Pilate goes out to the people and says, "I find no fault in Him at all" (vs38)

In the N.T. often the Ways of Christ and the Christian walk and doctrine are called "truth". (2Tm3:8, 4:4, Tit1:14, Heb10:26, Jac5:19, 1Jn1:6,8, 2:4, etc) It covers everything from actual Salvation (1Tm2:4), to how we conduct ourselves as we speak, "Yes and No". (Mt5:37) Thus, John's Gospel often has Jesus beginning statements with "Truly, truly, I say to you..." One of my gripes against the NKJV is that they changed "Truly, truly" into "Most assuredly". (Chipping away!) In the Greek in those places it actually says, "Amen, amen". But as Jesus speaks to the church of

Laodicea, He labels Himself as "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness" (Rev3:14) Today's apostasy no longer maintains truth. And, no wonder! They have rejected Jesus Christ, Who -is- the Truth, and the Amen. Jesus said, "I am the way, the TRUTH..." (Jn14:6) (Thus, this is one of the things I had in mind recently when introducing the new VW-Edition of the Scriptures to the subscribers. The NKJV has a lot of 'little' things by which it seeks to have a "feel" as an apostate translation. They don't accept Jesus speaking "Truly, truly". This is one of the many things that was "fixed" for the VW-Edition.) Thus, as Jesus speaks to Laodicea He wishes they would be either Yes ("Hot"), or No ("cold"). But since they are lukewarm and wishy-washy, slip-sliding around, like today's society that says there is no right or wrong, He says, "I will vomit you out of My mouth". (Rev3:15-16)

Thus, when Jesus came the first time, John's mission was to "Make straight the way of the LORD". (Jn1:23) And as we anticipate Jesus' soon return, we cry out with the same message. Jesus is the Word. His Word is Truth. When we were saved, we were "brought forth by the Word of Truth" (Jac1:18) as we seek to maintain and preserve God's Word as it is, in truth, the "Word of Truth". (2Tm2:15) Because the Word of Truth (Scriptures) is one and the same with the Word of Truth (Jesus Christ). Whoever seeks to "twist" the Scriptures, does so "to their own destruction" (2Pt3:16) because in doing so, they seek to change God's character. But He says, "I do not change.." (Mal3:6)

Just as Jesus was the "..lamb without blemish and without spot" (1Pt1:19), so too, "The Words of Jehovah are pure words" (Ps12:6) We should be as the psalmist who said, "Your Word is very pure; Therefore Your servant loves it." (Ps119:140) We should not be as Israel who, when Jesus "came to His own..His own did not receive Him"(Jn1:11) and after hearing His "gracious words" proceeded to try to throw Him over the cliff to kill Him (Lk4:22,28-29)... but we should be as those.. "..as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those believing into His name.." (Jn1:12) When we "desire the pure milk of the Word" (1Pt2:2) we do so because such a desire is for Jesus, Himself!

Behold the Lamb of God! - John 1

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" "Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God!" (Jn1:29,36)

Let us be reminded, again, the context of everything we read in the Gospels. When Jesus "came to His own" (1:11), His "own" was Israel. He was born of a Jewish mother, and at eight days, He was circumcised as any proper Jewish boy was; and was dedicated as any first-born was who "opened the womb". (Lk2:21-24)

To the Jew, the lamb was a most precious sacrifice and remembrance. It was a "memorial". (Ex12:14) Passover was when God delivered Israel out of bondage in Egypt. But more specifically, Passover was when the death angel saw the "blood", that he passed-over the house and did not kill. (If you are not familiar with the account, please read in Exodus ch12) Thus, at every Passover, the 'lamb' of the Passover was the honored guest. Special attention was paid to it, to be sure it was "without blemish". (Ex12:5)

So, when John introduces Jesus as the "Lamb of God" who would be taking away sin, he was not pulling this 'figure of speech' out of thin air. The Jews knew the significance of a lamb, even remembering back to Abraham setting about to offer up Isaac, and the ram caught in the bushes providing the substitute; as Abraham had said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb.." (Gen22:8) And here, Jesus is being called -God's-Lamb. As Peter writes to Believing Jews he says of Jesus, "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your vain way of life received by (Mosaic) tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1Pet1:18-19)

Now... 'when', exactly, was it all planned that Jesus would come? "He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world.." (1Pt1:20a) You see, when God created all things... When -Jesus- made all things (1:3), even way back then, before sin had ever come into existence, God knowing that there would be sin, Jesus' coming was already part of the creative plan. And so 'now' (at the time of John), Jesus "..was manifest in these last times for you" (1Pt1:20b) For centuries Israel had been observing Passover annually; by the time Jesus would arrive, they would have killed thousands of lambs. But it was not possible for animals to atone for man's sin. (Heb10:4) Thus, "Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me...Then I said, Behold, I have come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me; to do Your will, O God." (Heb10:5,7) Jesus created (and holds all things together) knowing that He would also have to

come, ultimately, and die for the very creation He was breathing life into. (Gen2:7)

Thus, 'what', exactly, was it that John was proclaiming, in introducing Jesus as he did? The "Lamb", of the Jewish sacrificial rituals. For the purpose of "taking away sin". As Jesus would say on occasion, to "give His life a ransom for many". (Mt20:28) For centuries Israel had sacrificed animals according to the Law. And Jesus came to "fulfill" that Law. (Mt5:17)

But, 'how' do we know that 'this' man, here, now, is the Promised One? How do we know that John isn't just merely delusional? After all, he is rather a crazy old coot, living out in the wilderness, eating nothing but locusts and honey. Well, too, the sun has likely 'aged' him; he is actually rather young yet. Thus, he's more likely than not just a radical hippy. Probably been smoking a little too much pot, and is hallucinating with visions of grandeur!! Some of the people said, "..he has a demon.." (Mt11:18, Lk7:33)

Why is he known as "John the -BAPTIST-"? He came immersing for one purpose. John, himself, admits that he did not know who the Christ would be. (1:31) But he came immersing "..that He should be revealed to Israel.." The instructions given to John were 1) to immerse, and 2) "upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and abiding on Him, this is He who immerses in the Holy Spirit." (vs33)

Can you imagine being John? Knowing that his mission is to preach and immerse people. And as he is immersing, wondering at each one, "Is -this- one the Christ?" Now, before Jesus comes to him, he knows that He is special, because he objects, "I need to be immersed by You, and do You come to me?" (Mt3:14) While he had been given his instructions, he apparently only understood the "baptism unto repentance" (Mt3:11) aspect. And so, when Jesus comes to be immersed, he thinks Jesus is also "repenting"..?? But when he submits to Jesus' request, and immerses Jesus, then he sees what God had foretold him; the Spirit descending upon Jesus. And he testifies, "I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God". (vs34)

Now, when Jesus was immersed, "a voice came from Heaven which said, You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased" (Lk3:22), fulfilling the prophecy, "I will declare the decree: Jehovah has said to Me, You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." (Ps2:7) As the writer says, that God never gave such a label to any of the angels (Heb1:5). And furthermore, the Father labels the Son, Jesus, as God: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.." (vs8)

So, why was Jesus immersed? We already know: for John to recognize Him when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him; for Jesus to be "revealed to Israel". But Matthew records another interesting aspect. When John

objects to immersing Him, He replies, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Mt3:15)

Hebrews ch7-8 speak of Jesus as "High Priest", and compares between the priests of the Mosaic Law and Jesus Christ. We won't look up all the passages at this time; but if you recall reading in the Pentateuch, all the Levitical priestly rituals, you will remember how the priests, in preparation for service, would, among other things, dip themselves in the large pool of water and wash, prior to donning the priestly garments. Jesus is about to begin His ministry. If He is our High Priest, He needed to even fulfill that Law of washing. The Levitical priests washed to symbolically cleanse/sanctify themselves unto (symbolic) purity. Jesus is washing unto a purity; but a different kind; because immediately after being immersed, He goes out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Mk1:12) [For a deeper discussion of this, please see Ch4 of the Matthew series in the Library.] But when the 40 days are completed, it becomes evident that Jesus is, truly, "without sin". (Heb4:15) Proving God's pronouncement at His baptism, that He was "..well-pleased.." with Him.

So, Jesus is the Lamb of God, our High Priest. What sort of High Priest is He? You know, in Israel, the priesthood was the people's ultimate authority on everything. Again, if you read back in the Pentateuch, they decided civil matters as the courts. When there were plagues or illnesses that needed inspecting, they did that. If a man was jealous of his wife, thinking she might have been unfaithful to him, he would bring her to the priests, and they would make her drink a special water to decide her innocence or guilt. They had all sorts of rituals and ordinances which they meticulously followed. Now, the reason they needed the "bitter water that brings a curse" (Num5:18-19), is because the priests were not all-knowing. They could not discern, of their own cognition, the woman's heart and actions.

But notice: "The Word of God (Jesus) is living and powerfully active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not revealed in His presence, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we must give answer". (Heb4:12-13) Now, if you have always thought this little passage speaks of the 'Bible', remember that last month we observed how the Scriptures are an integral part of Christ's essence. But in this immediate context, notice the passage continues on talking about "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest..." (vs14) ...it is obviously talking about Jesus.

So, as John is introducing the Lamb of God, does Jesus manifest His ability to know the heart and thoughts? As Andrew and Peter start following Jesus to find out more about Him, Jesus calls to Philip, who, in turn, goes and gets Nathanael. And when told that they had found the Messiah, he gives the same argument of disbelief that the scribes and pharisees will give later (Jn7:52), "Can anything good come out of

Nazareth?" (1:46) Nathanael was not belittling Nazareth, but indicating that the official Scriptures did not mention Nazareth in relationship to Messiah. While Mt2:23 speaks of "the prophets" saying "He shall be called a Nazarene", those were apparently some prophetic words that didn't get recorded in the scrolls. Let's face it, not everything that every prophet ever spoke became Scripture, just as John himself says that what he wrote was not everything there was to say about Jesus. (Jn21:25)

So, Nathanael comes and Jesus says, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" (1:47) You see, when Nathanael said what he did, he was essentially doing what the Bereans later would be praised for, "searching the Scriptures...whether [it was so]" (Ac17:11) How can this man be the Messiah? He comes from Nazareth, but the Scriptures say He's supposed to come from Bethlehem...not realizing that Jesus had, indeed, been born in Bethlehem. So Jesus praises Nathanael's pure heart.

'Whaaat? How do You know me?' "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." (1:48) You see, this was the Samaritan woman's testimony, "Come, see a Man who told me everything that I ever did. Is this not the Christ [Messiah]?" (4:29) What is Nathanael's response? "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (1:49)

Who else can tell a person their own thoughts with certainty? "God knows your hearts" (Lk16:15) "For, behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what his thought is, He who makes the dawn darkness, and treads on the high places of the earth; Jehovah, the God of Hosts, is His name." (Am4:13) "..God..knows the secrets of the heart" (Ps44:21)

The demon spirits know some things. Their practitioners do a rather impressive job of conjuring at times. But one thing I have always noticed when the TV commercials come on for the psychic hotlines, those women never firmly make statements with certainty and finality. They will make bold pronouncements; but then, cushion the statement with, "Is that right?" You see...they do not 'know'. They can only do a demonically sophisticated job of 'guessing'.

But God -KNOWS-. He doesn't need to guess. He who "declares the end from the beginning" (Is46:10); in God's Son, Jesus Christ, "..had no need that anyone should bear witness of man, for He knew what was in man" (Jn2:25)

You see, when a person comes to God in faith, through Jesus Christ, when it is true saving faith, it is because God "draws" (Jn6:44) the person, and Christ declares to the person "all that I ever did". While the ministry of "soul-winning" might seem like a noble one, the only way a person can be truly saved is when they meet 'Jesus', Himself, "..for we ourselves have

heard Him and we know that this is truly the Christ, the Savior of the world" (4:42), the Lamb of God.

Rude, Angry, Zealous, Skeptical - John 2

"And when He had made a whip out of rope, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, Take these things away from here! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandize! And His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for Your house has consumed Me." (Jn2:15-17, Ps69:9)

Question: Is it ever right for Christians to get angry? Is it proper for a Believer to stir up a 'hornet's nest'? What about being impolite, especially to parents? After all, we are supposed to "honor" our parents. (Ex20:12, Eph6:2) What about skepticism: isn't love supposed to "believe all things"? (1Cor13:7)

Well, while the common people noticed Jesus' "gracious words" (Lk4:22), and all sick people who came to Jesus were healed (Mt4:24, Lk4:40), when it came to certain others, we see a different side to Jesus.

Notice this chapter starts out with Jesus "talking back to" His mother. When Jesus was yet a lad, he replies to their concerns with "Did you not know that I need to be in the things of My Father?" (Lk2:49) But then, returns home with them and "was subject to them". (vs51) And notice that Mary "kept all these words in her heart". (vs51b)

It seems as though Mary may have been a typical (busy-body) mom. Jesus, of course, had grown up as a 'perfect' son. Always obedient. Judging from her words, I expect she might have already known that Jesus could do miracles. At the wedding they run out of wine. Since she was from Nazareth, and the wedding was in Cana, why was she even concerning herself with the particulars of this wedding? Was it for family friends? Was it relatives? Or was she just being the 'helpful' busy-body, like Martha; "troubled about many things"? (Lk10:41)

Mary certainly got herself involved in trying to "talk sense" into Jesus when the family attempts to do an "intervention" and rescue Jesus from His delusions of grandeur that He is a "prophet" or something, going off to begin this cult, when they have concluded "He is beside Himself" (Mk3:21). He's out of His mind! So "His brothers and His mother" (vs31) come, looking for Him to take Him back home. And Jesus dismisses "faaaamly (values)" by replying, "Who is my mother, or my brothers?" (vs33) He knows why they are there. So, we can see obviously that Mary is not of a perfect mind regarding God's plans. [Editor: And yet, all these people pray to her!]

Here in Cana, they run out of wine, and Mary comes to Jesus, "They have no wine". (2:3) What a crisis! Jesus, they've run out. It's going to spoil the celebrations. Dooooo something!!!

"WOMAN" Not... "mother" or "mom". But, "Woman"! Years ago I used to have some friends. He was of Jewish lineage. Last time I saw them I noticed an interesting thing in their interactions with each other. If she had done something he thought was 'stupid', or less-than admirable, he would retort with, "WOMAN!" Said with a certain flair of 'disgust' in his tone. Whatever her fault of what she had done or said was because she was a "Woman!" Everytime he said it, I got the distinct impression that it was a put-down of her. Not "giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel.." (1Pt3:7) As though he was making sure she knew just how "weaker" she was... but the "honor" seemed to be distinctly lacking. And indeed, in the traditional Jewish male mind, one of their prayers includes the words of thankfulness for not having been "born a woman".

Notice that Jesus uses this same expression towards His mother. [Editor: please notice that I'm not suggesting Jesus had the same critical tone to His voice, of the above-mentioned former friend. But He uses the same expression.] What was His purpose in responding this way? First of all, He is demonstrating in His own life, what He is going to teach later. After all, how can a teacher teach something, if he doesn't live according to his own teachings? Jesus is now a 'man', not a boy. And if a person is to follow God, they cannot be tied to the family apron strings. It is often necessary to cut ties to "father and mother, and wife [this I learned the hard way!] and [family], yes, and his own life also.." (Lk14:26)

Now, I didn't get this from my family. But when I was married, the in-laws were of the "faaaamily values" mentality. If the desire was to live for the Lord, but God's standards were in conflict with those family 'values', the almost-immediate retort was of the nature, "You don't love us! You hate us! You are doing/saying these things to hurt us!" You see... the part of what Jesus said, that I didn't quote above was, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate..." (Lk14:26) You see... you might love them; but what they perceive, and what they broadcast to all their friends and relatives far-and-wide, is, "He HATES us!" But, if you are claiming to follow Christ, are you willing to have this [false] label attached to yourself?

So, after affirming His 'separation' from His mother, He also speaks truth. 2:4 He might have said in today's vernacular, "What business is it of ours, that they have run out of wine?" In other words, "Stop being such a worry-wart and busy-body."

But even moreso, and this may be the most important matter here; "My hour has not yet come." In other words, "Woman, you are not the manager of My ministry. I answer to My Father...whose things I must be about." Since we don't read of Joseph anymore at this point, many assume he likely died sometime prior to this. Thus, Jesus, being the first-born, was "the man" of the house. But Mary, being His mother, would have certainly likely been the "boss". Jesus is now stepping out into the ministry the

Father brought Him to, and so He is putting His foot down, letting her know that she is no longer His boss.

I've shared this a few years ago, but it fits here again; a related personal experience. A year, or so, after being married, I was still "seeking" the Lord's will for my life. I had the burden for ministry, but the doors had not yet opened. Looking back now, it is obvious I was not yet ready. It was not yet 'time'. My "hour [had] not yet come". But father-in-law, being a successful businessman, being savvy in worldly ways, knowing my desires for ministry, on one occasion during a lengthy visit, suggested that I should just sit down, plot out a course, and "go for it". While I spent years pushing on this door, and then that; I tried to explain to him the concept of "waiting on the Lord", which is what I was trying to do (and continued to do, even after that conversation). There are many with the label "christian" who try to do the Lord's work the world's way; seemingly not aware that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God.." (2Cor10:4) The world says, map out a strategy, and "go for it". God's Word says, "...those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.." (Is40:31) "Wait, I say, on Jehovah" (Ps27:14) At the "command of Jehovah" Israel would encamp, and at the "command of Jehovah" they would move. (Numch9) Each day, day-at-a-time. Even Jesus, God's Son, had His proper "hour" to obey His Father. This miracle Jesus would perform would become the "beginning of signs" (2:11) Woman, stop meddling in matters that are not your concern! This is not your ministry, you are not in charge.

On the aforementioned occasion when His 'family' comes to get Him, He not only snubs them, but looks around at those to whom He is ministering and says, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." (Mk3:34-35) You see, at this point, His family did not yet believe in Him. (Jn7:5) He could not maintain "family values" and serve His Father at the same time. He had to be separate from them. And yes, to their perspective... 'Rude'.

And then, we come to His 'temple-tantrum'. Not only has He 'spit' on family values, now He is on a rampage against religious tradition. What He did in chasing the merchants out with the whip was every bit as if today He were to walk into one of today's churches and dump all the book-sale books on the floor, drive a fork-lift into the foyer and ram the forks into the middle of the vending machines and toss them outside, get the backhoe bucket and rip out the sandwich/espresso concession stands, and chase everybody out. Perhaps He would also walk into the local "christian" bookstores and work them over with a baseball bat..??

The disciples remember the O.T. quote about the "zeal" of God's house. While God's Law gave provisions for people living great distances to take money, and buy what they needed for sacrifice (Deut14:26) once they got to Jerusalem, apparently that whole process had become corrupted. We won't try to discover here all the theories that have been put forth by the scholars. But apparently the merchants were making excessive profit, as

Jesus is also quoted as saying, "you have made it a den of thieves". (Mt21:13) That pretty much explains it! And notice the forceful nature of Jesus' response to it, as He cleans them out of there! Again...so RUDE!

Is there anything Believers should have "zeal" for? Some have zeal for "kjv-only". Others have zeal for their particular "church". Uh... that's Baptist, Lutheran, Catholic, Mormon, etc. Jesus' zeal was for the authenticity of what/whom the temple represented. Remember that "grace and truth" came through Jesus. (1:17) The Jews were into their traditions. As we will see as we progress further, Jesus was into Truth. The Jews worshipped their perceptions. Jesus proclaimed reality.

Some have complained at VW's stance on English translations of the Scriptures. While the kjv-onlyists complain that we pick at some of kjv's faults (because they think it has none), my 'zeal' is for "What did God - REALLY- SAY?" In working on both Green's LITV, and now the VW-Edition, some proofreaders continually express personal 'druthers' for some linguistic idiosyncrasies that they 'prefer'. But I stick with certain things that I know to be 'right', because that's what the texts say. And to the level of what I know, I stick with it, and will not budge... zealously!

I expect if Jesus were going from church-to-church today, He would go up and down the pews and rip out the perversions and toss them into the dumpster, put a little lighter fluid over them and strike a match. I would never have the 'nerve' to do such a thing within someone else's turf. But then, I am not the Son of God. I have not been called to do as some of the O.T. prophets were called; like killing hundreds of Baal's prophets after praying fire down on the water-drenched sacrifice. But I have been sent to "say to them, Thus says the Lord Jehovah". (Ezek2:4b) Thus, to the best of my ability, I also zealously guard the Scriptures in my little corner of the world. As the psalmist said, "My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your Words." (Ps119:139)

Is it right to be angry at things? As I work at the VW-Edition, and see what has been done in places in some translations, I become angry. I see what the scholars have presented in their documentation that God's Word says, and then I see what they did into English, and I become angry. How 'DARE' they change God's Word like that! Do they not realize that they are heaping judgment upon themselves? When they change God's Word, it is the same as to "take [His] name in vain. Do I not hate them, O Jehovah, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies." (Ps139:20-22) When they change what God said, they manifest their own hatred of God. In their hearts, God is not important enough to relay exactly, accurately and precisely -WHAT- God said.

Notice as some were hard-of-heart against Jesus, because He did not cow tow to their traditions, but manifested truth, it says, "And when He had looked around at them WITH ANGER, being grieved by the hardness of

their hearts, He said to the man, Stretch out your hand. And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other." (Mk3:5) You see, the "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mt12:8) was doing 'good' on the Sabbath; not observing their man-made traditions.

Yes, Believers can "be angry, but do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath." (Eph4:26)

One reason I would not drive a fork-lift into a foyer, or rip perversions out of pews, is because I have not been commissioned to do such things. God has not authorized me to do such. If I were to do such a thing... drive up to some "church" and walk in, wreaking havoc; the first thing that would likely happen is that I would get wrestled to the floor, hauled out and arrested by the police. The next thing that would happen would be interrogation. "Who gave you this authority to do this? What right do you have to do this? Just who do you think you are?"

In that day, in that culture, when some man started whirling about, creating such a spectacle, in Israel it was usually either a prophet or a king. When a good king replaced a bad one, one of their first acts was to go on a rampage to destroy idolatry. When prophets did it, such deeds were also usually accompanied by some sort of spectacular sign from Heaven. When Elijah killed the prophets of Baal, they had just seen fire come down from Heaven and consume the offering, wood, stones and the water by which it had all been pre-doused. So, the Jewish leaders ask, OK now, since You are doing this, where's Your sign from Heaven? (2:18) C'mon! Perform for us!

Jesus did as we will see repeatedly. He did not 'perform' to titillate their flesh. But gave them truth; only... couched in a riddle. Since He knew their hearts, He gave them truth, but purposely veiled from their understanding. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. (2:19) Wow! Reeceally?? It took 46 years to build the temple, and He's going to rebuild it in three days?

Truth: as to His purpose in coming. At the very beginning of His ministry, telling them His purpose, in the context of that 'present' feast of Passover (2:13) they were then celebrating. He was there to be the Passover Lamb of God, "without blemish and without spot". (1Pt1:19)

As an aside here: while His words are explained as being about His crucifixion and resurrection, and the "temple" being the "temple of His body" (vs21), one wonders but what He was also speaking of future fulfilled O.T. prophecy: "Come, and let us return to Jehovah. For He has torn, and He will heal us. He has stricken, and He will bind us up. After two days He will restore us to life. In the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His presence." (Hos6:1-2) Knowing that prophetically a "day" and "thousand years" are the same; "..with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2Pt3:8) And that,

"Behold! The Man whose name is THE BRANCH! And He shall spring up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of Jehovah." (Zech6:12) We are presently at the gates, entering into this 'third' prophetic day when the BRANCH (Christ) will be building the temple. Something to think about...

But notice... while Jesus does not 'perform-on-demand' for the religious leaders, He is, nonetheless, performing signs before the people. From reading the other gospels, we know that His ministry included the healing of many sick people, and raising the dead. As a result of the signs, it says, "...many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did." (2:23)

Well now, isn't this wonderful! Praise the Lord! How many people do you suppose these were who "made decisions for Christ"? See what an effective ministry Jesus is having! Praise God! He's got the right combination of things going on. If we read in other places (which we won't look up now), we would see that "multitudes" followed Him. And they are "believing" in Him. They are having "faith".

But notice: "But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew everyone, and had no need that anyone should bear witness of man, for He knew what was in man." (2:24-25)

Awe! Party-pooper!! Jesus, aren't You being rather judgmental, there? They are making "claims for Christ", and You are reacting as though You are calling them "unsaved". They are making claims to "faith", but You are saying they are "not Christians"?? Is that what we are hearing You say???

Indeed it is!! It is these same people who within three years will celebrate, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Mt21:9), and before that week is scarcely half over, will yell, "Crucify Him!!!" (Mt27)

Skepticism? "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone forth into the world." (1Jn4:1) "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know, yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you; unless indeed you are unacceptable?" (2Cor13:5)

There are many today who glibly say, "I'm a Christian, too" and before the sentence is even finished, in the same breath, continue on expounding their "doctrines of demons" (1Tm4:1) Them -CLAIMING- to be "Christian" is supposed to be reason enough for you to listen to their false doctrines.

To those who were in need, and knew they were in need, Jesus showed mercy, compassion and salvation. But to the self-righteous, impostors and pretenders, Jesus "did not commit Himself to them", and neither should we.

Born of the Spirit - John 3

"Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born from above." (vs5-7)

From the president of the United States, to Joe-citizen sitting in the church pews, there is this idea of what a "Christian" is. Well, actually, there are many variations of ideas, that gather to worship regularly. But most of them can be boiled down into Oprah's doctrine that, if you "just have faith", and "love in your heart", that that is all that is needed. On one hand, if you spend enough time around some 'holy man', that holiness will rub off, as some sort of "seed of faith" sprouts 'from within' and you then begin to "grow in your faith". On the other hand, what a person must do is look 'inward' and find that 'goodness' that is in there, and just bring it out and make it a part of your conscious thought. In both cases, essentially, a "christian" is a person who has striven at all these things and is now a "better person". Living a decent, moral life, possessed of "family values" and "love of God and country". This goodness was really there 'within' all along. It just needed to be found, nurtured, and helped to grow. Just "give your life to Jesus", and "make a commitment". And of course, it helps to have somebody with the right words, so that a person can "repeat after me".

Notice that Nicodemus, a "ruler of the Jews" (vs1) comes to Jesus. It doesn't tell us 'why' he was coming to Jesus. But he obviously had a perception that Jesus was a "great" Man... a "holy" Man. That, at the least, "God [was] with Him" (vs2b) Was he hoping, as many do, to receive some of that holiness "by association"? Many people making claims to being "Christian" include in their 'resume' (Uh.."testimony") that they went forward "at So-n-so's crusade". Or, they met some Somebody-or-other (who coincidentally has some radio program, or is an author of so-many books, or has some certain set of letters behind his name due to his education, and is famous), and just "being in that person's presence" they "felt God's love", and something-or-other the person said sprouted the "seeds of faith", and ever since then, their faith has been growing to wherever it is they think they are now. And of course, the more 'famous' the person they talk to, the more sure is their 'faith'.

So, Nicodemus comes, and Jesus replies, Oh, come right on in Dr. Nic. Here, have a seat, and I'll have the secretary get you a cup of coffee. You were noting all My great works and miracles. (vs2) I'm sure you saw our newest building off to the side of the driveway as you came into this vast complex; that's going to be where I teach people the 'power of prayer'. The building across the road from that is where we coordinate our prayer warfare strategies. God has been blessing us marvelously, and we have been touching so many 'millions' of lives. Well, here... let Me take you on

the grand tour of the place so you can see for yourself. Uh, Ms. Secretary, would you please hold all my calls; I'll be taking Dr. Nic out to lunch when we're finished with the tour; if you will have the chauffeur bring the limo around to the front to be ready for us. If it's an emergency, patch them through to my cel phone. Will you also please make a luncheon reservation for us at the Ritz.

???

But notice what Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God." (vs3) Bam!! (Forget what you think are "great works" and fame; let's get down to business) Yes, we know of Jesus' generic invitation to the multitudes, "Come unto Me.. I will give you rest" (11:28) But whenever Jesus speaks to individuals, He often places an obstacle before them; a conundrum. Something which looks 'different' than the question they thought they were asking. Ones wanting physical healing, He speaks of sins forgiven. (Mt9:2) The gentile woman, suggesting that "dogs" don't deserve anything. (Mt15:26) The prostitute, about water. (Jn4) And as Nicodemus is buttering Jesus up for what he expects to be a "glorious" conversation with a "great man", this great Man knocks him down. Whap! Essentially says, 'It is impossible to get into Heaven'. While the words say "he is not able"; the meaning implies that the matter is "an impossibility". It is NOT POSSIBLE...for a person to see the kingdom of God... unless...

Unless what? He repents -REAL HARD-? Makes a commitment? Goes forward at an 'altar call'? Makes promises to God to become a better person?

No! Unless he is "born from above". What an 'impossible' situation! Nicodemus asks, How does one be born 'again'? Get into mother's womb again, and be born "a second time"? (vs4) Who has ever heard of such a thing! Humans do not get born, grow up to maturity, and then climb back into the womb and be born again. That's just not the way things work.

So now, Jesus gets to the root of the subject. This is a matter that, for all the popularity of Jn3:16 as the 'most famous' Salvation verse, people do not understand this next part Jesus explains to Nicodemus. They talk about faith. Some even also talk about repentance. But they do not understand 'what' it is their faith is based upon. They do not understand 'regarding what' they are repenting. Without understanding this, no amount of faith will get one to Heaven. Without the core, it doesn't matter "how hard" one repents. Please understand, after years of VW writings which talk about repentance and faith, we are not now suddenly expunging those truths. Not Hardly! When people object to and reject those doctrines, it is partly because they do not understand 'this' one we are now addressing.

There are two natures: flesh and spirit. (vs6) When we are born as humans, we are born through the womb. That is the birth "of water". (vs5)

But "flesh and blood is not able to inherit the kingdom of God" (1Cor15:50) Again: the meaning of "not able" is: "it is not possible" for flesh and blood to see Heaven. It is an impossibility.

You see, the problem with all the various ways by which people think they have become Christians are all man-based. They are of flesh. They spend time in the company of what they presume to be a "Christian", so they think they now are, too. They make promises. They work hard. They even dabble in "spirituality" and have experiences. After all, Jesus says, "water and the -Spirit-". And the way most translations word it, they read, "Ye must be born -again-". (vs7) So, they go about to "start over"; have a "fresh start"; a "new lease on life"; and they say they are "born again".

But the Word actually says, "You must be born FROM ABOVE". Nicodemus was thinking "again"; but Jesus was saying "above". This birth Jesus is talking about involves a new nature. This birth comes from a different place. As humans, our physical life comes from our 'earthly' parents, and is of this world. But the birth Jesus is explaining comes 'from God'; to become "children of God". (1:12) It is of "the Spirit". (vs5) Thus, we understand when Paul says, "Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." (Rom8:9)

So, how, exactly, do we 'acquire' this Holy Spirit? Do we "pray" for Him to "fill" us? Is there something we "do" to acquire Him? Does it require worship, and if we worship enough, will He catch us away into ecstasy? Do we "speak in tongues"? How do we know when we "have" Him?

As we go into vs8, please understand that the word rendered in most translations "wind" is "pneuma". It is the root from which "pneumatic" comes, referring to things dealing with wind, air or air-driven tools, etc. However, this word is the word which, in Scripture, speaks of the Holy Spirit, or the spirit of man. "Unless one is born of water and Spirit [pneuma]" (vs5) "The Holy Spirit [pneuma] descended in bodily form.." (Lk3:22) "Father, Son and Holy Spirit [pneuma].." (Mt28:19) "..the Spirit [pneuma] of Truth.." (Jn14:17), etc.

After Jesus finishes explaining, Nicodemus asks, "How can these things be?" and Jesus chides, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (vs9-10) If Jesus is talking about a birth from above, of the Holy Spirit, why would He shift in mid-stream and start talking about the "wind blowing", like most translations say? This core doctrine has been hidden from the translators, because like Nicodemus, they didn't understand it, either... not being of God, themselves.

"The Spirit [pneuma] breathes where He wishes, and you hear His voice, but do not know where He comes from and where He goes. So is everyone who is born from the Spirit [pneuma]." (vs8)

(If Jesus' example is about "wind", then are we also born of "wind"? But wind does not blow "where it wishes", because, it blows in a God-ordained "circuit" (Ec1:6) The "way of the wind" is one of the "[works] of God who makes everything" (Ec11:5) Thus, if the verse closes by being "born from the Spirit"; then it is also the Spirit who breathes "where He wishes".)

A person who has been born "from above" will be able to understand this verse when the Lord knows it is the right time for them to understand. If you have not been born "from above", you will never understand it. Things of the Spirit are only understood by those who have the Holy Spirit. (1Cor2:11) If you are not of the Spirit, you will not understand this, and cannot hope to until and unless you receive this 'birth from above'. It is God who "reveals [it] to us" through the indwelling Holy Spirit. (1Cor2:10) What this is, is not the same as being "spirit-filled" that charismania promotes. This is not something where you feel all "tingly" in your emotions. You are not suddenly filled with euphoria. But this is the "still small voice". (1Kg19:12) Elijah had all those dramatic "manifestations" but it says, "Jehovah was not in..." those things. But where God spoke to him was through the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit speaks, you know Him. Often, satan tries to imitate and get one's attention, to confuse. But the Holy Spirit "bears witness with our spirit.." (Rom8:16) Other than that, there are no words to describe it, other than what Jesus spoke. The Believer hears His voice, and knows He is there... but how do you describe "where He comes and where He goes"? You cannot.

So... knowing this, perhaps we understand now why salvation is not something we do? When we are born into this world as babies, we had nothing to do with our birth. Our parents conceived and bore us. So, what makes us think that a 'birth' from Above is something that we can accomplish? And yet, that is precisely what christendom is based on. Most who call themselves "Christian" have only been born "again" through their own presumptions. Just like Nicodemus, whom Jesus chided, today's '[c]hristians' are not saved.

So, how does the birth from Above come about? Again, it is indescribable. But God gives it through the Holy Spirit.

When we continually speak of "pretend-[c]hristians", invariably some of these very pretenders will retort back, "How can you say I'm not a Christian?!" (even though the specific person wasn't pinpointed by name). When we refer to the "repeat-after-me" prayers by which people think they are now saved, I've had some retort with, "I prayed a repeat-after-me prayer, and I'm saved." (Not that one of those 'prayers' might not be involved for some, in some cases, as they truly do meet the Lord in abject horror of their sin, and plead for His Saving Mercy) But then, usually, a few more comments later reveal the 'spirit' of which they are. A pretender doesn't understand how a True Believer can presume to suggest that the pretender is not saved. It's like the toddler who was video-taped in secret, doing something naughty; and being surprised that mommy and daddy

know what they did. While the Holy Spirit "bears witness" within the Believer so he knows that he, himself, is a "child of God" (Rom8:16), the same Holy Spirit also bears witness to-or-against the spirits within others. If the spirit in that other person is the same Holy Spirit, the Lord "knows those who are His" (2Tm2:19), and the Believer then knows, because "we have the mind of Christ". (1Cor2:16)

The True Believer "knows something" the pretender hasn't a clue about. Jesus says, "We speak what We know and bear witness to what We have seen, and you do not receive Our testimony." (vs11) The True Believer "knows".

So now... notice what salvation is. The Son of Man had to be "lifted up" (vs14)... crucified. And then "everyone believing into Him [does] not perish but have eternal life". (vs15) Notice that, without Christ, mankind is perishing. That is man's condition. Man is "judged already" because he is without Christ. (vs18) Humanity doesn't have to do a single thing to perish. Just his mere existence WITHOUT CHRIST condemns him! We won't discuss here what we have in other places, how this condemnation came from Adam's sin (Rom5:12, 1Cor15:48); we are "conceived in sin" (Ps51:5); which is why unborn babies (who have never 'done' anything yet, right or wrong) are also condemned. (1Cor7:14) Why is there so much evil in the world? It is because mankind is without Christ. (vs19-20) Christ is Light. Mankind is in the darkness of sin, and they refuse to come to Christ, because they "loved darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil" (vs19)

But to those who "receive Him" (1:12), who "believe into Him" (3:15-16) they receive "Eternal Life". Notice again, a subtle word difference. Many translations speak of "Everlasting" Life. The difference between these two words is like the difference between being born "again" vs being born "from above". If we could somehow renew ourselves and call it being born "again", then, we could begin from where we are, and continue living forever, from-here-on-out, and our present life has now received an 'extension' so as to 'never end'. But such a life would then be 'our' life.

The word here is "aionios" = "without beginning, without end; a perpetuity of time". If we are creating our own salvation, were such a thing even possible, we might be able to live from-now-on forever. But if we are born 'from above', of the Holy Spirit, we are receiving a new life. We have a new nature. We are a "new creation" where old things are "passed away" and everything is now "new". (2Cor5:17) As God speaks to Israel of their restoration He speaks of the "new spirit" He will give them. (Ezek11:19) David asks, "create in me a clean heart" (Ps51:10) Notice that "create" is not the same as "fix". Oh, Lord, please "fix up my life". Or... Lord, here's my life, please help me fix it and make it better. No! Salvation involves a brand new heart. A new Holy Spirit. And thus, the Life we get is also a "new" one. If we only live "everlastingly" from-now-on...that is the same life we now have. But when we receive the Holy Spirit "from above", we are

also given His Life. What is the nature of God? "...having neither beginning of days nor end of life.." (Heb7:3) The "same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb13:8) "from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps90;2)

That is the 'eternal' life the Believer receives! God's life. Do you see why today's typical invitations are sooo flawed? They invite, "give your life to Jesus". What good will that do? We are "DEAD in trespasses and sins.." (Eph2:1) What the sinner needs is to receive Jesus' life. The invitation should be worded more on the order of, "Won't you ask God to give you His Life, the life that comes from His Son, Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit." As John says, "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." (1Jn5:11)

Now, notice that Nicodemus did not "repeat after Me". Jesus did not invite, "Won't you commit to Me now?" At the invitation, "Won't you come forward". Jesus begins by telling Nicodemus, essentially, YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE, where you are, the way you have in mind to do it! You think you're a great leader of Israel (his position before Israel was not unlike that of today's great/famous church/denomination leaders, teachers, seminary professors, and televangelists), and you don't even understand these basic things!! (vs10) But notice that Nicodemus apparently, after this conversation with Jesus, then did get saved. Later when his fellow-pharisees are condemning Jesus, he stands up for Him, and they taunt, "Are you also from Galilee?" (Jn7:50,52) And when Jesus has died on the cross, Nicodemus helps Joseph (of Arimathea) to bury the body.

Salvation does not come through christendom. "...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." (Tit3:5)

See Also Addendum: Q/A -As Moses Lifted up the Serpent

Spirit and Truth - John 4

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (vs23-24)

Back in the time when Jesus walked in Israel, to utter the word "Samaritan" was every bit as vitriolic a racial slur as for a racially bigoted person today to use the "N----" word about someone who is a Negro (which, by the way, is a legitimate word meaning "black"), of African ethnic descent. For a Jew to go into Samaria was many times worse, in the Jewish mentality, than for a bigoted white person to go into Harlem or any other place where the population is predominantly Black. Thus, when Jesus "needed to go through Samaria" (vs4), it was like Him having travelled all over, and then, specifically diverting His travels through a ghetto, where the upper crust "nice" people just didn't go, and stopping to rest where the gang members were used to hanging out.

And once there, along comes a 'working girl'. Of course, since the disciples had run off to buy food, Jesus was alone. Just Jesus and this woman, alone, together by the water well. I wonder if anybody was spying on them through their windows, and gossiping and whispering? Notice that when the disciples get back from shopping, it says, "they marveled that He talked with a woman" (vs27) but didn't have the courage to ask after Him as to "what is He doing?" But then, Jesus was also known, and condemned, for eating with other "tax collectors and sinners". (Mt9:11) So, He is obviously not too worried about His own 'reputation'.

Because... He is talking with the woman about "spirit and truth". The people can gossip all they want to, because shortly, they will understand what has just been happening.

We all know about the discussion about drawing water, and Jesus promising "a fountain of water springing up into eternal life". (vs14) Later in the book Jesus will be inviting people to come to Him and "drink". (ch7) So, we won't cover that right now.

However, the woman obviously isn't understanding Jesus' words about the "fountain of water" symbolizing "eternal life". Her mindset is stuck on the water pot she has come to fill, and how to drop the bucket into the well to draw up water to fill her pot; so that she doesn't have to continue hearing the whispers of everybody when they see her coming to the well in the heat of the day, so she doesn't have to endure the taunts of the other non-harlot women. After all... how many of 'their' husbands has she been with?

So, Jesus gets right to the point. Remember about Jesus, that He is that "two-edged sword" that pierces into the "soul and spirit" and "is a discerner

of the thoughts and intents of the heart". (Heb4:12) So Jesus hits her at the core of her soul. The reason she is at the well at high-noon, in the unbearable heat when everybody else is in the shade of their homes, is because of her life of sin. She has to "sneak around" in broad daylight, to avoid other people. Even though she lives the life she does, she does so in shame.

Let's take a little diversion here a minute. Let's speak of this "shame" that 'working-girls' experience. Hollywood and TV glorify the pimp and street girl "professions". However, it is -NOT- a life of glory. These girls are -NOT- "happy" doing what they do. Many of them do it because they think it's the only way to make ends meet. Years ago I got to know one of them at a regular (electronics assembly) job. At first, I learned a lot about her "profession" from overhearing her conversations with the girl next to her, whose husband/boyfriend was a pimp. And then, she finally, after she knew I had been hearing everything they'd been talking about for a couple of weeks (I had been quietly minding my own business, working), turned to me to get my 'reaction' to it all. My whole decorum would have told her that I was of a different world from hers. From that point on, we had many conversations. And you know, in spite of the bravado they emoted, when you actually take the time to speak with them, and get into their souls, they are TERRIBLY UNHAPPY people! And, how can they not be! They continually give themselves to be abused in all sorts of ways. And if we consider the matter of the "life is in the blood", as they receive the soul/[nephesh] of all these people; how can they help -but- to have all sorts of personality disorders, emotional problems; and to try to ease their pain, as in the case with this one I knew, drug addictions. She had a nice shiny Camaro. But she was unhappy... and in-and-out of jail for her drug problems.

This is the kind of person Jesus is addressing, and He says, "Go call your husband." (vs16)

"I have no husband."

Exactly! Because you've been with many men, and the one you're spending time with now isn't really your husband, either. (vs17-18)

Whoa! You're a prophet!! As she, in a few minutes, is going to be proclaiming to all her male acquaintances, "see a Man who told me everything that I ever did. Is this not the Christ?" In other words, He knows what I've been doing; He knows what we've been doing; if He knew about me, He knows all about you guys, too! (vs28-29)

But... we're getting ahead of ourselves, here.

Call your husband. I don't have a husband. You spoke truth when you said you don't have a husband. Oooo! This is uncomfortable. Let's change the subject. Get into a more philosophical/religious discussion. After all, if this

Man is a prophet, let's talk about "religion". After all, that's what her life consisted of. Learn what the man she is with is interested in, and converse with him about 'his' interests. But in this case, if we can talk about "religion", it gets us away from the truth of my own sin. And if nothing else, I can 'feel' just a little bit "holy" while I am having such a discussion, and can forget about my own depravity. Yes, this Man knows my 'tainted' past, but if I can show Him I know a little about "religion", too... See? I'm not really so bad, after all..!

This is what today's "[c]hristianity" is proclaiming. Yes, you may have a 'tainted' past. Not "utterly dreadfully sinful nature you were born in". But God accepts you "just as you are". Yes, you have these sins, but come right on in to the church... it doesn't matter. After all, Jesus grovelled around in the dirt and ate with sinners, too.

Well, not quite! This was Israel's condemnation. "Behold, you trust in lying words that are of no benefit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know; and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen [it], says Jehovah." (Jer7:8-11)

No, Jesus did not "grovel" with the sinners. Yes, He ate with them. But He did not partake of their sin with them. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost". (Lk19:10) If you are to rescue somebody out of the muck and mire, you need to get close enough, and reach down into the mire to pull them out.

So, now, as Jesus is about to rescue this woman, He leaves off with the chit chat. If one is being rescued from a mud pit, there is a bit of extreme physical activity to either get a rope/harness around the person and pull (likely with some discomfort involved), or for the rescuer to be dropped down at the end of a rope, who goes about to grab the victim, and exert force to pull them out.

Woman, you haven't the slightest clue as to what you are talking about! (vs21-22) You're talking about all this "religious" stuff, but you are wrong. Her argument (look it up and read it) was something on the order of what people argue today. Look at all these different faiths... don't they 'all' equally get to Heaven? (vs20) And Jesus says, essentially, there is but ONE WAY to get there. "...salvation is of the Jews". (vs22) God is the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel". (1Ki18:36) Jesus was born a "Jew" to provide redemption for the world; a "light to the nations/gentiles". (Is49:6) No one comes to the Father, except through Christ. (Jn14:6) There is no other means of salvation, than Jesus Christ. (Acts4:12)

And now, Jesus gets down to the nitty gritty. Paul in Romans proclaims that a True Believer is one who is so "of the heart". (Rom2:28-29)

True worship of God does not come about from religion, and all the 'paths' people take. But true worship of the Most High is "in spirit and truth". (vs23-24)

The woman's personal life has been exposed. Her conceptions of "religion" have been dashed. But this Man is saying things differently than anything else she's ever heard. Everybody else merely 'speculates' about things, giving their own perceptions and ideas. But what is "truth"? That's the question Pilate asked, "What is truth?" (Jn18:38) Well, this 'Man' has shown that He knows the -truth- about my innermost dark secrets. And He speaks about worship with authority, as though He truly -knows- what He is talking about. But there is one thing left to this consideration of worship. The Messiah. "When He comes, He will make known all things to us" (vs25)

"I AM! the one speaking to you" (vs26)

THAT'S IT!!! Her own preconception of what the Messiah 'would be' when He 'would come' was her answer. She knew that people philosophized 'about' God. But she also knew that the True Messiah, would be the very 'embodiment' of Truth. (Jn14:6) That He would -know- the truth. Now, this man she's been talking to says, "I AM". Unlike the pharisees who would pick up stones to try to kill Jesus when He made similar statements to them (Jn8:58-59), this woman considers how He has just revealed her innermost darkest secrets, and what is the basis of her proclaiming Him to be the Christ? "..He told me everything that I ever did..." (vs29)

"The secret things belong to Jehovah our God..." (De29:29) It is "God in heaven who reveals secrets" (Dan2:28) And it was this very fact that got Nebuchadnezzar's attention, "Your God truly is a God of gods and a Lord of kings, and a Revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret." (Dan2:47)

This Man, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, knew things about this woman that nobody else did. And on the basis of that knowledge, this same Man says, that worship comes from the same place. This is what He meant when He said the water He offers becomes "in" him a fountain of water.

Worship of God is not ritual. It is the -HEART-. If a person is full of sin, and performs rituals, that is not 'true' worship, because this God of gods knows the true heart. Worship of God comes from the spirit of man. That is a place where ritual has no connection. That is a place where the confrontation is just God and man, face-to-face. When Adam had sinned, he ran to hide, because He could not face God. But when a person is in Christ, having been known down to the core being of our "soul and spirit" (Heb4:12), having had our life opened completely up, laid bare, a naked

before Him (vs13); it is ONLY THEN that we can "COME BOLDLY to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need." (vs16)

When we speak of Repentance, I often speak to people when they query various things about salvation, about "meeting Jesus". Have you met Him? Have you heard Him? And some question "how does one hear His voice?" And they then become worried that we might be speaking of visions and charismatic deceptions..."hearing voices", as in a trance.

No! This woman of Samaria did not have a vision. Jesus met her, and opened up her heart to herself. -THIS- is what I mean whenever I communicate with people at this level. If you have met Jesus, He has opened up your heart to yourself. You have consequently seen yourself as He sees you. That's "truth". You are no longer hiding behind ritual and repeat-after-me prayers. Those "prayers" have nothing to do with genuine Salvation. Such a prayer is not the result of having truly 'met' Jesus and having had your heart laid bare and naked, with all its filthy shame exposed. When such a thing happens, there is no repeat-after-me prayer that is adequate! Take heed to this! Take it to heart! I've been there; I know whereof I speak. This is truth.

When you meet Jesus in this fashion, and repent before Him, you receive His Holy Spirit. Now, this 'meeting' may not necessarily involve words. There are things for which words are simply not adequate. That's why the Holy Spirit is 'already' at work during the repentance, interceding on our behalf "with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom8:26b) When this happens, you "know" it. There is no question as to your salvation. It is at a level deeper than mere human interaction can presume to understand. It is the Holy Spirit who "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God". (Rom8:16)

This is why charisma is so popular. These people have never actually met the Lord, and refuse to humble themselves before Almighty God in order to meet Him. But they want some experience either "on this mountain" or "in Jerusalem" (vs20) to be able to say they know God. You know, there is quite an industry of people who get baptized in the Jordan River or Sea of Galilee, just so they can say they did it 'there'. They come away "feeling" extra specially blessed for the experience; thinking that having done it closer to the actual place where Jesus walked, makes their salvation more sure, or more real.

True Salvation is -NONE- of all those things! Hear this clearly! Salvation is -NOT- the going forward, praying a repeat-after-me prayer, filling out some website form to 'register' your 'commitment' or 'decision', or any of the other dozens of things people get conned into, or manufacture to do for themselves. If you have not been met 'by' the Lord, as this woman of Samaria was, you are not saved. Notice that Jesus "needed" to 'go'

through Samaria. (vs4) He knew that she was the field "already white for harvest". (vs35) He "needed" to go meet her, so she could be saved.

We are never saved by our own "decision" to do so. There is no person who has decided "I want to follow Jesus...how can I do so?" Nb! "All we like sheep" are going our own way. (Is53:6) But it is -JESUS- Who comes along to "seek and to save" the lost. (Lk19:10) He has "foreknown" us from the "foundation of the world" (Rom8:29, Eph1:4), and so "when the fulness of time" comes for each of us, as He has been drawing us, God sends His Son (Gal4:4, Jn6:44) to meet with us, just as Jesus did with the woman of Samaria. And then, all we can do is respond to His call in repentance and contrition, and receive Jesus as the "Water of Life".

When that happens, then we can truly worship God. "...for the Father seeks such to worship Him." (vs23)

The Prophet's Honor - John 4

"...Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when He came into Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast.." (4:44-45)

Does this sound like a familiar statement by Jesus? We're not going to try to figure out how much time had elapsed. But it was Galilee, earlier, just after Jesus' temptation as He is beginning His ministry that He goes into His home-town of Nazareth and reads from Isaiah in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and reveals to the audience that He, Himself, Jesus, is the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2. And as His hearers are in wonderment, recounting amongst themselves how He is only, merely the carpenter's son, essentially rejecting His claim because He is a nobody with "questionable" birth, He says, "No prophet is accepted in his own country." (Lk4:24) And as He chides them for seeking a sign, recounting O.T. examples of Israel's unbelief and how God rejected the unbelievers, they become riled up, haul Him out to the edge of town, and seek to throw Him over the edge of the cliff. (vs28-30) They understood clearly that "God does not hear sinners" (Jn9:31), and He did not "visit" unbelievers, but rather, sent His prophets to the poor and foreigners (widow of Zaraheth & Naaman the Syrian). However they (sniffingly) considered themselves to be the "elect"; but Jesus is categorizing them along with the rejected unbelievers of the O.T.!

That's the same kind of anger that unbelievers manifest in these days. Many seek after signs and wonders; and if a servant of God comes along labeling them as "unsaved", they become wrathfully angry with the messenger; because they consider themselves to be "born-again christians" belonging to such-n-such church, and having been spirit-filled, and know they are because they have the signs-and-wonders to 'prove' it. "And don't condemn something if you haven't experienced it!" (they say)

Well, now, Jesus has been away awhile; preaching here and there, and performing many miracles. So now, He comes back and it says that they "received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem" (vs45) He is now "famous".

What does it take to be seen as a prophet? When somebody grows up from childhood, the older ones who see such a person, in their heart-of-hearts look "down-upon" the person. After all, I changed his diapers when he was little. I babysat him. When he was running along, fell, and skinned up his knees, I was there to pick him up and put a bandaid on the booboo. And when a child grows to manhood, the adults will look at such a one with admiration and proclaim, "My, just look at the young man, how he has grown!" But within the consciousness of the adults is a bit of the thought, "He is a product of -our- community. WE RAISED HIM to be what he is. He is an extension of US!" So, if such a person has God's call upon their life,

and begins to proclaim sin as sin, and to proclaim, "Thus says the Lord", stepping on -our- toes ... "Well, just who do you think you are! Have you forgotten who raised you? Have you forgotten who taught you X, Y & Z? You've become an adult, and now you suddenly think you're BETTER THAN US! All hoity toity!"

And indeed, the rejection is worst from "family". When VW began years ago, it was family members who immediately unsubscribed right and left, some, even, with retortful comments of their own spiritual superiority. As of right now, there is only one (1) relative who yet remains on the mailing list. But again, see how Jesus 'lived' what He preached? "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Mt10:34), as He continues on to describe the 'family' conflicts when one STEPS OUT to follow Him.

Well, notice how Paul says to Timothy, "Let no one despise your youth." (1Tm4:12) When God called Jeremiah from his youth, He says, "Do not say, I am a youth; for you shall go to all to whom I shall send you" (Jer1:7) But, do we understand how it is tough for a young man, growing up, once attaining to adulthood, to have any respect from his elders.

Bush, Jr. didn't really have full respect from many quarters, following in his father's footsteps, until the national crisis came about, and he had opportunity to show his true colors. In a similar fashion, Jesus did not have the respect of His own countrymen until He had been away, making "a name for Himself".

But notice that, although they are receiving Him, He knows it is only because they have seen His miracles. He knew their true heart. When He had performed the "beginning of signs" (water-to-wine -2:11), and then went to Jerusalem, performing more signs, and people were "believing" in Him, He "did not commit Himself to them, because He...knew what was in man" (2:24-25) Is this the same incident as recorded in Mt13:54-58, where when He returns "home", and due to their "unbelief", He does not do much by way of ministry? They "receive" the home-town-boy back home, who has gained 'fame' in the world, but they are not believing with true faith. They are not yet accepting the fact of His Deity; let alone that He is a "prophet".(Lk24:19) Even His own immediate family, having been born of Mary, the one who "pondered all [those] things in her heart" (Lk2:19), after having had a personal angelic visit, did not believe in Him. (Jn7:5)

The nobleman's son is sick (vs46) and comes to Jesus, begging Him to heal his son. Jesus' response, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe" (vs48) Isn't this the case today? Certain ones with the label "christian" simply WILL NOT trust in Christ through Faith, but what they HAVE TO HAVE their "experiences" that they can see and touch. Remember earlier in the chapter we learned that God seeks the worship "in spirit and in truth". (4:24) Of the -heart-.

Notice the man, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" (vs49) I dare say that Jesus' retort was not only to the man, but also to the people observing the incident. Jesus gets their attention by retorting 'obnoxiously'.

But then He sets things up for both the man, and also the people. The man must respond to Jesus in faith. He had wanted Jesus to -physically- 'come' to heal his son. Jesus says, "Go your way; your son lives" (vs50) So now the man must "go" in faith, without Jesus tagging along with him in a large entourage. After all, he's "nobility"! Somewhat like when Abram "went out, not understanding where he was going" (Heb11:8) Like Naaman who was told to "go" and dip in the Jordan, where he had expected some sort of hokus-pokus, waving of the hand over the leprosy. (2Kg5:11) The man takes the first step towards faith in obedience, but what do you suppose that he might have been grumbling within himself (like Naaman did) that Jesus was rudely 'dismissing' him out-of-hand, and not paying him the attention (house-call) he thought he (and his position) deserved? But then, when he gets home and sees the son having been healed at the very moment Jesus had spoken the word, he "believes" (vs53)

So, what is the purpose of a "sign"? Is it for Believers? Thinking even logically... if a person is a True Believer, what 'need' is there for a sign? When God showed all His signs in Egypt, Pharaoh had retorted, "Who is Jehovah? ..nor will I let Israel go" (Ex5:2) And as Israel went into idolatry, the people came to Aaron with "...as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt.." (Ex32:1) They were not yet understanding that it was not Moses who was leading them, but God. They were in "unbelief". (Heb3:19)

Today, a segment of that which calls itself "church" has a doctrine that they come to God in "faith". But their faith is not enough. They must also have physical manifestations of signs and wonders to validate their faith. But you see, the very definition of "faith" is "...the certainty of things hoped for, the evidence of things NOT SEEN." (Heb11:1) "...Jesus Christ. Whom having NOT SEEN you love." (1Pt1:7-8) Such a seeking of signs and wonders is actually a "fruit" (Mt7:16,20) of UNBELIEF! Am I pulling this out of 'thin air'? Notice Paul's words, "Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers" (1Cor14:22) You see, if you are of the bunch that seeks after signs and manifestations, by that very lusting, you are -proving- that you are an unbeliever. Did you get that? The very fact that you are seeking those signs/manifestations announces (even PROCLAIMS) to all creation that you are NOT a Christian. You are of the same spirit of Galilee that did "not honor" (4:44) Jesus Christ.

Notice that it says this healing was "...the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee" (4:54) The first sign was in "Cana of Galilee". (2:11) It was Nazareth, -Galilee- (Lk4) where their unbelief went so far as to try to throw Him over the cliff.

Yes, Jesus performed many "signs" to Israel. They, too, were unbelievers. "But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe into Him" (Jn12:37) But it is His own 'home' country where specific signs are labeled "signs". If anybody should have known Him, it should have been His own "home" land.

"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My fear? says Jehovah of Hosts" (Mal1:6)

You see, what Israel had done to the Father, they were 'now' doing to the Son. And eventually they would do as Jesus illustrated, "Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, They will respect (honor) my son. But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance." (Mt21:37-38)

The Legal Case - John 5

"It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed... He who made me well said to me, Take up your bed and walk." (vs10-11) "...the Son is not able to do anything from Himself, but what He sees the Father do.." (vs19) "...the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son.." (vs22) "...I have a greater testimony than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish; the very works that I do; bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent me." (vs36) "I do not receive honor from men" (vs41) "...there is one who accuses you; Moses, in whom you have hoped...if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (vs47)

Of the four Gospels, John is most unique. The other three simply record Jesus' life, teachings, miracles, crucifixion, etc. But none of them see Jesus arguing His case as the Son of God the way John does. John is to the N.T., what Isaiah is to the O.T. If you read Isaiah you will see how God presents His "case" for His existence to Israel, much as an attorney might present -evidence- before a court.

The topic of this passage is introduced by the Jewish leaders, "it is NOT LAWFUL for you to carry your bed." (vs10) Who had established this law? Moses? Remember when the Law was first given, somebody on the Sabbath went out and collected kindling to cook their meal. What was the verdict? "...stone him with stones outside the camp". (Num15:32-36) But where did Moses come up with the Law? "...Jehovah said to Moses, The man must surely be put to death.." (vs35) Who gave the Law initially, which Moses enforced? "I am Jehovah your God...Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy." (Ex20:2,8)

How did God go about establishing His own authority, after which, He gave the Law? He had just delivered puny little Israel, totally defenseless and unarmed, out from under the bondage of the world's most powerful nation. He had dried up the Red Sea so they walked across on dry ground. When they were thirsty, He split open the rock and brought out water. When they were hungry, He gave them their daily portion of food. And as He gave the Law, He came down upon Mt. Sinai in a thick cloud with thunders, lightning and earthquakes. As Moses was to go up into the mountain to meet with God, "...so formidable was the sight that Moses [who had already been in communion with God prior to this], said, I am in terror and trembling." (Heb12:21) Was there any doubt as to His awesome power? Was there any doubt as to His 'authority' to give the Law? In proving His might overwhelmingly, who would dare to resist Him without fearing the consequences? If He said, "Keep the Sabbath", His omnipotence established it.

This lame man has been lying by the pool of Bethesda for 38 years! 38 years was well-nigh-onto maxing out a typical life-expectancy of those

days. Especially, if all he did was to "lie" there, he was certainly not getting proper exercise to keep healthy, otherwise. But also, 38 years, being his whole life-time, he certainly knows-the-ropes around there. He has seen that angel come and stir up the waters so many times that he cannot count them. He has seen impossibly sick people get into the waters and be healed. He likely knows about doctors and healers plying their magical arts. In 38 years, he knows the difference between spiritist quackery, and Jehovah's genuine article. And he knows his own sorry hopeless state.

So, along comes this 'man' who says to him, "Rise up, take up your bed and walk." (vs8) In essence, what is this 'man' telling him to do? Break the Sabbath. Yes, I know it's the Sabbath, but why don't you break it now, and pick up your bed. Well, if anybody else were to come to this man and say such a thing, he might have laughed back in their face. He cannot even manage to muster up the ability to make it down to the pool in time to get healed. (vs7) And I'm supposed to just go on a lark, just for the sake of breaking the Sabbath? YaRight! I'll pick up my bed...when pigs fly! If I were even -ABLE- to pick up my bed!

Do you see what this "healing" was? Yes, Jesus -healed- this man. But why didn't He come around on Friday? or...Sunday? The man could have been healed just as well on any -other- number of days of the week. Jesus tells the man, "Pick up your bed"; and along with the command, gives the man healing which he knows within his body. Remember, he has seen 38 years of others being healed. This time, however, an angel does not stir up the waters, but a 'man' tells him to pick up his bed; but his healing is just as authentic as when the Heavenly messenger (angel) usually comes by on a regular basis.

"..it is NOT LAWFUL for you to carry your bed..." Well, I don't know about that, but, "He who made me well said to me, Take up your bed and walk." (vs11)

What authority had given the Law? Something way beyond human power. What authority had just now 'broken' that same Law? Something that 38 years of other means and hopelessness had not been able to heal.

When we studied "Sabbath" in the series, "Ten Commandments" (and some of its subsequent Q/As), we used an example of a composer of music. If a pianist was performing Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" and after three movements began playing a "fourth", the audience would gasp in horror. The Moonlight Sonata only has three movements. A fourth movement would not be -authentic- "Beethoven". But if Beethoven, himself, were to appear on the scene, would he not have authority to make some revisions to his own work? But he would need to prove to the music world that he was, in fact, Beethoven. How would he go about to prove it?

Well, this is what Jesus is doing. God gave the Law from Sinai. At the same time God promised to send His "Angel" to lead Israel. (Ex23:23) And

we know from Paul's writing, that the One who was with Israel in the wilderness "was Christ". (1Cor10:4)

So, how is Jesus to prove to Israel that He is, indeed, The Christ? He must show 'evidence' of being from the same Source that gave the Law originally. He must provide "testimony" before this informal "court-of-law". After all, the legal experts are accusing Him of -breaking- the "Law".

Would you please state your name for the record. "My Father works until now, and I work." (vs17) Later He will be drilled more intensely, and He will say, "...before Abraham came to be, I AM." (8:58) And when on official trial for His life, they will put Him under oath, "Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God." To which He answers, "You said it." (Mt26:63-64)

But for right now, 'Look at My works'. The Father has done certain things; and I do likewise. I cannot do anything of My own ability. It comes from the Father. (vs19) Isn't this amazing! Here Jesus is, God's very Son, saying that what He does is not of His own authority. So, why is it that today's 'spirit-filled' pretend-christians think that -they- have all this power?! Even God's Son did not usurp for Himself, what today's charlatans purport to do!

But the Father has given certain authority to the Son: to raise the dead (vs21), to have judgment (vs22), honor (vs23), giving of resurrection (vs25), to give eternal life (vs24). But notice again, that this authority does not originate with the Son, but is given to Him by the Father...why? "...because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." (vs30)

So notice...we are still in 'court'. "If I bear witness concerning Myself, My testimony is not true." (vs31) But there is 'other' testimony of Jesus' authenticity. John proclaimed, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29) The Holy Spirit witnessed by coming down upon Him. And John "bore witness" to this event. (1:33-34) The Father testified, "You are My Son". (Ps2:7, Mk1:11, Heb1:5)

In addition, Jesus' "works..bear witness" of Himself. (vs36) And in this, we get back to the healing on the Sabbath. God created the Sabbath. God commanded to keep the Sabbath sanctified. Now, Jesus comes along and says, essentially, 'break' the Sabbath. By what authority? Here... be healed IN ORDER THAT you -can- break it! Who else, ever in the history of mankind ever did such miracles? Only God or God's messengers.

It is like when Peter and John healed the lame man, and subsequently preached Christ to the crowd, and are subsequently standing before many of these same rulers, it says, "And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say against it." (Acts4:14) Legal proof. Exhibit entered into evidence.

You wish to condemn Me for saying "that God [is My] Father, making [Myself] equal with God"? (vs18) Here is My evidence which I present before 'your honors'. The works which God Almighty did when He gave the Law... I am doing the same works. And Moses (whose writings you have studied for your bar exams), gives precedence for this case. "...for he wrote about Me." (vs46)

I rest My case.

The Bread of Life - John 6

"Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near... Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat? ...So when they were filled, He said, Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost... My Father gives you the true bread out of Heaven... I am the Bread of Life... All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out... Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes into Me has eternal life. This is the Bread which comes down out of Heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the Living Bread which came down out of Heaven... not as your fathers ate the manna and died." These are the "..Words of eternal life."

Israel coming out of Egypt, following Moses "..all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank out of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1Cor10:3-4)

It is rather fascinating that this particular chapter of John should follow in sequence, as these monthly articles are progressing, in their order, at 'this' particular time. That the other regular weekly studies related to Israel, Jesus and the Church should have been happening 'just' as we now come to John ch6. Again, a testament to God's sovereignty and His timing, to put things together as He does, coordinating and "scheduling" all these things to follow as they do, in their sequence. This is not something that -I- have scheduled. There have been many different 'schedules' I have mapped out on paper to keep tabs of which things should be mailed on what days. But over the past several weeks, the eraser has been used a lot, and things re-penciled in. And as I sit down to write this article now, about a week before it's time to post and mail it, I am in awe as to how it follows the recent commentaries and Q/A's regarding Jesus Christ and Israel.

No matter how many different ways we present God's Truth, there are many who -just- "don't get it". They -refuse- to understand. And even in this chapter, by the time Jesus is finished telling the people what we've been saying the past couple of weeks, that Jesus Christ is the "root", He is the "vine", NOT Israel or Moses, "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." (vs66) [Ed: And for you who trust in 'numerology', God's sovereignty has even catered to your unbelief with how the numbers of that verse came to be assigned... 6:66! "..and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world." (1Jn4:3)]

Notice Jesus' response to their unbelief, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?" (vs61-62) One of the unbelievers who has complained about recent mailings made a point of emphasizing, "..Jesus (a Jew)..". Thus, the Church is grafted in to Israel, because it is grafted into Jesus (a Jew). But notice that

Jesus is making a point of His credentials. In coming chapters He will be confronting them even more directly as to His Deity. Yes, He was born as "flesh and blood" (Heb2:14) "under the Law" as a Jew. (Gal4:4) But "He was before" from Heaven. He -is- God. The Word "in the beginning...was God". (Jn1:1)

We repeatedly note Paul's words about Eternal Life being a matter of the "heart", not -physical- 'circumcision'. One who is a Believing Jew is thus "of the heart". (Rom2:28-29) This is what Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, "God is Spirit" and those who worship must do so "in spirit and truth" (Jn4:24) Here He says, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh does not profit; not a thing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." (vs63)

And just as I know that many of you reading this are "not getting it" because you are unbelievers, Jesus said, "But there are some of you who do not believe.." (vs64)

So now, if what has been said thus far has angered you, and you are now going to stop reading, and/or, you are dashing off your "unsubscribe" notices, you can go off and "die in your sin" (Jn8:21) if you so-choose. But let's now get down to the precious Truths of this chapter for you who are sticking around, and for you who are Believers:

This chapter is long, and most everybody is already familiar with, and everybody else preaches/teaches how Jesus multiplied the bread to feed the thousands, and about Jesus walking on water; so let's look at some other highlights.

One of the -prime- characteristics that differentiates God, the Most High, from other gods, is His "...declaring the end from the beginning.." (Is46:10) If you read through Isaiah, you will see quite a lengthy courtroom-like argument regarding His infinite knowledge of things past, present and future... -challenging- other so-called deities to this same ability. Nostradamus and the likes of Toronto Vineyard and charismania can, AT BEST, only boast 70%. God is 100%.

It says, Jesus "Himself -knew- what He was about to do." (vs6) He was not predicting something, -hoping- it would happen. He "knew". I sometimes see bits and pieces of this TV program called, "Crossing Over". The fellow behaves like charismania's false prophets, telling people things about dead loved ones, "I'm seeing a B, a Bob? a Bill? a Robert? a Benjamin?" He finally narrows it down; and then impresses people with other things. One day he was carrying on about (I forget now.. for the sake of this discussion, let's say the name was "Albert") an "Al? Albert? Alberto?" And the longer he carried on, the more the people were -not- recognizing the name. But the more he carried on, the more "sure" he was that he was right. As the program was closing, and they showed later up-dates as the people went to investigate what he had been telling them, they made a

point of 'discovering' that there had been a room-full of "red balloons" on a particular occasion, as the psychic had told them. But 'mysteriously' made no further mention of "Albert". I kept yelling at the TV, "What about AaaaLBERT???" He was "so sure"...but was -wrong-! That's because he is not of The Most High.

Jesus "Himself knew.." First of all, Jesus -Himself- knowing, affirms our understanding of Jesus' "Deity". That which the Jewish O.T. prophet had discussed, that God "-knows-"... Jesus was 'exhibiting' the same 'ability'. He "knew" and he -did- it. He fed all those people from a limited number of loaves and fish. There was no question as to the fact that those people were going to get fed HEARTILY that day! All the people "were filled". (vs12a) If you will, "stuffed".

And then, notice what Jesus says. Not only 'what' He says, but 'how' He says it. "Gather up the fragments...so that nothing is lost." (vs12b)

Through this "sign" miracle, Jesus is making a proclamation. He is about to teach a primary major Truth about Himself. Just as in the previous chapter He heals a man, giving him the -ability- to "break the Sabbath", in order to prove His own Lordship over the very Sabbath He, Himself, had instituted, thus having the authority to "break" it; here He gives a demonstration of Mosaic proportions, to illustrate His point.

Two points: 1) Jesus is the Bread of Life and gives Eternal Life. And 2) When He gives Life, "nothing is lost".

How does He approach #1? "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (vs28) This is it... "that you believe into Him whom He sent." (vs29)

Incredibly, the people -immediately- demonstrate their unbelief. Jesus has -just- fed them, and they ask, "What sign do You show then, that we may see and believe You? What do You work?" (vs30) And, unbelievably, WHAT illustration do they give? The "manna" of the wilderness. (vs31) They are not "getting it"! Jesus has just shown them a "sign"! He has fed them on a scale as had happened in the wilderness with the Manna.

Just as those today who look at Jesus' "Jewishness" and -physical- "Israel", but miss Jesus' "Deity", and the fact that Believers are "in Christ" (2Cor5:17), not "the [c]hurch" or "Israel"; they also were not understanding that "life" is the "bread of God who comes down from Heaven". (vs33)

Still having "manna" and "filled" stomachs on their minds, "Lord, give us this bread always." (vs34) Just like the woman of Samaria was hoping for Jesus' "water" so that she wouldn't have to continually go to that well (Jn4:15), these people are hearing Jesus' words about His Deity, but only seeing physical "bread".

"I am the Bread of Life" (vs35) What "works" must we do to be saved? "Believe" in the One God sent. That's -Me- (Jesus). "I am" that One. I'm telling you who I am. But instead of being like the abhorrent "dog" from Samaria (ch4), a woman not even historically grafted into the vine, who put her trust in Jesus; of these, the "natural branches" (Rom11), Jesus says, "..you also have seen Me and do not believe." (vs36)

Just like many today, they were looking at the "Root", the "Vine" (ch15), and refused to believe. They were too filled with "our place" (Jn11:48). Their -own- Jewishness, and the fact that they were not "dogs" of Gentiles. They were trusting in "Israel" instead of "Jesus Christ". And they condemned Jesus because He was not 'plugged in' -to- Israel and the way it had become perverted. Why, He didn't even keep -their- (concept of) "sabbath". (Jn9:16) Just like today's unbelievers, they had it all backwards!

But notice what Jesus says of those who do believe into Him. "All that the Father gives to Me.." (vs37) He also says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.." (vs44) Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost". (Lk19:10) But, just as He came to do the -Father's- "will" (vs38), His disciples, also, were/are "given" to Him by the Father. (17:9,11)

Jesus gives Eternal Life. (vs40) But that is not all. And this is important... notice how He repeats three times, "..I will raise him up at the last day.." (vs40,44,54) The Resurrection. If all a person gets, is, "Saved"...and then he dies... of what good is that? Then, Paul's argument is correct, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" (1Cor15:32) ..which is today's attitudes in the wake of 9-11, and their realization of their own mortality... "live it up, do those things you've always wanted to do, because you never know when you might die." And without Christ, that is about -all- they have! But that is the passage where Paul gives the 'hope' of the Gospel: Jesus died and -rose- again. (1Cor15:1-4) Jesus promises to "raise" the Believer. And as the people stopped following Him, after all these WONDERFUL words and promises, later the rulers would also be "greatly disturbed" with the apostles for preaching "..in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." (Ac4:2)

And so, first of all, Jesus' grace proclaims, "..the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." (vs37b) Hear this carefully, folks. If you, in That Day, find yourself being condemned to the Lake of Fire, do not 'blame' God or Jesus. It was never God's "purpose that any should perish". (2Pt3:9) God does not, "..delight with pleasure in the death of the wicked.." (Eze18:23) If a person is of a "heart" to come to Jesus, He says "BY NO MEANS" will such a person be denied.

And such as those who come to Christ in repentance and faith, notice Jesus even sees to the detail "so that nothing is lost". (vs12b) Jesus did nothing at "random" or by "chance". His words and deeds were all with

specific purposes. As He prays to the Father, He proclaims, "Those whom You gave Me I have guarded; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition.." (Jn17:12)

Yes, indeed; a person believing in Jesus Christ is "eternally secure". "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? "..For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom8:38-39) This is Jesus' work, it is His promise; and His resurrection guarantees it!

Sadly, the people of Jesus' day, when He came the first time, were no different from people today, as we approach the time when He comes again. Be sure of this... that when He comes, performing the marvelous sign of the Resurrection and Rapture of Church-age saints, people will not believe. Mark this well!

See what happened. Jesus made all this bread. He fed the people so they were stuffed. They had had an 'experience'. And without using their "minds" and 'understanding' (1Cor14:15), and being of "sound minds" (2Tm1:7, Tit1:8), they all jumped on a bandwagon to "..take Him by force to make Him king.." (vs15)

But when He explained to them Who He really was, the Bread of Life, come down from Heaven from God, they "..went back and walked with Him no more." (vs66) Incredible!! They proved that they did not -really- 'want' God.

Hear this well! People who go to the Lake of Fire "WANT TO" go there. It is not for lack of "faith" that people will perish. Many proclaim "sola fide" (faith only). But satan and his minions "believe and shudder" (Jac2:19) These Jews who ate the bread, and then walked away, later yelled out, "Crucify Him!" and also, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Mt27:25) These same people who wanted to make Him king, a bit later would welcome Him into Jerusalem with words like, "Hozanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord", and four short days later, "Crucify Him!" ... "We have no king but Caesar!"

You see... the 'trouble' with Jesus was, that He did not coddle their lusts. As long as He filled their stomachs and healed their sick, they liked Him. But when He proved His Deity, they wanted none-of-it!

Today's "Israel" (since all these people want to be grafted in -to- Israel!) is the same. As those were when Jesus walked the earth, so these are today. They want "experiences" and to "feel good" and do nothing but mantracize "worship". But "repentance from dead works"? (Heb6:1), or living lives "befitting repentance"? (Ac26:20) Oh, no! We can't have any of that! You say my -heart- should be what my mouth proclaims? "..confess

with your mouth...and believe in your heart.." (Rom10:9) Well, you know... Romans was written by Paul. And Paul is really not all that 'reliable'. Give us Acts, with "tongues" and "power". Something with pizzazz. Something where we can 'rock' like Brittany Spears, and indulge the flesh. We can convince ourselves that we are OK "just as we are". After all, everybody else in "the [c]hurch" is preaching this, too.

Well...out of all those thousands, only "the twelve" remained. The rest all "went back" and rejected Him. Jesus says to the "few" (Mt7:14), "Do you also want to go away?" You see, Jesus did the opposite of what today's salesmanship does. Oh please come back! I didn't mean to offend you all! I know I was pretty harsh! I'll try to soften My words a bit more. Mmmm?

So, you "few"... What's keeping you here? Are you sure you're not missing the boat, by not following the crowds? After all, how can they "all" be wrong? You mean, just -you- are 'right'...and all-those-others are wrong?

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life. And we have believed and understood that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (vs68-69)

Where is He From? - John 7

"Therefore many from the crowd..said, Truly this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Christ does not come out of Galilee. Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" And the pharisees answer Nicodemus, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee." (Jn7:40-42,52)

We shouldn't judge these people too harshly, after all, Nathanael, the one whom Jesus labeled as being "without deceit", retorted, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (1:46-47)

Of course, it's been 30 years since the Roman census, and the fantastical account of the shepherds who were visited by angels just outside Bethlehem. It's been 28 years since the evil king went on a rampage and killed all those little babies. It's been 30 years since Simeon and Anna in the temple prophesied all those wonderful things about that little Baby (Lk2:25,36), and they are now long-since dead. Considering the typical life expectancy of those days, those shepherds who worshipped Him in the stable are likely long-dead by now, too. But even if they are still alive, why would they make a connection? After all, it's been 30 years. That's a long time. Many things happen. People and the political landscape of the nation come and go. Those events were in Bethlehem. -This- "Jesus" is from Nazareth. After all, there's been many different charlatans leading little cults here and there. Amongst them was also "Judas of -Galilee-" who deceived people right around the time Jesus was born. (Ac5:37) How do we know this isn't just another in a string of crack-pots?

After all, His own brothers don't believe in Him. If anybody was to know Him, one would have thought it would be 'faaaamly'. C'mon Jesus, what are You sitting around the house for? Get out there, take out TV ads, put up billboards, take out full-page articles in the newspapers; go on Oprah, Charlie Rose, and be interviewed by Tom Brokaw... Let people know who You are! Don't you realize... if you want to get something 'big' going, you've gotta invest a little in promotional campaigns? What you need is a PR 'manager'. Don't hide your talents under a bushel. Let them shine so people can see just how great you are. They won't know if you don't dazzle them with some pizzazz. (vs3-4)

"My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready." (vs6)

"MY time...YOUR time"... What do You mean? What are You talking about? Are You making a 'difference' between us?

Exactly! The difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and the world.

"The world cannot hate you..." (vs7a)

There is a 'love' amongst those of companionship and fellowship. Those being 'from' the same place, and having the same outlooks, have a camaraderie. If a 'city slicker' walks into a cafe in a 'hick' town, the locals will tend to stare at the stranger. In some other surroundings, the more rowdy types of the locals might even pick a fight with the stranger. Why? Because he's "different" from them. Of course, city dwellers are more "suave" if a country 'hick' comes around them, and snub their noses the other direction. These different ones might even 'tolerate' each other and their differences.

But just let one start condemning the other, and what happens? Everything ranging from politics to actual physical confrontation and harrassment. "You think you're -better- than us! Well, we'll show you!"

"..but it hates Me because I bear witness of it that its works are evil."
(vs7b)

OK... a quick little 'application' here, before we continue. Christians are exhorted, "...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph5:11) Hmmm! Is this the reason Jesus promised, "...in the world you have affliction.." (Jn16:33)? Indeed!

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (Jn15:18-19) Remember, "...our citizenship is in Heaven.." (Php3:20), NOT the world.

So, why is it that we see so many so-called "christians" being so popular with the world? Why is it that so many so-called "christians" are living as though they 'belonged' in the world? If the world respects and honors some famous so-called "christian" leader/preacher or other celebrity... could it be that the so-called "christian" in question isn't -really- a "[C]hristian"? (Rom9:6, 2:28-29)

Well... Jesus' brothers have gone ahead to the Feast, and then later Jesus also goes "...not openly, but as it were in secret." (vs10) And then...

"..My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me..." (vs16)

Whoa there, Jesus! Weren't You listening? You've gotta promote 'yourself'! You can't go sneaking around, and then be self-demeaning in front of people. If You want to be their leader, You've gotta portray an image of self-confidence and self-esteem. After all, how are You going to lift their self-esteem, if You aren't showing any of Your own?

Well, here is the difference between a true servant of God and a servant of the world...

"If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak out of Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and unrighteousness is not in Him." (vs17-18) You see, Jesus came to do "the will of Him who sent Me" (4:34, 6:38,40) And so, anyone who makes claims to "name the name of Christ" (2Tm2:19), will be characterized by this same 'will'; the will of God. Anyone who would try to promote 'self' is not a true "servant" of -the- "Master". (15:20)

Notice: this is Jesus, the Son of God, taking this attitude. He didn't go "clinging" after the Father's grandeur, but took on the form of a "servant". (Php2:6-7) So, where do today's charlatans get off, claiming big things for themselves?

So now, Jesus addresses their primary complaint about Him. He was continually healing on the Sabbath. He was demonstrating His Deity by doing works that no mere 'man' could do. (vs21-23) But, He was not keeping 'their' concept of Sabbath; and this, to them, was reason enough why He could not possibly be "from God". (Jn9:16)

But Jesus is 'setting up' the dialogue by which He will be proclaiming (next chapter) that He is, indeed, Deity. But He starts out by reasoning with them about their own practices. They condemn Him for doing good in healing the sick on Sabbath, but they do something of even less consequence on the Sabbath... circumcision. A male baby was to be circumcised on the "eighth day" after birth. (Gen17:12, Lev12:3) If that "eighth day" happened to fall on the Sabbath, they performed the circumcision...on the Sabbath.

Well, Jesus was proclaiming to them about the "beams" in their own eyes, such that they could not see the mere "twigs" in the eyes of those they condemned. (Mt7:3-) He chides them, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (vs24)

In the past we have used the example of a Believing wife, married to an unbelieving husband. Some from the 'First Church of the Pharisees' see her walking into a night club on the arm of her husband. Of course, they've never met the husband, because only 'she' ever goes to their church. But she is always dressed so "worldly", with nice fashionable clothes, jewelry and makeup. And so, when somebody spies her walking into the nightclub, a corporate 'gasp' ascends. "Do you know what I saw -her- doing the other night???" Well, that was her 'husband', and he wanted her to accompany him. After all, we know from Paul's writings that the wife is to be submissive and obedient to her husband. And if you don't trust Paul, Peter says that "without a word" the husband might be won, by the submission of their wives. (1Pt3:1-6) And see how Peter's example is of Sarah, who on one occasion almost could have lost her marital purity, because of being obedient to her husband. (Gen ch12)

Yes, you see that lady entering the night club? That's -your- concept of the "appearance of evil" (1Th5:22 KJV) It doesn't fit with your twisted theology of 'keeping up appearances'. But when you realize that Paul is really saying, "abstain from every -FORM/KIND- of evil" (1Th5:22), then perhaps Jesus' words can be better understood, and one will then "judge righteous judgment". The woman is being "obedient" to her husband, and is "not leaving him". (1Cor7:13)

The peoples' concept of just 'who' Jesus is, is clouded by their inability to "judge righteous judgment". But as they hear Him speak, they are convinced that He 'surely must be' the great prophet or the Messiah. (vs26)

BUT... He doesn't come from the right place. "...we know where this Man is from.." (vs27) They, of course, don't realize that He was born in Bethlehem. All they see, is where He is from 'now'.

So, since they are struggling with Jesus' 'roots', He begins to explain to them where He is -really- from. They think the Messiah should be coming from Bethlehem; but they see someone from Galilee. (vs42) But Jesus explains how He is from "...Him who sent Me.." (vs33) He speaks of "...where I am you are not able to come.." (vs34)

They still don't get it. All they can see is this world. If He is "going" - somewhere-, all they can think of is, to the "Dispersion among the Greeks" (vs35), because He is a "Jew", and a Jew would 'obviously' not go to just anyone. The only other Jews they knew of were those of the dispersion.

And yet, His speaking is so powerful, that the officers sent to arrest him, presumably tough and unflappable, come back to the rulers WITHOUT Jesus: "No man ever spoke like this Man!" (vs46)

Jesus is not following the advice of His 'siblings'; but is, nevertheless, reaching hearts. "Perhaps the rulers truly know that this is truly the Christ?" (vs26) "And many out of the crowd believed into Him, and said, When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?" (vs31) In other words, what this Man is doing, are not they the words and deeds of the Messiah?

Oh, but... He comes from Galilee..!

Nicodemus... (remember him? ch3) tries to reason, "Does our Law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he does?" (vs51) Everybody is trying to figure out "where" Jesus is "from", but Nicodemus, like many who are believing in Jesus, exhorts them to see the fruit of Jesus. Who is He? What is He teaching? What is He doing. He is doing and teaching things that no one could do, "unless God is with him". (3:2) This Man is from God. He is from Heaven.

"Are you also..." a Christian?? "Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee." (vs52)

Well, even if the question -was- about Bethlehem or Galilee, and not whether He was God-in-the-flesh, Himself; there was a prophecy they all apparently missed...

"For afterwards He will glorify the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them the light has shined." (Is9:1-2)

I AM - John 8

"I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the Light of Life." (vs12) "I am from above. You are from this world; I am not from this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins." (vs23-24) "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM.." (vs28) "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM." (vs58)

"And the high priest answered and said to Him, I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God! Jesus said to him, You said it. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mt26:63-64)

In the previous chapter everybody is trying to figure out 'where' Jesus comes from; Bethlehem or Galilee? Jesus cries out to them, "...you know where I am from; and I have not come from Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me." (7:28-29)

In this chapter, now, they ask, "-Who- are You?" (vs25)

While we know that a person must believe that the Son of God came in the flesh (1Jn4:2-3), that He "partook of flesh and blood" (Heb2:14); the problem the people of Jesus' day struggled with was His Deity. They -knew- He was flesh and blood; that was not an issue. They even assumed He was born out of illegitimacy, out of "fornication". (vs41) But, while they are trying to figure out His legitimacy to be the Messiah, born properly in Bethlehem, Jesus is forcing them to face the fact that He is not only the seed of David, their Messiah; but more than that, God Himself.

When the perversions today mistranslate, they have Joseph being Jesus' "father". (Lk2:33) Jesus is showing them how He comes from an entirely different place. Forget about Bethlehem or Galilee; He comes from "the Father who sent [Him]". (vs16)

Where is this? "I am from above. You are from this world; I am not from this world." (vs23) If Christians would understand this one point, the face of the Church would be so much different. Paul speaks of our "citizenship" being in Heaven. (Php3:20) So many congregations have their minds set on buildings, campaigns, and various worldly ways; getting people to come to, and join them, at 'their' particular -building-. Their minds are not in the heavenlies. When they bring the world into the church, they are not functioning "from above".

What is necessary to be saved? Well, first of all one must believe that Jesus is the "I AM". Notice that Jesus says this name three times in this

chapter. Forget your translation that says, "I am he". Notice that the word "he" is italicized. That means, it's not in the Greek texts. It was added by the editors of those translations. You see, not only does one need to believe that Jesus is: the Christ, Savior, Redeemer, Son of God... one must believe that Jesus is -very- GOD HIMSELF. "In the beginning was the Word...and the Word -was- God" (Jn1:1) His name "I AM" is His "memorial" name (Ex3:14-15).

So, Jesus says, first of all: "...unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins." (vs24) This was the very answer to their question which condemned Jesus to crucifixion, "...are you the Christ, the Son of God?" You see, that 'trial' came after all these prior discussions. They already knew what Jesus was claiming for Himself. But they rejected Him. They did not believe Him.

Furthermore He says, When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM.." (vs28) In other words, when they would crucify Him, then they would know. What sorts of things happened at His crucifixion?

The sun was darkened for three hours. (Mt27:45) There was a huge earthquake. (Mt27:51) And, of highest symbolism to these Jews, the veil in the temple, separating between the Holy of Holies, was rent in two. The Holy of Holies represented the very presence of God. Jesus' death made a direct access to the Father, without the need for human priests. (Heb ch9, 4:16) While the Jewish leaders hardened their hearts, even against all those events, the Roman commander and the rough-n-tough soldiers on the scene "feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God!" (Mt27:54)

Well... We are not bastards (in context, 'like You are'), we have one Father; God. Well "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come from Myself, but He sent Me." (vs41-42)

And then, Jesus gets down and 'nasty' with them: Why is it that they cannot understand Jesus? Note this well. "Because you are not able to hear My Word." (vs43) Remember, Jesus is "the Word". (1:1) It is the "Word/Jesus" who knows the heart of man down to the division of his spirit and soul. (Heb4:12) Salvation comes through the hearing of the "Word". (Rom10:17) "So shall My Word be...it shall accomplish what I please.." (Is55:11) And how does salvation come? "...there is no other name (than Jesus, the Word) under Heaven given among men by which we need to be saved." (Ac4:12) You see, Jesus the 'man' was one thing. But they were not receiving His Word.

Do we begin to understand why there is such a proliferation of English translations of Scripture out there...most of them being perversions? Somebody recently queried me by e-mail: with "all the translations that are out there" why go to all the trouble of producing the VW-Editon? What

makes the VW-Edition so different from all of them, to make it worth the effort? Why not just pick one of those versions? Well, they 'all' have -many- errors. Just picking one item at random, since we are here speaking of Jesus' Deity...-ALL- (every one) of them are careless and not consistent in how they render the various names of God. Even the KJV, which was for its day likely the most 'faithful' of the lot, renders God's name "Jah/Yah" (Ps68:4), for instance, only once; but this name -PROLIFERATES- the O.T. In all these translations it is mostly rendered as "Lord", same as those that truly should be "Lord", as well as "Jehovah". And where these translations have not been faithful to God's Word; where they, thus, -lie-; they are "of the devil as father". (vs44)

This is what Jesus labels the Jewish spiritual leaders. Transported to today: the pastors, denominational leaders, seminary professors, conference speakers; and those 'scholars' who produce the perversions. They do not "hear" His Word, because they are not saved. They are of satan. The translations are full of falsehood because the devil has "no truth in him". Whatever he can interject through his unsaved scholars, "he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, for he is a liar and the father of it." (vs44)

But Jesus is speaking Truth, and they "do not believe [Him]". (vs45) They do not hear Him because they "are not of God". (vs47) Same for Believers proclaiming to unbelievers or 'pretend' [c]hristians, John says, "We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (1Jn4:6)

So now, Jesus cranks the discussion up one more notch. "..If anyone keeps My Word he shall certainly never ever see death." (vs51)

Oy, oy, oy...now we -know- He's a crack-pot! "Abraham died, and the prophets...are You greater than our father Abraham, who died?" Just who do You think you are? (vs53) Just like the woman of Samaria, looking for actual -physical- 'water', these can only see the 'body'.

Notice Jesus' reply. Even though being God Himself, He is not "clinging" (Php2:6) to His equality with Deity. He says, essentially, I am not glorifying Myself. By Myself I am nothing. "It is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say that He is your God." (vs54) Always, revealing to mankind the "Father". Showing to man the "image of His essence". (Heb1:3) But even while revealing Himself, keeping the Father at all times "everything in all things". (1Cor15:28)

And notice the little digs: "..of whom you say that He is your God" (vs54) If I were to say I don't know Him I would be "a liar like you" (vs55) Not very 'nice' is He!

Just like today's "church", claiming to worship God, if Jesus were to pop in during a worship service, how would He speak to the leaders up on the

platform? You claim to worship God, and serve Jesus Christ... but you are all liars! You are serving the devil. You don't know God. And they would retort, Just who do You think you are, coming in here like this and insulting us! You mean to say that You 'alone' are "right", and ALL OF US are "wrong"? And He would speak of how He, truly, DOES KNOW the Father... and they would persecute Him out of their church. And they would wax philosophical and 'argue' -cleverly- with Him from all their "great men" and "church fathers".

OK, so... "he shall never ever taste of death"? Jesus makes a further claim now: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." (vs56) Remember when the three men came to Abraham, and the two angels go on ahead to Sodom to rescue Lot and family, and Jesus stays behind to speak with Abraham. (Gen18)

Jesus is letting them know -just- Who He is. He is not 'from' Bethlehem or Galilee. He is not from a 'place', but He transcends all time. The very distinguishing characteristic about Yahweh/Jehovah is that He "[declares] the end from the beginning" (Is46:10). He is "from everlasting to everlasting". (Ps90:2) He is the very LORD of the universe:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM." (vs58)

Notice several things about this statement: First of all, "Truly, truly". This is in contrast to their "lies" and their "father of lies". The devil is a liar. But when Jesus speaks, He speaks Truth, because that is His very essence. He says, "I am...the truth." (Jn14:6)

Since we spoke of the KJV above, let's now address the NKJV, being the version presently most recommended in printed form, but among the reasons why a work like the VW-Edition is necessary. In this place the NKJV says, "Most assuredly". You see how cleverly the language is manipulated to water down God's Word. The text says, literally, "Amen, amen, I say to you..." A word of absolute trust, faith, agreement, truth. And the word is 'doubled' for emphasis.

Then... "I say to you.." Why did Jesus not merely say, "Truly, before Abraham came to be...etc."? Again, 'who' is Jesus? 'What' is He? He is the "Word". "...every Word of God is pure.." (Pr30:5) He spoke of the fulfillment of every "jot and tittle". (Mt5:18) Everything Jesus said has significance.

Jesus is "Truth". He is also the "Word". It was not enough that the truth He was about to proclaim merely -was- Truth; but it was also necessary that this Truth be -SAID-...and was labeled as -being- SAID.

"..before Abraham came to be.." Here we are understanding a claim, again, to that which is only God's domain. Someone who would fulfill the role of.. "Your eyes saw my embryo, and in Your book I was enrolled, and

all my days had been preordained, when as yet there was nothing."
(Ps139:16)

"I AM"

What is the claim of this 'man' who, according to gossip and rumor, was born of illegitimacy? The embodiment of Truth, proclaiming the Word, being in charge of the Book of Life who enrolls souls in this Book before they are ever conceived (in other words, of similar power to the One who "breathed..the breath of life" to form a "living soul"-Gen2:7), calls Himself by the very name given through Moses who led Israel out of Egypt: Yahweh/Jehovah... "I AM that I AM". (Ex3:14) Jesus is claiming for Himself the same attributes of Jehovah who led Israel out of Egypt; He is claiming to be one and the same with Jehovah. He is claiming, essentially, to have been there! Indeed, Paul confirms this with, "..and that Rock was Christ.." (1Cor10:4)

They recognize this claim, and just as their forefathers had rejected God and made the golden calf, so too these reject Him again and pick up stones to attempt to kill Him, right there, on-the-spot. He 'escapes', being "hidden... going through the midst of them". (vs59) However, when they eventually have Him on trial, that which convicts Him for crucifixion is His testimony that He is, indeed, the Son of God. They crucify Him -because- He is 'God'. The 'charge' posted over Him on the cross was, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (Jn19:19) They, being of the devil as their father, do the bidding of their 'god'. It was prophesied to the serpent, "you shall bruise His heel" (Gen3:15) As He bore the "reproaches" of the "many peoples", satan's servants "..reproached the 'heel' of Your Anointed". (Ps89:50-51) Those Jewish leaders likely thought that 'they' had succeeded in condemning this 'impostor', but they (claiming to be followers of God, Abraham and Moses) were servants of satan, fulfilling satan's desire to do away with God's Son... were only allowed to get Him in His (prophetic) "heel"....because He rose again from the dead.

However, in spite of the fact that the religious leaders are rejecting Jesus, "as He spoke these words, many did believe into Him." (vs30)

Remember how the disciples proclaimed, "You have the -words- of eternal life" (6:68) Ah yes, that old gospel song that I haven't heard anybody sing in years, "Sing them over again to me, Wonderful words of life. Christ the blessed One gives to all Wonderful words of Life..."

And notice how Jesus exhorts them. He does not send them all back to their apostate churches where they are members. He says, "If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples." (vs31) That's how we live the Christian life, by "keeping His commandments". We prove our 'love' for Him by keeping His commandments. (1Jn5:3) Our 'love' for other Believers is manifest by our keeping His commandments. (1Jn5:2) We can expect to receive our requests of him, only if we are keeping His commandments.

(1Jn3:22) And if we do not keep His commandments, we are proven to be "liars", and the Truth is not in such. (1Jn2:4)

Do you see certain people 'praying' and 'asking God' for all sorts of things, but they are disobedient to His Word? They are liars. They are not His disciples. One reason a faithful translation of Scripture is needed, is because "All Scripture is breathed by God..." and is the source of how a Believer is to "be complete" and "thoroughly equipped for every good work". (2Tm3:16-17) If we wish to be "faithful" (1Co4:2) disciples of Christ, we need to know 'what' He commands. One person complained/taunted against the VW-Edison project with words similar to, "It's not so important what the Bible -says-, but that we -obey- it." Well, I ask: How can we obey something we don't know what it says? ...if it is Truth or not? If a sign is supposed to say, "Do not touch the hot stove", but the sign-maker omitted the word "not", and you 'obey' the sign... what is going to happen?

Oh, to be sure, the 'scholars' will taunt, giving all sorts of so-called 'wisdom' from the various "great men" and "church fathers" and historical tradition. But the psalmist noted, "You, through Your Commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are always with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your Testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the elders, because I keep Your Precepts." (Ps119:98-100)

Indeed: "Then Jesus said to those Jews who had believed in Him, If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. (vs31-32)

I AM: the Light of the World - John 9

"Jesus answered, Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. It is necessary for Me to work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one is able to work. As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." (Jn9:3-5)

The previous chapter closes with Jesus proclaiming to the Jews, "...before Abraham came to be, I AM." (vs58) While such a statement is complete, in and of itself, since Jesus came from the Father who is the eternally existing "Jehovah" (Ex3:14); typically an existence is demonstrated by characteristics and attributes. One knows a river exists by the flowing of the water. A car is known by its shape and ability to move down the road. A musician is known by the aesthetics of their performance. A chef by the aroma and taste of the cuisine.

Jesus, the One who made all things (Jn1:3), is certainly known by creation: "The heavens declare the glory of the Mighty God; and the firmament proclaims His handiwork. Day unto day pours forth speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor words where their voice is not heard." (Ps19:1-3) The "invisible God" (Col1:15) is known by "the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.." (Rom1:20) and manifested Himself to humanity through the Son. (Heb1:2-3)

But even people are known as -individuals- by certain qualities and characteristics. People are known for their honesty, deviousness, graciousness, perversity, caring, intellect, physical strength, skill, etc. While a person can recognize another person by sight or appearance and many often "fall in love - at first sight", the true makeup of a person is what is in their soul, and those things which come "out of the heart". (Mt15:19), and their works which manifest that which is within. (Jacob2:14-26)

Jesus has already proclaimed Himself to be the "Bread of Life" after He fed the people (Jn6:35,48), and the "living waters". (Jn4:14, 7:38) These living waters, however, is even a redirection, and indication of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Father is manifest to humanity through the Son; as the Son is presently with the Father, the Son is manifest to us through the Holy Spirit. We'll see this in greater depth when we get to chapter 16.

Thus, it is one thing for Jesus to proclaim, "I AM". But all that the people see is someone who looks to be, merely, 'human'. One of the things prophesied about the coming of Messiah was, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened..." (Is35:5) But also notice -Who- is able to open blind eyes: "-Jehovah- opens the eyes of the blind.." (Ps146:8) And notice the argument of the one whose eyes were opened, "Since the world began it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born

blind." (vs32) Who else, besides God Himself, could do such a work? Jesus has done a work only God can do. Thus: Jesus is God.

What causes a person to be born blind? I expect an eye specialist could expound on numerous reasons: deformities due to lack of certain critical eye parts, like; eyeball, optical nerves, retina within the eyeball, eyelids formed in such a way that they could not open; perhaps even a total lack of an eye socket? This was not a person who at one time had seen, but due to disease, had 'lost' his sight. He was -born- without sight. Same as if a person had been born without an arm, or some other such deformity. The parts were never there to function to begin with, and only merely needing "fixing". He was born not ever knowing what "light" was.

Why?

Not long ago in visiting with some people, the topic of "generational curses" came up. The sins of the parents, and how those sins and their accompanying cover-up lies affect the children. Indeed, God promised a generational curse for various things, foremost of which was idolatry. (Ex20:5) Of course, we know the curses upon children of mothers who drink or do drugs during pregnancy. Or, some other abuse is inflicted upon the child when they are at a helpless age. I was just reading recently of the 24% of the births of those living today around the Chernobyl nuclear disaster area, being born deformed.

Certainly, these kinds of births are not the fault of the baby! The baby could not help it that it was conceived by its parents, under the circumstances that it was. And many people also REALLY balk at the concept that babies are -born- "sinners". (Ps51:5) So much do some reject this truth, that one person recently even suggested that, while a baby may be "conceived" in sin (as the Psalmist says), they are "-born- innocent". My thought: does not birth follow conception? So, what sort of "salvation" happens within the womb of the sinful mother, to give birth to a "righteous" baby? It doesn't. Nevertheless, babies are born into this world, in all sorts of circumstances; some at a great -physical- disadvantage.

The people ask Jesus, "..who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (vs2) I suspect they are covering all possibilities by including "this man" in their question. How could he -have- sinned prior to being born? Perhaps the parents were upstanding citizens; 'good' people? So, the age-old question, "Why?" Why do bad things happen to (seemingly) 'good' people?

"..that the works of God should be revealed in him.." (vs3)

In this instance it was not any sin. Remember how God is the "Potter" and we are the clay? (Rom ch9) This man was a 'lump' the Potter formed with a "marr" in it; which the Potter then took and "..made it again into another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.."(Jer18:4)

What better way to illustrate Jesus being the "Light of the World", than with a physical demonstration of giving sight (light) to one born blind! This miracle would stick in people's minds. As they contemplate Jesus' preaching, they will be gauging it against this miracle. If His preaching is 'from demons', then how does one explain the fact that He could open the blind eyes? (10:21) Something which only God can do? And it will also be part of the 'package', in their minds, when He raises Lazarus from the dead. (11:37)

However, is "light" merely a sight with -physical- eyes? With the -physical- He demonstrates His authority over the -spiritual-. The world, whose "deeds are evil", are spoken of as being in "darkness". (3:19) The enacting of sin is also called, "works of darkness". (Rom13:12, Eph5:11) And so, as Jesus forgives the woman caught "in the very act" of sin, He exhorts her, "go and sin no more"; and authenticates His authority in not condemning her and forgiving her with: "I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the Light of Life." (8:4,11-12)

When a person is born from above (Jn3:3), we then "walk in the light as He is in the light". (1Jn1:7) When a Believer is "in Christ" (2Cor5:17) they are in Christ's Light. Their deeds are no longer evil and in darkness, hiding away from God's 'reproving' light; but they "[come] to the Light, that [their] deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been worked in God." (Jn3:20-21)

This comes about because Salvation comes through Jesus Christ. (Jn14:6, Acts4:12) Of Jesus' coming it had been prophesied: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them the light has shined." (Is9:2)

But mere words are not enough. Anybody can speak words. How are words proved? Through actions.

Now, the one who received sight, received a double blessing. Not only did he receive -physical- sight, he also received -spiritual- sight.

"Do you believe into the Son of God? Who is He, Lord, that I may believe into Him? You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you. Lord, I believe! And he worshiped Him." (vs35-38)

And Jesus sums up the whole lesson of this miraculous sign:

"For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." (vs39) And as the self-righteous pharisees taunt Him, He replies (and today's pharisees should take this to heart), "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, We see. Therefore your sin remains." (vs40-41)

The invitation is given to Israel prophetically, and is also given to you who are yet in rebellion: "O house of Jacob (lit: supplanter), come and let us walk in the light of Jehovah." (Is2:5)

See Also Addendum: Illusions of Light

I AM: the Door - John 10

"Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep...I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture...I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep...I am the Good Shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own...My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never ever perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one has the power to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are One."

What is a door? A gate? Typical houses are constructed of solid walls. If a person wishes to get in, they must enter through one of the specially-designed -openings-. The openings are called "doors". In the imagery Jesus uses of the shepherd and sheep, sheep are also corralled within fences. The openings to corrals are "gates". If a person walks towards a house, not aiming for the door, they are going to go "bonk!" as they hit the solid wall. A sheep running into the fencing will catch its snout and yank its head around. If you want to get into the house/corral, the prescribed path is through the door/gate.

Jesus says, "I KNOW My sheep.." (vs14) From what I have seen of sheep ranching in this country, typically, sheep are herded and 'driven' from one place to another. Sheep are tagged and become data in the rancher's database. But in other countries, and in previous times, I understand that shepherds would 'lead' their sheep, by their playing of pipes and/or their voice. Jesus says, "My sheep hear My voice...and they follow Me" (vs27) While we, as sheep, may sometimes be confused as to who is 'sheep' and who is not, the "solid foundation of God stands firm, having this seal: the Lord -KNOWS- those who are His.." (2Tim2:19)

Notice also that the Shepherd is "known -by- [His] own". (vs14) Sheep who belong to the Shepherd "follow" the Shepherd. (vs27) Sheep do not follow strangers...because they do not know the stranger's voice. (vs5) A stranger can call, but the sheep will ignore them; they do "not hear them." (vs8)

I've used this illustration before, but it fits here again. When I was a lad, my family lived a couple years on the farm with my uncle, who also had some sheep. Every morning my uncle would go out to the sheep, carrying a bucket with oats in it, and would call out to them, "Come sheeeeeeep! Come sheeeeeeep!" And they would begin bleating, and come towards him en-mass, and crowd around him. Of course, they wanted the grain. But they also recognized his voice. If he needed to corral them, he could call to them. But if my dad or I were 'helping' him, the only way we could get them to go the desired direction was to get behind them and 'shoo' them. On a couple of occasions, when nobody else was around, as I might be near their

fence, I would call out as my uncle would, "Come sheep!" But they would pay me NO MIND. I was not their shepherd. They did not 'know' my voice. To them, I was a "stranger".

So, let's bring this to spiritual terms. These words right here are to fellow Believers. Dear Believer: you and I both know our Savior, don't we. There is a "witness" of the Holy Spirit in our lives. (Rom8:16) When True Believers are together there (already) -is- a "oneness" in Christ, for which He prayed. (Jn17) We are not seeking to 'create' a unity, because Christ already made it when He purchased and redeemed us with His own blood. (Heb9:12, 1Pet1:19, Rev1:5) So, there already is love for the brethren. (1Jn2:10, 3:14) If the love isn't there, it's a sure sign that 'somebody' is not a true "sheep". But the love is there because we are following the same Shepherd.

Now... as we are exhorted to be "wise as serpents" (Mt10:16), and are watching out for pretenders; if we see something that looks like 'sheep', but we see them following a -different- "shepherd" than the One we know who redeemed us with His own blood, judging by -whom- they are following, we know they are not sheep. Remember, Jesus said that nobody can "serve two masters". (Mt6:24) If those so-called "sheep" are following a different shepherd... a different voice (a different gospel which Paul calls "accursed" -Gal1:8-9)... we can know, WITH CERTAINTY, that they are not true Sheep. Notice how John reviews the matter: "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (1Jn4:4-6) Remember we are CHRIST-ians, because we follow Jesus Christ. But not everyone who calls themselves "Christians" are. Not all Israel was Israel. (Rom9:6) Not everyone who proclaims, "Lord, Lord" is getting into Heaven. (Mt7:21) And the True Sheep can have a pretty good idea of who those are, by observing what sort of shepherd they are following.

So, how does one become a sheep? How does one get into the sheep fold? Obviously... through the door/gate. And where is that door? Some modern buildings are sometimes confusing, especially, ones made with lots of glass. When the windows are glass, and the doors are glass, if one is not paying attention, one has trouble finding the door. One of my customers had me make special logos to put on some glass 'window' areas, because some people were walking into the windows and hurting themselves. Some architecture that uses an arch-type of construction, often the doors are built into the shape of one of those arch-ways. From a distance one might look at such a building and not know which was an arch, and which was the door.

On Public TV every once in awhile I catch little bits of this artist who does an entire painting on camera, explaining what he does as he goes along.

He paints "happy little" things here and there. He decides he wants a building in the middle of his landscape... a few brush strokes later and Voila! there's the building. If he wants a door in that building, some more paint colors, brush, and "see how easy that is?"

But... can anybody go 'through' such a door? No. It's not a real door. It's an "illusion" of a door, by manipulating paint colors on a canvas. If somebody were to decorate one of those non-door archways of the above-mentioned building, to look like a door; or hang a bead-curtain in front of it; and a person comes along full-speed thinking to enter the building, what is going to happen? Bonk! There is only -one- 'real' door. If a person wishes to enter the building, one must enter through the door. If the person sees the inside of the shopping mall store, but tries to walk in someplace other than the 'open' doorway, they are going to "Bonk!" into the glass windows.

This seems like a 'simple' concept doesn't it. And we might laugh as we contemplate those "Bonk!"s appearing on the next edition of TV's "Funniest Videos", or something.

But when it comes to the matter of Entrance into Heaven, this is -precisely- what people do. They hang some hippy bead-curtains of "love and acceptance" in front of a wall here, or paint a "happy little" door on an "indication" of a building there. But they are all false.

People suppose that "all faiths" will get there. All a person needs to be, is a person "of faith". It doesn't matter, one can follow Mary, Allah, Buddha, mother earth, self-actualization, etc. But they are all various beads, indications and paintings. They are -not- 'real' doors!

Jesus says, "I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved.." (vs9) Later He will be saying, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." (14:6) No, it doesn't even come through the one many claim was the "first pope", as they proclaim salvation through "-the- church" of Rome. This so-called "first pope" proclaimed about "Jesus Christ of Nazareth" that "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we need to be saved." (Acts4:10,12)

Jesus Christ is the -ONLY- WAY to Heaven! He "laid down His life" for the sheep. (vs11) His saving work is summed up, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and..He was buried, and..He was raised the third day according to the Scriptures." (1Cor15:3-4) The purchase of our salvation was "finished" on the cross. (Jn19:30) No further work, sacrifices or penances are required, because He did this "once for all" (Heb7:27, 9:12, 10:10); and our eternal life is guaranteed by His resurrection and raising us to "newness of life". (Rom6:4) And this salvation is something nobody or nothing can "snatch..out of His hand". (vs28-29) This is the "love of Christ" (Rom8:35), fulfilling God's "love" for the world (Jn3:16) which guarantees that NOTHING "shall be able to separate us from the

love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom8:39) God is all-powerful. Thus, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom8:31)

All one has to do is... 'go-through-the-Door' ...Jesus Christ.

But also notice another property about doors. Certainly Jesus invites, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt11:28) But also realize that doors are designed to be, both, 'open' -and- 'shut'. Many people confuse Jesus Christ with the local -physical- 'building' or 'meeting-place' where Believers gather for worship, exhortation, teaching, doctrine, fellowship. They confuse a person coming through Christ for salvation, vs the unsaved coming through the doors yet-unsaved. When a person comes through Christ, they do not find themselves 'inside' yet-unsaved. Jesus changes a person and gives the "birth from above". (Jn3:3) If they came "through" Jesus, they are, genuinely, a "sheep". But today's "churches" are letting the goats and wolves in through the 'doors' of their 'building'. Catholicism teaches that salvation comes through "the church"; thus, people go "to church" (that building) where the priest pronounces his incantations and performs magic, changing wafers into something else (supposedly). And so, what-they-call "salvation" becomes an act of walking through the -physical- 'doors' of the building. And sadly, most non-catholic "christians" also have the same mentality, that a person must be invited through-the-doors of the 'building' so they can perform a ritual of "walking-down-the-aisle" to get saved. But this is a so-called "salvation" that is "some other way". (vs1)

Notice that "the doorkeeper opens" to the "shepherd of the sheep". (vs2-3) But when sheep are bedded down for the night, they are brought into the fold, and the doors are shut. Why? To keep the robbers and wolves "outside". "...outside are dogs and sorcerers and prostitutes and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and produces a lie." (Rev22:15) Paul warned that these "vicious wolves" would "come -IN- among" the flock. (Acts20:29) And how are they getting in? Incredibly, the so-called "sheep" are opening the doors to them! Or, some are coming in as "false brethren". They are "brought in" and come in "by stealth". (Gal2:4) And once they are in, just like the soldiers who entered Troy in the wooden horse, they come out, open the gates to let all the rest of the soldiers (wolves) in, who wreak havoc on the sheep.

Note this well, what Jesus labels them. Any who come by some other way, than through Himself, are "thieves and robbers". (vs1) They are -NOT- True Sheep, or true shepherds.

Notice that it is not for man to open doors that Jesus has shut. Jesus is the Door-keeper, "...who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.." (Rev3:7) And notice also in that same context, He speaks of those who are "...of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie.." (vs9)

We are to keep the unclean out. When Christ has set up His millennial rule, and temple worship is re-established, one of the practices that will be corrected, God says, "And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean." (Ezek44:23)

We need to keep straight -which- "doors" we are dealing with. We need to help guide people, and point them to -the- "Door", Jesus Christ, for salvation. But we need to learn to keep the door[s] of our meeting places shut against the wolves, lest they viciously devour the little lambs.

I AM: the Resurrection & the Life - John 11

"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes into Me, though he may die, he shall live. And everyone living and believing into Me shall never ever die. Do you believe this? ..Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who comes into the world." (vs25-27)

When it comes to discussions of the Rapture, there are many (human) viewpoints. From Scripture we believe the Lord will "receive" us to Himself (Jn14:3) prior to the resumption of Daniel's 70th week with Israel. But there are many, who confuse prophecies about Israel and the Church, who think the Church goes through a special so-called "Tribulation", one that is distinct from the past 2000 years of affliction the Church has been experiencing in many ways at various times in history, just as Jesus promised would be the case. (Jn16:33) As the various camps argue with each other, they taunt with words like, "when you find you were wrong, I'll wave to you anyway, as we are on our way up." In the end, whoever was right won't matter, because the Lord will come for us all anyway; and those who were wrong will end up in the Lord's presence anyway.

This article is not going to be a discussion of pre/mid/post. (There's enough past writings on the subject at the website, if you're not sure)

But there is a category of person who claims to name the Name of Jesus Christ, but they don't believe in -any- Rapture... pre, mid or post. Can such a person truly be a "[C]hristian"? In the past we have suggested that, certain people, if confronted with the Scriptures about a "pre" 70th week Rapture, and come away from such a revelation holding to "mid" or "post", that such unbelief -may- indicate a person's true heart. And since it's been awhile, lest anybody get all 'excited' at that statement, let's be reminded that "not knowing for sure" (one way or the other) is not necessarily such a scenario. There are many Believers, for whom their walk with the Lord up-till-now has involved other areas of growth in the Scriptures. It is not yet their time to be assured regarding the Rapture. They are yet dealing with cleaning out certain worldly ways from their lives...things that are more important to their life at the moment, as they seek to be pleasing and faithful to the Lord. If a person hasn't yet learned about the world's carnal ways, and gotten them all cleaned out to now be living holy and pure lives, knowing about the Rapture is of much less-significance in the eternal scheme of things. But if a time comes and the person is faced with the 'truths' about the Rapture, and comes away believing something different than what Scripture teaches, it causes others to wonder -what- 'spirit' taught them those false doctrines; since God's Holy Spirit knows only -one- "Truth" to "guide" us into. (Jn16:13) But, like I said above: this article is not about that. But this little bit can be food for thought, for you who haven't considered the matter, to chew on awhile.

But if a person does not believe in -any- Rapture, after hearing the Truth; such a person CANNOT BE a True Believer. And we understand this from this little exchange between Jesus and Martha. Believing in the Rapture is one-and-the-same along with believing in the Deity of Jesus Christ. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, you -will- also believe in the Rapture when enlightened about it. If you believe in the Rapture, it is because you believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

However, let us back up a bit and take a look at the quoted portion from the top.

Jesus has made several "I AM" claims over the past chapters. In each case He has authenticated His claim with a sign. His being the "Bread of Life" was authenticated by multiplying the few loaves to feed the thousands. (ch6) He proved being the "Light of the World" by giving sight to a blind man. (ch9) And now He is claiming to be "the Resurrection and the Life"

So he "stayed two more days" (vs6) when He heard Lazarus was sick. He 'dawdles' along. He knows Lazarus has died (vs11) as He takes His own sweet time to get there. By the time they arrive, Lazarus has been dead "four days" and in such a hot climate, the body would be stinking pretty foul. (vs39) Jesus is making sure they know that He is truly giving life. Lazarus has not merely 'recently' died, and now needs CPR. He's good-n-dead... on his way back "to dust". (Gen3:19) The people are remembering that He is capable of healing "the eyes of the blind" (vs37), but they are not quite prepared for what He is about to do now.

Why did He do this? That the people "may believe" that Jesus was sent by the Father. (vs42) And when the sign was complete, its purpose was fulfilled, as, many "believed into Him". (vs45)

Now, notice the 'authority' with which Jesus raises Lazarus. "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus! Out Here! Now!" (vs43) He is not like the whiny parent who "just can't control" their children because "kids will be kids", but is like the parent who stands at the door, calling the errant child in, "Get over here! Right now!" This is what the people noticed continually about Jesus, that He commanded the unclean spirits "with authority" (Mk1:27), and taught "with authority". (Lk4:32) He's the One that's "in charge".

In the last chapter He made the claim, "I give them eternal life" (10:28) There are lots of charlatans who lead people into cults with wild promises. There have been several who conned everybody to commit mass-suicide, with the promises of euphoria on the other side, either in a waiting space ship, or some other promise. The Islamic suicide bombers are given false hopes of being with Allah, and having a harem of virgins. But in all of these cases, the people jump into death 'blindly'. They don't stop to consider that they have been given no authentication or proof that anything they are being told contains even an iota of truth. When people consider the

definition of "faith", they think they must step out 'blindly' because "faith is the certainty of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb11:1) Well, it might be true that a person takes "blind" steps. But faith is not based on "nothing". Faith is not "empty". It is based on God's -person-, and His -doings-. The most notable 'doing' that humanity can see is Creation. (Rom1:20)

When Jesus promises "eternal life", this is not a blind promise. When He promises to -give- "eternal life", how do we know He can deliver on His claims? Lazarus' body was beginning to rot. With authority Jesus commands, "Out here! Now!" And people were not left wondering "if" or "whether-or-not" He had been successful, having to merely take Jesus 'word' that what He said was true, even though there was no proof; because, -there- was Lazarus, standing before them! Now, considering the burial custom of those days, where the body was wrapped ("bound" vs44) in clothes, it is obvious that Lazarus did not find himself suddenly "awake" in the tomb, and 'walk' outside. Not only did Jesus raise him; He also physically 'moved' him outside before everybody for inspection.

In a few more chapters when Jesus, Himself, rises from the dead, we will consider how Jesus' resurrection is the very foundation of our eternal life, and the hope for our resurrection; as He was the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1Cor15:20,23)

But notice in Jesus' conversation with Martha: He discusses the Resurrection. The person who believes into Christ, if they die, they shall live again.

But notice the next sentence: Everyone 'living' and 'believing' shall what? "..NEVER EVER die.." What is that? The Rapture! Notice that the context of Paul's discussion of Jesus the "firstfruits" of the resurrection, is also the -same- context in which he proclaims (in case we missed it from Jesus' conversation with Martha), "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep (die physically), but we shall all be changed." Notice that the Resurrection and Rapture are tied together: "the dead will be raised" and "we (the ones he was just saying that "not all sleep") shall be changed" (1Cor15:51-52) As Paul reiterates, "..the dead in Christ (Believers) will rise first" and then "we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together at the same time with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.." (1Th4:16-17)

The ones who "not all sleep", who "are alive and remain" are the ones Jesus says, "-living- and believing" shall what? "NEVER EVER DIE". That which has been coined by popular use, with the term, "Rapture".

And notice that Jesus asks Martha, "Do you believe this?" Notice He does not ask her, as He did the blind man in ch9, "Do you believe into the Son of God?" (9:35) He does not ask regarding her faith in Himself. He asks if

she believes "this". What? That which He has just been expounding: the Resurrection and Rapture.

What is her response? It is the same response the Ethiopian gave to Philip when he wanted to be immersed, his testimony that he was saved: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts8:37) The Person and Deity of Jesus Christ.

Part of the essence of Jesus Christ is the fact that He made "all things" (1:3) and that "life" is part of His very essence. (1:4) If a person claims to believe in "Eternal Life", such a belief is impossible without also believing that Jesus is -very- God. And that Eternal Life is attained via two alternate journeys depending upon the time of the Lord's return: 1) Death and Resurrection, or 2) the Rapture.

Time and history will progress. People will be born. Some ("few" Mt7:14) will come to Saving Faith in Jesus Christ. For most of history those believers will die, physically, like all mankind does, returning "to dust". But when Jesus returns for His own, He is not going to kill those Believers who are alive at that moment, just so they can be resurrected. No! Those who naturally died along the way will be resurrected. And those "living and believing" at that moment will be caught up to the Lord at the same time the resurrected ones go up to meet the Lord...only, with changed bodies. (1Cor15:50-54)

Do you believe this?

Die unto Life - John 12

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it unto eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, My Father will honor him." (vs24-26)

This chapter contains so many little sub-subjects. But we will only observe a couple. In it, Jesus summarizes His ministry and message; a summary of how He was received (and rejected) by the people. It summarizes His earthly ministry to the people at large, as, the next chapter then begins His journey to the cross, and His final exhortations to His disciples. In a few days, Jesus will be crucified. The countdown has begun... the whole purpose for His coming, in a few days will be fulfilled. All His teaching, miracles and signs have led up to 'this' final week. On one hand they welcome Him with "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (vs13) And on the other, in spite of all the irrefutable signs with which He has authenticated Himself, "they did not believe in Him"; fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, "Lord, who has believed our report?" (vs37-38)

As is Jesus' style, He throws out more conundrums. The people were looking at what they perceived of prophecy, thinking that Messiah would "remain forever" (vs34); but He starts talking about death. Just like today (today is nothing new), back then people did not want the 'negative' and 'depressing'. They wanted brightness, happiness, sunshine, feel-good. As long as He filled their stomachs with food, they wanted Him as their king. (6:15) That was Israel's whole lust when it came to getting their first king... someone who would do everything for them and provide for them, to "fight their battles" for them. (1Sam8:20) Isn't that what today's socialized societies are? Have the 'government' do and provide everything for us, and make our lives pleasant and safe.

But such a course of life leads to loss. Everybody is out to live safe lives, and they elect representatives to pass laws -requiring- everybody to conform to certain "safe" modes of behavior. Forget about the thousands of babies they murder daily... the government tells us to wear helmets, seatbelts, confiscates e-coli-infested meat (when people insist on having their 'blood' with meat, contrary to God's ordinance -Gen9:4, instead of -cooking- it!). Forget about "death-with-dignity" in such forms as euthanasia or doctor-assisted suicide; society claims that "life" is the most important thing... especially of "-the- CHILDREN!"

In addition, the world has this societal fetish regarding "self-esteem". Recently I was seeing some local children's programs being promoted on TV, and one of the primary benefits of the program was that, by participating, the children would learn "self-esteem". The popular TV stars

or famous musicians appear on the various talk shows, proclaiming how they did things "for -me-". -I- needed/wanted... so I did this FOR ME... for which statements the audiences erupt into rounds of applause and cheers. Some women proclaim how they left their husbands, for their -own- needs and desires, and such as Oprah exclaim their affirmation with, "You go, sister girl!"

Well, what produces a pretty flower to delight the senses? What results in bountiful crops and harvest, such that many are fed? DEATH! Not the "affirmation of life". How does that bumper crop of wheat come about? By storing last year's harvest in the granary and keeping it -safe-? No. It must be planted. What happens when seed is in the ground? It gets moist. Now, if seed did not contain a germ for life, if that moistening process continued unabated, that seed would rot in the ground, and eventually there would be no more substance recognized as "seed". Thus, as it gets moist and soft, that is the beginning of death for that seed. However, if that seed does not experience that warming/moistening process, to become soft, the germ within will never be able to sprout, put down roots, and send its shoot up above the ground. That seed must be buried and begin to die, in order for it to sprout life...and produce a crop...or the pretty flower.

Notice what Jesus says, that the one who "hates his life in this world" will receive eternal life. Now please notice that this is not just a matter of "hating life". There are some cults that self-flagellate, and others that believe it is noble to walk with pebbles in their shoes (and a whole host of other things), in order to purposely suffer -physically-. Paul gives us clear understanding, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it.." (Eph5:29) It is not physically natural to hurt ourselves. And the proclamation that people "don't have enough self-esteem" is also a myth. The reason children are belligerent and rebellious is precisely -because- they are OVERFLOWING with -SELF-. That's the way we are born. If they are asked to do something, one of the first words a baby learns is, "NO!" The next one is, "I". "I can do it aaalll by MYSELF." No, me, my..."It's MIIIIINE!!!"

No, we do not hate our existence, but we need to hate our life "IN THIS WORLD". What is in the world? Sin. (Rom5:13) "For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world." (1Jn2:16) Jesus is calling His hearers to "not love the world or the things of the world" (1Jn2:15)

People want to be accepted by God. How does one do that? By "serving" Jesus. How does one serve Jesus? By "following" Him. (vs26) And how and where do we follow Him? Into death.

Is death pleasant? Jesus' death certainly wasn't! Jesus' "soul [was] troubled" over the prospect. (vs27) Is death something to be shunned at all costs? Jesus asks whether He should be saved from it? Well, that was His very "purpose" in coming. In the Gospel of John, several times, Jesus'

death is called His being "glorified". (7:39, 12:16,23) Indeed, it is His impending death that will result in "every knee" bowing and proclaiming Him "Lord". (Php2:11)

What would be the result of Jesus' death? He would "draw all to [Himself]". (vs32) The "blood of bulls and goats" cannot "take away sins". (Heb10:4) They were merely a deposit, the promise, the forshadow of when Christ would come to die for sinful man. The result of His death is that mankind, both Jew and Gentile, can now be "reconciled..to God" (Eph2:16) If Jesus had not died, since sin was introduced into the world at Eden, there could never be such a thing as "Eternal Life" for any of mankind.

So now, if the one who is 'honored' by the Father is one who 'follows' Jesus, what is the nature of that following? Just as Jesus died, His followers must also die. Let's see the context: "certain Greeks" (vs20) came, wanting to see Jesus. And what does Jesus talk about when He is informed about them? Death. You want to "see" Jesus? You want to "follow" Him? You must die.

If a person is "hating" his life "in this world", how does one leave this world? this life? Through death. (No, we are not speaking of suicide! Please take this in context. Let's continue.) Jesus was always using parables, figures of speech, to illustrate. After Jesus was 'glorified', the Apostle Paul explains this in depth:

We "die to sin". (Rom6:2) When, due to family conflicts, someone says of another family member, "They are dead to me", what are they saying? (After all, that person is still living and breathing) It means that a separation has been implemented. In that person's mind and soul, the person they are repudiating is as if they no-longer-exist. They have been blotted out of the will; they are no longer recognized as 'family'.

Paul continues, regarding immersion: "...do you not know that as many of us as were immersed into Christ Jesus were immersed into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through immersion into death..." (Rom6:3-4a) This is why the pagan 'dabbing' of water on one's forehead is not correct. The 'pouring' of water, while possibly signifying being "spirit-filled", is not the same thing, of being "buried with" Christ. Some pagan religions will take large buckets of water and 'fling' the water out over everybody assembled. Again, a picture of being "spirit-filled" (with demons), perhaps; but it is not "immersion", a graphic picture of "burial", due to death.

Being so-called (charismatically) "spirit-filled" never includes "death". Well, let's take that back. Those of pentecostal/charismatic beliefs suppose that the sign of salvation is when they have become "spirit-filled". Then, as a true sign of that so-called spirit-filling, many of them become "slain" (in-the-demons). But you see: that is -backwards-. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit does not come until -after- one has been "buried with Him". The

"newness of life" (with the Holy Spirit) does not come until after one has first been buried with Christ, and -then- been "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father". (Rom6:4)

Paul shows us how his discussion follows-up what Jesus is saying in John ch12. (In this case, KJV did well in retaining the correct word. NKJV and others that claim to be more "literal" have clouded the issue) Paul says, "For if we have been -PLANTED- together in the likeness of His death.." (Rom6:5) See how this carries on Jesus' discussion of the seed dying in the ground? Seed in the ground is usually "planted" there.

So... continuing on: If we were 'planted' with Jesus through immersion, then "..certainly we also shall be in resurrection". And noticing how we "follow" Jesus... "..our old man was crucified with Him.." (vs6) Paul said in another place, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal2:20) Just as that family member officially/legally blots a family member out of their life, so, too, "..the body of sin might be nullified, that we should no longer serve sin." (Rom6:6) Catholicism does not believe in 'divorce', but they have no problem with "annulments". There may be children from the marriage, but the annulment, as far as catholicism and the 'law' is concerned, makes it as if the marriage had 'never happened'. It never existed. When a father wishes to unblot his daughter's tarnished reputation, he will seek to get his daughter's marriage annulled.

You see, we don't actually get physically "crucified" on an actual cross, with spikes. But when we "follow" Jesus Christ, and become "immersed" into Him, God "annuls" our sin. We become "dead" to the world, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ. Thus, Paul speaks of our salvation as being "in Christ" where "old things have passed away" and everything has "become new". (2Cor5:17) Just as that daughter has the memory of her time with that man, in this world we still remember our past sins. But in a -legal- sense, that girl's reputation has been cleansed. Now, in the case of the daughter, and catholic annulments, I have a real problem with that whole concept: those children from the union "don't exist"? They certainly do! But for our finite limited minds, God uses the legal example of "annulments" to help us understand how He saves us. And when God takes away our sin, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." (Ps103:12) And "..He adds, Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." (Heb10:17)

Now, while we speak of dying and being given life with Christ, Jesus is not the ultimate end of our faith. The Ethiopian's testimony prior to being immersed was, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts8:37) While God led Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness wanderings, He did so through the pillar of cloud/fire. What did that pillar represent? Who was in that pillar? The "Angel of God". (Ex14:19) And who was that? When Israel had sinned with the calf, God then says, "..I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you.." (Ex33:3) But He says, "My Presence will go with you.." (33:14) We could do an entire study on the subject of the

"Angel of God". But Paul summarizes the matter of who went with Israel, by saying "...that rock was -CHRIST-.." (1Cor10:4) While we have Jesus coming to die on the cross, to live a 'human' existence as "flesh and blood" (Heb2:14), and then die; Jesus appeared to people throughout the O.T. Jesus is the "express image of His essence". (Heb1:3) Jesus represents the -Father-.

When we believe into Jesus Christ, we are believing into the One who "sent" Jesus. (vs44) If we see Jesus, we have seen the Father. For all His grandeur as God's Son, even so, Jesus did not function on His own authority. What He spoke and taught, it was from "the Father". Jesus was obedient to the Father, as He followed the Father's "orders". (vs49) A subordinate obeying his superior. Remember that it was "God" who "sent" His Son to die. (Jn3:16) And so, what we are hearing from Jesus, comes straight from the Father, because that is what Jesus spoke. (vs50)

So now, as we "believe" into Jesus Christ, of what sort is our faith? Many of the rulers believed into Him, but due to political pressures, and knowing what would happen if they confessed their faith, they didn't. (vs42) The edict was out, and was enforced upon the blind man, given sight. If anyone confessed Jesus, they were expelled from the temple. (9:22,34) So, for political expediency, these who claimed to believe into Jesus kept mum. What was the real reason? "...they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." (vs43)

So, were they saved? It's one thing to "believe" in Jesus; even the demons believe. (Jac2:19) But it's another to "die" to self, and serve one Master. They were believing, thus claiming to 'serve' Christ. But they were also serving the "whitewashed tombs". (Mt23:27) And what did Jesus say? "...no one is able to serve two masters.." (Mt6:24)

Many today "make -CLAIMS- for Christ"; but due to their "love of the world" Scripture is quite plain, "the love of the Father is not in" them. (1Jn2:15) They are too enamored with the world, and do not wish to "upset" the world. Thus, it is obvious that they have not -died- to the world. Someone who has died has no more place in the world. Their body (corpse) just lies there, while their spirit and soul are elsewhere. If they are yet concerned about the world, their spirit and soul have not yet moved on to be with Christ. They are not saved. They do not have Eternal Life.

In the context of our observations of these rulers, understand Jesus words: "Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will also confess him before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God." (Lk12:8-9)

"..if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is

made unto salvation." (Rom10:9-10) If a person is loath to confess, by default-by-omission, such reticence becomes denial!

Do you want Eternal Life? Are you ready to follow Christ? Even to die with Christ? Are you ready to die to the world? Are you willing to be kicked out of your church for Christ's sake? You must be ready to say "yes" to each (all) of these questions. If you balk at, or say "no" to any of them, it is not possible for you to be saved.

"No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Lk9:62)

Love One Another - John 13

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I love you, that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love mutually with one another." (vs34-35)

Since the 60s and 70s the world has been singing, "What the world - needs now - is love - sweet love..." Around that same time the hippy offshoot of the organized "church" was popularizing these two verses just quoted. There was even a so-called "christian" rock group called "Love Song" as they would sing, "What can you say to a love song...oooo a love song...if you can feel it in your heart."

And then, on the so-called "other side" of the -spectrum- were the "judgmental" folk. The ones promoting this so-called "love" of theirs, while condemning "judgmentalism", would, themselves, -judge- these they had judged as being "judgmental". And along with being "judgmental"; likely the 'cause' (in their minds) for judgmentalism; the judgment was that there was a lack of love. The way I experienced the label as being (myself) "judgmental, was when I would interject the share-all so-called Bible studies with, "the Bible says..." with chapter-n-verse. If people were sitting around "lovingly" sharing their opinions, if a Bible-believer dared to quote Scripture, and suggest that the Bible actually -proclaimed- something 'definite' (black-n-white), rather than all the "gray areas" they were awash in, such a Bible-believer was -judged- by them as being "unloving" and "judgmental".

The reason?

For adhering to God's 'absolutes'. For repudiating the immorality of the day, when everybody else was -lovingly- promoting "live and let live". Do your own thing. Try it, you'll like it. Don't be square, man! If somebody was caught up in sin, the so-called "loving" thing to do was to display "tolerance" for it. To not impose one's -own- 'values' upon them. And if a person were to suggest that the values were Scriptural values: well, that's just "your -opinion-" of what the Bible says. When the Bible says, "you shall not commit adultery", if a Believer would label such behavior as "adultery", the person was accused of "judging"; judge not lest you be judged; don't poke at the twig in your brother's eye when you've got a beam in your own; if you point a finger at someone else, always remember you have three fingers pointing back at yourself; etc,etc...it went. The "loving" thing to do was to NOT call adultery, "adultery". This is just one example.

Even today, this ministry receives accusations from some quarters that it is too "unloving". Too harsh! And I know that I'm not alone in this. Any of you who love the Lord, and stick-to-your-guns with God's Word, the Scriptures... you, too, are also often derided as being "unloving".

And yet, Jesus says that the world will know we are His disciples by our love. So, what gives? What is the context of this command?

First of all, 'who' is Jesus addressing? He is no longer with the crowds. Ch13 begins a new section in John. Up through ch12 most of Jesus' words and teachings have been with the crowds and religious leaders. Now, ch13 begins His journey to the cross. A little later in the evening, in a couple hours, in context, He is going to be arrested, put on trial, and the next day be crucified. Ch13 is the upper room. The Last Supper. It is just Jesus and the disciples. The next five chapters will be His final words of teaching, exhortation and encouragement to them, before He is crucified.

Is the Believer to love (and be loving to) the world? While we are exhorted "if it is possible" to be "at peace with all men" (Rom12:18), the exhortation to us is "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1Jn2:15)

To whom is this love directed? He is talking to the disciples, and says, "if you have love mutually with one another". (vs35) This is the "sincere love of the brethren" (1Pt1:22) This is one of the tests that a person is a Believer, "..because we love the brethren". (1Jn3:14)

What sort of love is this? That which Love Song used to sing? ..that which Oprah proclaims? That which one "-FEELS- in the heart"?

Jesus says, "..AS I LOVE YOU.." (vs34)

How does/did Jesus love? "By this we know the love of God, because He laid down His life for us." (1Jn3:16a)

And so, how do we love the brethren? "And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (1Jn3:16b)

How did Jesus show His love while He was alive? In this same context we have an example of Peter. Poor Peter...! He gets picked on so much! But there is much we can learn here.

Jesus is explaining how He is going away, and is leaving them behind. And as usual, Peter jumps in, Well, why can't I follow You now?? What are You talking about? And Peter starts to proclaim his never-ending love for Jesus by saying, I will even die for You! (vs36-37) Jesus, You don't have to undergo Your troubles 'alone'. I'm with You here, right alongside You! As he will later pull out his sword and start whacking about, and chop off somebody's ear. (18:10)

Oh, Peter... I'm so overcome with emotion! ...thank you so much! That means so much to Me to hear you say this. It makes Me -feel- 'loved', and cared for. Now, with such a friendship, I know I can face anything that

comes along, knowing you're right there with Me. We'll do this thing together. ???

Is that what Jesus said? That's pretty much what people today would say.

Oh, REALLY, Peter!?? You're going to be this macho brave guy? "Truly, truly, I say to you..." (vs38) (Have love mutually with one another..as I love you) Here is "TRUTH". Peter, here's the 'truth'. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you're going to wimp out, and "..deny Me three times."

Oh, but, Jesus... You're so 'harsh' to him! That wasn't very 'loving'. How do you think that made Peter -feel-?? He was trying to show his support for You, and You rebuff him like that?! Don't you see him over there sulking, and embarrassed now? You've just put him down and shamed him in front of his buddies. That wasn't very nice!! Shame on You!!

Well, we know the account. The -truth- was that Peter denied the Lord. And then, after the resurrection He will ask Peter, "Peter, do you love Me?" (21:15~) (We'll touch that when we get there.)

What is love? To "keep His commandments". "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments." (1Jn5:2) What is one of the primary commandments of God? "...that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love.." (Eph1:4)

Notice both "holiness" and "love" lumped together into the same context. But this is the primary point where the unbelievers -judge- Believers as being 'judgmental'... when a Believer tries to live a holy life, and also proclaim it to others. Such holiness (being set apart and distinct from the world's corruption), to them, is 'unloving'. But to God, it is part of the very definition, if you will, of love to God.

When a couple are married, if they do the traditional thing of walking up to the pagan altar to be blessed before the gods by the priest or preacher, the vows include the words "forsaking all others". Such a "forsaking" is the very definition of "holy". The newly married couple are "holy" to each other. They are separate and distinct from everybody else, and are -only- 'to' each other. Would anybody suggest that a refusal on the part of either one of them to go lusting after somebody else, should be considered "unloving"? No! Their love for each other is so strong that they WOULDNT EVEN DREAM OF going after somebody else! That would be called "infidelity"! And yet, this is precisely what the world wishes from the Believer, and if the Believer does not comply, the Believer is "unloving"! That's just like someone trying to entice a married person away from their spouse, and when rebuffed, whining that they are so "unloving" ...to them!

This was just reiterated again recently. And perhaps, when somebody who claims to you, to be a Christian, but they whine at you that you are too

harsh and unloving... perhaps that's a clear sign to you that they are not a -real- "[C]hristian"? We say this often, but it bears repeating: The world is full of pretend [c]hristians. Remember: they look, for everything, like "ministers of righteousness". (2Cor11:15) They know how to spin-a-yarn. They know the terminology. They know Scripture, and can often quote it to you better than you can quote it back. But like it was manifest recently, somebody initially seeming to be a Christian, but whining at VW's unlovingness... when "truly, truly" is spoken to them, they separate themselves, with anger and self-righteous vindictiveness and indignation.

Well this chapter begins... The Footwashing...

What is the footwashing about? Is it a ritual, like the "Lord's Supper", to be practiced when Believers meet together? There are some groups that think so. What is the lesson Jesus teaches through it?

First of all, Peter was told that: if he didn't receive it from Jesus, that "you have no part with Me". (vs8b) Footwashing (what it represents) is part of belonging to Jesus.

And then, Jesus also says that we are to "wash one another's feet". (vs14)

Now usually, we latch onto the parts where Jesus speaks of the "servant" and "master" relationships. (vs14-16) Jesus, the Creator of the universe and Savior of sinners, stooped to the position as a servant (Php2:5-7); that, just as Jesus humbled Himself to do the menial servant's job, so should we humble ourselves before each other: "whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant" (Mt20:26). And, indeed, this is one of the lessons of this passage... which we will not dwell on this time-around.

But let us see Jesus' explanation of the -feet-.

When Peter learns that he cannot be part of Jesus unless he receives this washing, he then says, Well, give me the whole treatment then, "...also my hands and my head!" (vs9) But notice Jesus says, You don't need all that. You're already clean. You just need your feet washed. And then... this has been (if you will) an object lesson; an "example, that you should do as I have done to you." (vs15)

When they came for this supper, being it was one of Israel's prime annual Feasts, they would have bathed and put on clean clothes. They were "clean". But the path they walked to get there was dirty and dusty. The dust would have clung to their feet. So, in order to be totally clean, all they needed was to wash their feet of the temporary dust-of-travel.

Jesus says, "...you are clean, but not everyone.." (vs10b) At the moment, Judas was still in the room. Otherwise, the rest were "clean". They were Jesus' disciples. They were "saved".

At home they were cleaned up. They travelled along to be with Jesus. And 'now' they were with Jesus. This represents, in object-lesson form, the path of the Believer to God's presence in Heaven.

We are on this earth and come to God in repentance and receive the cleansing of Jesus' blood of the "washing of regeneration". (Rev1:5, Tit3:5) We are, thus, "clean". We are saved.

But we are not yet with Jesus. We need, yet, to -get- there. Paul spoke that we have not yet "attained" (Php3:12), we have not yet "laid hold" (vs13), but are stretching for the prize (vs14); but it is like running in a race. (1Cor9:24, Heb12:1) While we may be clean from Jesus' salvation, our 'feet' get the world's dirt on them. We need to periodically "confess" our sins and be cleansed by His blood. (1Jn1:7,9)

So, if it is Jesus' blood that cleanses us; how, then, do we wash "one another's feet"? (vs14) After all, doesn't Paul also speak of not "judging another's servant"? (Rom14:4) And Jesus certainly did teach about the twig and beam in the eyes.

Well, notice that Jesus did not say to -NOT- point out the twig in the other's eye. But rather, to make sure one's own eye is clear, first, before doing so (Mt7:5); in helping to restore someone overtaken in a trespass, "..considering yourself that you not also be tempted" (Gal6:1)

So, how do we do this?

Let's go back to that married couple. They are deeply in love with each other, they are walking along, hand-in-hand; she's got her arm through his; arms around each other, etc., as people-in-love do. As they are walking along, this sweet-young-thing comes into view walking by, and his eyes go meandering over, and his head turns as he follows her movements. What does young bride do? Perhaps an extra "squeeze" of the hand, tugging a bit; maybe a punch in the arm or poke in the ribs, to get his "attention", as to say: "What do you think you're looking at??" Is that "unloving" or "harsh"? No. They love each other; and she is getting his attention; pointing out to him what he is doing (because, after all, it is in the nature of a male to look at females, yes?). Or like when I was younger, women used to wear full skirt-length slips, and sometimes the slip might hang below the skirt's hem; so, another woman might say to her, "your slip is showing". Again, is that "unloving"? No. The one woman does not wish the embarrassment upon the other woman.

Perhaps a lesson from animals will further-help us understand: Many species of monkeys will groom each other. Basically, they sit there picking bugs off each other; bugs that annoy, bite and itch. Doing this "picking" relieves the annoyance. Horses will often stand next to each other, head-to-tail. Their tails flopping into each other's faces, to get rid of pesky flies.

Is that terribly "harsh" that one horse is "slapping" the other in the face? No. It is a mutually beneficial act by which they are (if you will) "serving" each other.

We who know the Lord are called by God to be -HOLY-. Set apart, distinct from the world and its sin. As we anticipate Christ's return for us, what is the resultant behavior of the Christian? Winning as many souls as possible? No! "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (1Jn3:3)

Our #1 responsibility as Believers, above all else, is to be holy. And the greatest demonstration of love "mutually with one another" (vs35) is to help and support each other to that end. Help tuck up that slip, straighten the tie, swat that mosquito the other can't see, brush off that piece of lint... help wash the dirt off the feet. That we might be presented to Christ "...a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.." but that we "...should be holy and without blemish." (Eph5:27)

"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (vs17)

I AM: the Way, Truth, Life - John 14

"..you believe in God, believe also in Me...I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know...I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me...He who has seen Me has seen the Father...I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me.." (~vs1-11)

Everyone speaks of "god". Something extraordinary happens, and the first typical thing out of mouths is, "Oh my god!" or "Good god!" And if they are angry they pronounce, "God d--- it/you!"

When the world waxes philosophically eternal, what is their concept of things? As this is being written, this past week-end a rerun of one of the final episodes of TV's "Earth Final Conflict" was preaching man's doctrine. The world's doctrines are based on "doctrines of demons" (1Tm4:1) taught by their "deceiving spirits". The spirit (core energy) of a Tailon was proclaiming that all three of the evil/powerful alien beings man had been in contact with (Duridians, Tailon, Ativus) were "all in it together", and that they were part of man's development for his greater destiny, of something "greater than mankind". Of a "reaching for the stars". Something greater "out there". They pretty much understand that man's earthly life is not the end of existence. But man's future is a matter of reaching one's greater, fuller potential. Becoming something that is more god-like. Teasing man with satan's dream that "I will be like the Most High". (Is14:14)

Now, those who claim to be "Christian" are often not much better. We speak of "Heaven and Hell". And the next thought is, "where" is Heaven? Well, Heaven is "up", pointing the finger sky-ward. Trouble is, for somebody on the opposite side of the earth, that "up" -here- is "down" - there-.

There are many who look only earthward. Their minds/hearts only think that heaven is "what you make of it". They are trying to create their own "heaven-on-earth". Those with this mentality, who also claim to know the Most High, and His Son, Jesus Christ, are busy trying to clean up this world... make the world "christian" so that eventually, "christ" can come and rule on this earth; an earth that -they- have prepared for Him.

This passage in John ch14 may quite possibly be THE -KEY- to Saving Faith. It is certainly key to a proper understanding of the Christian's destiny.

Jesus starts out by saying, "you believe in God". (vs1) These Jews in the upper room with Jesus certainly considered themselves to be believers in Yahweh, the Most High God. Jews today speak of "G-d". As we began this discussion...everybody claims to believe in some sort of "god". Even

atheists, when crises come along, will be heard unwittingly uttering "god" with their lips. If the matter is pointed out to them, they will often be embarrassed by their own duplicity.

Believing in the concept of -a- "god" is not enough. -What- god does one acknowledge? Mythology has many deities, most of whom are promiscuous wrathful entities that must be appeased. Others, knowing that deity is not visible, concoct deities of their own devisings in their own spirits, and become demon-possessed.

Jesus says, "you believe in God...believe also in Me.." Now, to a Jew, is such a concept blasphemous? The Law opens with, "Jehovah our God, Jehovah is One" (Deu6:4) Who is/was Jesus? The Jews had their prophets. Moses, Isaiah, Elijah, Daniel, etc. Many viewed Jesus as just another prophet. (Jn6:14, 7:40) But did any of the O.T. prophets ask their hearers to "believe in" them? In fact, when people asked John as to his identity, he would take absolutely no credit for himself, but said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (Jn1:23) If "Jehovah is One", why is Jesus saying, "believe -also- in Me"?

Well, first of all, Jesus makes an incredible claim. He claims that He is going to leave for awhile, and then come to receive His followers. Notice that He does not say that His followers must develop their own inner consciousness to some higher plain, and go 'out-there' someplace to "find their destiny". As if to take a blind person to a strange place, with no bearings, and give them a little nudge and say, "OK, now, find your own way...just keep going...you can do it."

Many calling themselves "Christian" worry themselves as to "where" Heaven is. But we don't need to worry about that. Jesus said, "..where I am, there you may be also.." (vs3) Where is Jesus? We don't yet know. The apostle Paul got a glimpse, and he wasn't sure whether he was out-of-body when he saw the "third heaven", caught up to "Paradise" and found the experience unspeakable. (2Cor12:2-4) But wherever it is, it will be 'where' Jesus is. And how will we get there? Jesus will come to "receive" us to Himself. (vs3) We don't have to strike out blindly, 'hoping' we find it; He is going to come and fetch us there.

On what occasion is this? The Resurrection and Rapture. Remember that Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life". (Jn11:25) The "dead in Christ" will rise, and those alive at that moment will be caught up together to meet Christ in the air. (1Th4:16-17) Notice Paul uses the same words, "And thus we shall always be with the Lord" as Jesus says, "..where I am, there you may be also."

Now, we speak of not knowing 'where' Heaven might be, and Jesus says, "where I go you know, and the way you know". Is this a contradiction? Thomas thinks so, "we do not know where You go, and how can we know the way?" It is of a totally different dimension. Science fiction plays with

this concept often by depicting identical existences in different dimensional realities by shifting a temporal (time) vortex, or imagining a matter/antimatter relationship, etc. as their minds conceive of it.

But we do know there are different dimensions. There is a physical earthly dimension, and there is at least also a spiritual one. We understand this from a couple of incidents recorded in Scripture. In one case Balaam is riding his donkey to meet Balak, and the "Angel of Jehovah" stations Himself and makes Himself visible to Balaam's donkey, but not to Balaam. (Num22) Then, after Balaam has been beating on his donkey a few times, God reveals Himself to Balaam, too. On another occasion, when the town Elisha is in is surrounded by the Syrian army, Elisha prays to God to let his servant see the heavenly armies surrounding the Syrian army. (2Kg6:15-17) Indeed, there was an account told (I don't know if it's true) about during the 1967 war, that an Arab contingent suddenly went retreating at one point (I forget now, on the Golan Heights?), because they 'saw' an overwhelming number of soldiers facing them. And upon later investigation, apparently at the time, Israel had nobody stationed at that location.

So... "where" do we go? What is the "way" to get there? Well, it is not so much "where" or "way", but -WHOM-.

Jesus says, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (vs6)

Paul expresses it, "...flesh and blood is not able to inherit the kingdom of God.." (1cor15:50) Jesus was always speaking of "My kingdom" (Lk22:30), the "kingdom of Heaven" (Mt4:17,etc) When on trial Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world". (Jn18:36) The Kingdom of Heaven is not a 'place' a person can drive to, or get in a space ship and shoot-off to. If I am remembering correctly, back when the Russians were first to successfully send a man into space, supporting the atheist communist party-line, the cosmonaut is reported to have said something like, "I don't see God up here anywhere". Well, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, See here! or See there! For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Lk17:20-21)

Where the Believer goes, is to be with Christ. Where/what is that? Paul found the vision unspeakable. He says, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it dawned upon the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1Cor2:9) It is "with" Christ. What is the nature of that? We get a glimpse from the "new heavens and earth". It says of the New Jerusalem, "And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it; and the Lamb is its light." (Rev21:23) "...for the Lord God gives them light.." (Rev22:5)

So, Philip asks, "Lord, show us the Father.." (vs8) Jesus had said that they believe in the Father, to also believe in Him. But God is "One". The

disciples haven't yet quite got it. Jesus explains, essentially, 'why' they should believe in Him; because, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father.." (vs9) Remember, He had proclaimed, "before Abraham came to be, I AM" (Jn8:58) Jesus -is- God. As the writer of Hebrews explains to all those centuries? Jesus is the "express image of His essence" (Heb1:3) God the Father cannot be seen by my sinful man, "for no man shall see Me and live" (Ex33:20) We are corrupted. Flesh and blood cannot approach God's glory. Thus, Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom8:3), "sharing in" the partaking of "flesh and blood" (Heb2:14)

Thus, the reason why this passage is the primary 'key' to gaining access to God and Heaven.

When a person comes to (let's call it) Heavenly Faith, the first object of faith is the fact that God exists. (Heb11:6) Part-and-parcel with that is the fact that God came in human likeness, and came "in the flesh". (1Jn4:2-3) But they are not "two gods". God is "One". Christ is "in the Father and the Father is in [Christ]" (vs11) The "Word was -with- God", but the Word also -WAS- God. (Jn1:1) Not as some have distorted to say that the Word was -a- god. No! Jesus is -VERY- Deity.

One of the early confessions of faith was voiced by the Ethiopian, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Ac8:37)

But mere academic assent to Christ's Deity, alone, will not save. The demons also believe and "shudder". (Jacob2:19) Problem was that satan wanted Jesus to "do homage" to him. (Mt4:9) He was not content being the "anointed cherub that covers" (Ezek28:14), but wanted God's place for himself, as the "Most High". (Is14:14)

To get to the Kingdom of God, one must not search out for one's 'own destiny', but to be "in Christ" (2Cor5:17). Redemption is 'in Christ'. (Rom3:24) We are alive to God 'in Christ'. (Rom6:11) We have eternal life 'in Christ'. (Rom6:23) When we are 'in Christ' we have no condemnation. (Rom8:1) We are given the Spirit of Life 'in Christ'. (Rom8:2) We have the love of God 'in Christ'. (Rom8:39) Thus, we become one body 'in Christ'. (Rom12:5) We are workers 'in Christ'. (Rom16:9) We are approved 'in Christ'. (Rom16:10) We are sanctified 'in Christ' (1Cor1:2)

Now, if we fall asleep (die physically) 'in Christ' (1Cor15:18) we also have hope 'in Christ' (1Cor15:19) that 'in Christ' we will be made alive. (1Cor15:22) We have victory and triumph 'in Christ'. (2Cor2:14)

Is it sinking in? The way to Heaven and the Father is "in Christ". That is why True Believers are called CHRIST-ians. Just because satan and his "ministers of righteousness" 2Cor11:15 have usurped the title, does not diminish the fact that we are CHRIST-tians. Just as a bride typically takes

on the name of her husband, so, too, the bride of Christ has taken on His name, "CHRIST-ian". (Acts11:26)

But what about all these other ways? Are the Duridians, Tailons and Ativus all "in this together" to help man evolve to his greater destiny? Does man hug some trees, do some humming, have a meditative spiritual experience to elevate 'himself' to a higher plain of consciousness and spirituality?

Notice Jesus is quite certain, "NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER - except- through Me." (vs6b) That is the "narrow way" which only a "few" are finding. (Mt7:13-14) Yes, there is only "one way". There is one "only way". And yes...all others are wrong. The broad all-inclusive way, that the "many" are following, leads to "destruction". (Mt7:13) Those who proclaim those other ways Jesus calls "false prophets". (Mt7:15) Anyone bringing some "other" gospel, even if it is an "angel from heaven", is "accursed". (Gal1:8) Remember: satan is a fallen angel. He used to be the "anointed cherub that covers". That's why his demons are so convincing. Do not be fooled by them!

Yes, there is only -one- "right" way. All others are wrong. But the thing that gives us confidence in this truth is that this doctrine is not "my" doctrine. It is not what "I think". It is not "-my- opinion".

IT IS WHAT JESUS SAID.

It is not that "I think I'm right, and everybody else is wrong". No. It is that I "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts16:31), and -HE- said it. Thus, I believe it. So now, the burden of proof is on Jesus Christ.

Thus, the characteristic of Faith is, "Do we believe what Jesus said?" It is - JESUS- who has the "words of eternal life"! (Jn6:68) He is the -only- Way!

Amen!

See Also Addendum: "One Goat"

I AM: the True Vine - John 15

"I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit...I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me there is not a thing you are able to do. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is dried up." (vs1-6)

First of all, before we get into this topic, let us dispel one popular error. Notice exactly 'who' the "Vine" is. It is -NOT- "Israel". There are many of the Hebrew Roots movement that wish people to think that the "Church" is grafted -into- 'Israel'. They distort Romans ch11 to come up with this, where Paul speaks of the "wild" branches being "grafted in". (Rom11:17) If they would read that verse carefully, they would see that the wild branches are grafted "in -among-" the natural branches; not "-into-" them. But both the natural and wild branches are grafted into Jesus Christ; as Paul also explains how the two have been brought to God through the death of Christ. (Eph2:13-16) Notice that Jesus proclaims, "I am the Root and Offspring of David.." (Rev22:16) It is not -Hebrew- "roots", but -Jesus- THE ROOT. Israel rejected Jesus in the Wilderness (1Cor10:4-5), as they continued to do when they "crucified the Lord of Glory" (1Cor2:8), and martyred His disciple, Stephen (Ac7:51)

Thus, both Israel and the Church are "branches" of the True Vine, which is Jesus Christ. He says to His disciples, "I am the vine, you are the branches."

Now, let's also dispel another popular false (reformation?) doctrine. Notice He says that every branch that does not bear fruit the Father "takes away" (vs2); a branch that is not abiding is "cast out..and is dried up..thrown into the fire and...burned." (vs6) If it was a branch, that indicates an origin with Life; at one point it was 'attached' to the vine, sprouted, and grew. Dead branches do not appear out of thin air that didn't first originate from the parent plant, with "life". We are not going to say any more on this at this time that we haven't said at other times, except, to exhort the reader to consider how this differs from the doctrine with the popular label: Once Saved, Always Saved.

Jesus speaks of -bearing- fruit. Notice that the branch does not "produce" the fruit. There are many who call themselves "Christian" who are busy being "soul-winners", and when they have a convert -they- boast in their -own- accomplishments, not remembering that Jesus said that no one comes to Christ unless the Father "draws" them. (Jn6:44) A sinner CANNOT BE SAVED, unless they have met Jesus Christ. Branches do not beget branches; they are to bear fruit. Many so-called soul-winners only beget more "baptists" (or whatever the congregation's name); but they are not bearing fruit. In a recent e-mail somebody was asking about some

of these and their prevailing spirit (attitudes), noticing that, while they proclaim "???-onlyism", that they are typically lacking in the "fruits of the Spirit", those things mentioned: Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc... (Gal5:22-23) They proclaim adherence to a certain flawed translation, but don't even -obey- the translation they thump. We'll come back to this matter of 'obedience' in a moment.

When Jesus speaks of bearing fruit, what are some of the things an orchardist does? Well, certainly, there needs to be water and nourishment for growth. But what else? -Pruning- is necessary. Why?

I'm no expert in these things, but understand some basic concepts; although, don't necessarily have expertise when it comes to my own apple tree. This tree was bought 12-13 years ago, with 5 different varieties of apples grafted into one trunk; planted in the back yard. This past year, for the first time, it was absolutely -loaded-. During blossom time, the branches were utterly -covered- with blossoms, all lined up and down all the branches. And this year, for a change, it seemed like -all- the blossoms developed into apples. As the apples grew, I knew two things: 1) if I let them -all- grow, none would get very big; and 2) if I let them -all- grow, the weight would break all the branches off the tree. Now, not really knowing proper pruning technique, I did what I figured was necessary, clipping away here-and-there, over half the growth...trying to figure out what could grow, and still have the branches be able to carry the weight. And the apples came out delicious and tasty. I'd go pick the corn, tomato, zucchini for supper...and eat a fresh-picked apple for the appetizer. And still, there were more apples than I could handle...and since my neighbors on either side were not really 'into' apples to share with them, the birds and worms also got their 'fair share'.

Now, there's lots of people who think that "bearing fruit" consists of busying themselves in huge gigantic 'programs'. They go after the "hundreds, thousands and millions". But if their fruit were examined, one finds that most of their so-called 'converts' are not really saved. They 'went forward' at a Billy Graham crusade, or 'became a member' of that soul-winning Baptist church. Other congregations hire pastors to help them "grow-a-church", and so they make big 'splashes' into their communities, have mega-programs, and grow mega-churches. But how many of their members are actually saved?

When a fruit-bearing tree or vine is not pruned, it will grow wildly all over the place, sending out shoots with -many- leaves, growing big and tall, looking impressive...but if it is not pruned, those mighty, impressive-looking branches will break off...and then, what of that fruit? It is cut away and thrown into the fire. Now, when pruning is done, at least when I do it, what remains looks not impressive at all. All that 'glory' is gone. It appears to be a bit 'spindly'. Oh, but let me tell you, those apples were truly juicy yummy! (From one for whom, for years, fresh apples have been a source of allergic reaction.)

Remember Jesus' words; people typically simply don't understand them: "...wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many entering in through it. Because narrow is the gate and distressing is the way which leads unto life, and there are -FEW- who find it." (Mt7:13-14)

Now, what is involved in bearing fruit? "Abiding" in the vine; submitting to the "pruning" of the Father. In practical terms, this involves 'obedience'. Getting rid of all the flash and pizzazz, and allowing God to make of us that which is to His purpose and liking. I didn't really know what I was doing when I pruned the apple tree...but the fruit was yummy. Unlike me, God actually -knows- what He is doing when He prunes. He prunes away all the excess and dead twigs; which may help us understand better how "all things work together for good to those who LOVE God.." (Rom8:28)

Aaah yes..."love". What does Jesus say about love? The Father -loves- the Son, and Jesus also -loves- us. Therefore, what? "...abide in My love" (vs9) If we are abiding in the Vine, and submitting to the Father's pruning, by that very position, we are also abiding in His love, because "God -is- love". (1Jn4:8,16)

So now, 'how' do we continue abiding in Christ? How do we demonstrate our love? How did God demonstrate His love for us? "...Christ died for us." (Rom5:8b) Again, how do we demonstrate our love for Christ? Are you ready for this? Most people don't like this next little bit...

"If you keep My commandments, you will continue in My love..." (vs10) And Jesus has given us the example to follow in this, "...just as I have kept My Father's commandments and continue in His love."

Is not -love- a 'sentiment'? As I've heard Oprah proclaim, if you "-feel- love in your heart"? You get all warm and fuzzy all over, empty your mind, ask to be 'spirit-filled' and that 'feeling' that comes over you is so-called "God's love"...and you simply go spread the -feeling-?

No! LOVE is -OBEDIENCE-. These people continually want Jesus to "fill" them, but they do not obey Him. Notice how it works, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him." (14:23) In ch16 He is going to explain how this comes through the Holy Spirit.

Do you want God's presence in your life? Then OBEY Him. Do you say you "love" Him? Then OBEY Him. If you claim to love Him, but insist on dabbling in the various "doctrines of demons" (1Tm4:1), YOU ARE A LIAR. Is that -my- opinion? "He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (1Jn2:4)

Now, if you are True, and obedient, then, and only then, is the following true: "If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall happen unto you." (vs7) If we are in Him, and our own hearts, minds and desires are molded by His indwelling Word, then, the only things we will ask for will be "according to His will" (1Jn5:14), and thus, He will hear us; because with this abiding, "we have the mind of Christ" (1Cor2:16). This is something those who "name-and-claim" have no clue about, because they are of different spirits. They are not part of The Vine, Jesus Christ.

But our Lord has given us assignments: He has given us His 'joy'. And He has given us His Word in order that our joy may be 'full'. (vs11) He also commands us to "love one another". (vs12) This love is of the sort that will "lay down one's life for his friends". (vs13) But also, with this relationship of "abiding" is also a new thing: Friendship with Jesus. (vs15) After all, if we are part of His "body" (1Cor12:27, Eph4:12), we are His "bride". (Eph5) Yes, we are His servants, but we are -also- more. Our obedience is not necessarily just out of 'duty', but from love. The master-slave relationship includes a measure of "fear", where obedience is -required-. But where there is fear, there is not "perfect love". Such a relationship is not an "abiding". There is a distance. But as we abide in Christ and know His love, we love in return, and "perfect love casts out fear". (1Jn4:18)

So, when we obey His commandments, we are not doing so out of duty and fear, but because of love we WANT TO do His will. However, having said this, this is not license to live any ol' way we like. Certainly we can opt to -not- obey Him. But that is not grace. Such disobedience actually indicates (is a gauge of) our true heart, that we actually are not joined to the Vine; because if we are, we keep His commandments. By 'nature' dogs bark, ducks quack, cars drive down the road, airplanes fly; and Believers obey Christ... and sinners disobey. If a person is abiding in Christ, it is no longer "his nature to sin, because he has been born of God." (1Jn3:9)

Thus, as branches, His desire is for us to "bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.." (vs16) That we abide in Christ, and 'remain' with Christ; not being all cluttered up such that the Father needs to prune us, cutting away what looks like fruit but due to the clutter would never grow to maturation, but would "weigh down" the branch with "sins" (Heb12:1-2), with the possibility that the branch might break off. Fruit that remains: both of the branch, and also what the branch bears; growing to maturity and becoming juicy, crisp 'apples' that are 'yummy' to the taste.

"For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life." (2Cor2:15-16)

See Also Addendum: Vines

The World's Hate - John 15

"These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before you." (15:17-18)

Back when this series from the Gospel of John began, a year and a half ago, I could never have guessed that this lesson would end up being timed so perfectly, coordinating with 'current' world events. This past Thursday, while the US was celebrating "Thanksgiving", the Israeli people were electing a leader who wishes to go contrary to God's Law regarding their God-given land, instead of the man who boldly proclaims that Israel cannot negotiate with terrorists, nor give them a 'nation' within Israel to further their terrorism. So it seems that God allowed Israel's enemies to coordinate several multiple, simultaneous attacks against Israel.

Currently, the forces of hate are situated -globally-. Islamic Jihad (holy war) against Israel and anything that smacks of being so-called "Christian". Islam hates Israel. Islam hates Christians. And why is this so? Because they hate Jesus Christ; and ultimately, God the Father, Himself.

Notice the contrast of the two opening verses. Jesus commands His disciples to "love one another". In fact, the disciple-of-love later comments, "By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1Jn2:3) Jesus commanded that His followers love one another. Now if a person claims to be a follower of God, but "hates his brother" he "is in darkness until now." (1Jn2:9) By definition, "darkness" means "unsaved". And when (true) [C]hristian brethren are being obedient to God, keeping His commandments, and also loving one another; if there are others who are attacking, persecuting and martyring Christ's followers, by that very -disagreement- of their holding to different beliefs and doctrines, they prove themselves to not be of God. John says it this way, "We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (1Jn4:6)

However, there is an even more-sinister element that hates God. While Islam openly, defiantly hates God; the element that is even more dangerous than Islam is that which -calls- itself "Christian", but is not. It is that which proclaims the doctrine of "Tolerance". They look at Islam (the religion of hate, that goes around massacring people by the hundreds and thousands, just simply for not being Muslim) and call it (as our US president does) a "peaceful" religion. On the other hand, they look at (true) Christians who seek to "be at peace with all men" (Rom12:18), but also don't desire to see sinners lost, so faithfully proclaim God's "acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk4:19) of Salvation through Jesus Christ, refusing to be tainted by the world's filth; but even though (true) Christians don't lay a hand of animosity upon anyone, their words of God's love through Jesus Christ and of one's desire to live holy separated lives unto the One who

"loved us and gave Himself for us" (Eph5:2)... such a life is called, by them, "hate".

Jesus in this passage speaks of "the world". (vs19) It's real easy for (true) Believers to look at Islam and know that it is part of "the world". It is easy to see those scoffers we work next to at our jobs, listening to them talk about their drunken orgies and everything else perverse that comprises their lives, and know they are of "the world". It is easy to flip channels on the TV, with all its perversities, and know it's of "the world".

But equally part of "the world" is that which calls itself "christian", but is not. If they are not "in Christ" (2Cor5:17), they are not saved. Anyone who is not saved is of "the world". For all their "christian" labels, and their speaking to (true) Believers about being our "brothers"... THEY ARE NOT. They are of "THE WORLD". But it rips our emotions out dealing with them, because for everything, they have the -appearance-, at first glance, of being "[C]hristian". But Jesus exhorts, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." (Jn7:24)

I know that many of you (this article is more -to- 'True' Christians this month) have struggled with this. It is appropriate for me to write this article, because I have first-hand experience. I dare say that, throughout my lifetime, any 'persecution' I experienced came predominantly from that which had the label "Christian". Around unbelievers I might get into discussions of "religious" things, or fellow-workers might good-naturedly give me ribbings over my not joining them in their after-work bar-scene activities, or take notice that I didn't join in, in their dirty stories, etc. But they would not politic me out of something, or meet me to beat me up, or any of the things one might associate with "persecution". The persecution I have experienced has pretty much 'all' been in "the church".

So, let's look at what Jesus says. Also, I really believe the chapter demarcation for "ch16" is unfortunate, because the first few verses of ch16 are actually, really, still part of the discussion which ends ch15. Let's continue...

What Jesus said in these verses -already- happened back during the 1st century after Jesus returned to the Father. But I think we will readily understand that the same happens today. When Jesus speaks of "synagogue" (16:2), I think we can plug in the word "church" for today.

First of all let us understand Jesus' love for His followers. He does not wish for us to "stumble". (16:1) All this talk about hate and persecution is not very "uplifting" is it. But Paul, also, was busy "[warning] everyone night and day with tears". (Ac20:31) Jesus' -love- is not manifest to us by continually saying to us, "I love you, I love you, I love you". No. His love gives us direction, warning and encouragement... because He knows just how perverse this world is. He knows just how deceitful satan and his pretend

"ministers of righteousness" are. (2Cor11:13-15) And He does not wish us to "stumble".

Thus... He has told us -before- the persecution comes. He does not do like some parents do, when they 'lie' to their child about to get a shot, "Oh, it won't hurt at all"...and then the needle sticks, and it 'hurts'..."Waaaaaa!!" He does as a parent should, "It's going to hurt a little. But it won't be too bad. It will be over with before you know it. Be brave."

Jesus says, "But these things I have told you, that WHEN IT COMES, you may REMEMBER that I told you of them.." (16:4) The things of this lesson Jesus -KNEW- would be part of our existence as Believers in this world.

And -WHERE-, does Jesus say, does the persecution come from? "They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.." (16:2)

When the early Church was persecuted and scattered away from Jerusalem, where did the persecution come from? The Jews. The very same ones, the temple -leaders-, who had crucified Jesus. We won't look up all the references now, but when Paul was persecuted, stoned and beaten, -who- was doing all that? The Jews. Whatever gentiles might have gotten into the act usually only did so as part of the mob, which the -Jews- stirred up. Rome didn't get into the act until quite a few years later. And then, once Israel was dispersed, where did most persecution come from? The Roman -church-. The "inquisitions" were carried out by the -church-. Now, today, that the 'church' of Rome has adopted a more 'tolerant' stance, where does persecution for the True Believer come from? The -church-...only, now, it is not necessarily headquartered in Rome. It is the church that sings worship songs, preaches from the Bible, and has a worldly hierarchical organization; and has been inviting the world into its meetings for so many years, that a person can no longer easily distinguish who is saved, and who is not. Just as Israel had their "mixed multitude" (Ex12:38, Num11:4) from Egypt in their ranks, always stirring up rebellion against God, they have not been obedient to "...separate all the mixed multitude from Israel.." (Neh13:3) But the mixed multitude participates, leads in worship; and after they've been there awhile, they also become teachers and preachers. In other words, the fox has put on some 'feathers' and is guarding the hen-house! The fox has let other foxes in, and they have all put on 'feathers', and so, when the foxes lunge at the -real-chickens, the chickens don't understand the attacks.

What are you trying to say? That only -you- are a true 'chicken', and we are not? Look at all our feathers! Do we not flap our wings and cluck? How can you say we are not chickens? How can all-these-feathers be so wrong, and -only- 'you' be right? And one-by-one, chicken after chicken "stumbles" into the mouth of the devouring fox, and as the fox grows, they beget more foxes (foxes do not lay eggs to hatch chicks! And what eggs the chickens lay, the foxes gobble them up, too!), and the chickens

become dwindled down to nothing. But, the foxes are flapping their feathers, and clucking "offering God service". (16:2b) And the head-fox tells all the pups that they must be on a campaign. The only way they can get their feathers to flap, is to "serve God" by killing the chickens and plucking their feathers for themselves. But, they are FOXES!

So, now that we have identified the 'source', what is the nature of the hate, and 'why' does it come? They are -of- "the world". The believer is -not- of the world. Jesus was not of the world. He said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world.." (18:36) The believer's "citizenship is in Heaven". (Php3:20) We are "...foreigners and pilgrims on the earth". (Heb11:13) Like the words of that old song: "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through; my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue...and I can't feel at home in this world anymore.."

Why does the so-called 'church' persecute (true) Christians? Because they persecuted Christ. They crucified Him. Jesus is our "Master". When armies fight, the individual combatants are not necessarily fighting the 'individuals' of the opposing army; but the militaries are fighting on behalf of their respective commanders-in-chief, and the governments they represent. During the last two World Wars, at X-mass time, when they would momentarily lay down arms, groups of individuals from opposing sides would get together to celebrate. And even today, years after those conflicts have been long-since-over, individual combatants have been known to meet each other in "friendship". But in a military sense, they were enemies, because the governments over them, giving the orders, were at enmity with each other. In the same way, when the world persecutes Christians, it is not the 'individuals' with whom they are at odds. It is Jesus Christ. And it is not 'they' who are at odds with Christ; it is the devil, who is "as their father". (Jn8:44) When a person takes up allegiance under a master, by definition, they also take upon themselves everything that master represents. If they follow satan, they take upon themselves satan's hate for Jesus Christ; and they make war with the woman's "seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." (Rev12:17)

The 'authority' for John's words which we quoted earlier, "He who knows God, hears us.." (1Jn4:6) comes from Jesus: "If they kept My Word, they will keep yours also." (15:20) When they taunt, "So you think that little -lone- YOU is right, and ALL-OF-US are wrong?" they don't understand the authority for the -truth- the 'lone' individual is proclaiming, when countering their false doctrines and practice. It is not -me- saying this, 'against' all-of-you... it is -Jesus- saying it. Jesus is my Master, and I am His servant... I am merely giving His Words. You may have more 'numbers' on your side of 'the world', but I am "with Jesus". (Ac4:13)

If you, as a (true) Believer, stick to God's Word, and 'they' oppose you, they are not opposing -you-, but Jesus. And by this, also, you can know

that they are not of God. And for all their words of "love" and "tolerance", they are in reality proving that they "hate you". (15:19)

And consider this most interesting dichotomy: Those who proclaim most vehemently and vociferously the doctrine of "TOLERANCE", -themselves- are MOST -[IN]TOLERANT- when it comes to (true) Christians, and God's Word. Those who repeatedly condemn so-called "hate speech", themselves -HATE- (true) Christians. When Christians proclaim God's -love- in Salvation, they -hate- the Christian. Why? Because they -hate- Jesus Christ. And, while they speak of "god" all the time, in truth, their hate for Jesus Christ is actually also a hate for God. "He who hates Me hates My Father also." (15:23)

Is there anything that can be done to "win" the 'world' of the 'church'? Do you wonder -why- these 'christians' are attacking you? Are they starting to 'get-to' you, such that you are beginning to doubt God's Word that you -know- in your heart? They call you "brothers", trying to create a camaraderie with you, to say that you and they are the 'same'; therefore you should love and tolerate them, and accept their false doctrines.

Just remember, Dear Saint (Rom1:7) in Jesus Christ: You and they are -NOT- the same. They are -NOT- your "brothers". The fact that they proclaim an "other gospel" (Gal1:8-9) makes them "accursed". They do not tolerate your steadfastness to God's Word -because- "they do not know Him who sent [Christ]". (15:21) They may call themselves "brothers" with you, but they are NOT SAVED. That's why they do not tolerate the Biblical doctrines to which you cling; and instead call it "judgmental" and "hateful". If they were, they would be in agreement with you, because there is only "one Spirit" (Eph4:4) Who gave the Scriptures (2Pt1:21) "once for all" (Ju1:3) who "guides" us "into all Truth". (Jn16:13) So, if they don't have this same Holy Spirit you do, but a different spirit by which they proclaim "other" doctrines, by definition, they do not belong to God. (Rom8:9)

Can they be won for Christ? Very rarely! If they have heard God's Truth, and then go get "spirit-filled" with satan's demons, "..the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be unto this wicked generation." (Mt12:45) And Jesus says, "..but now they have no excuse for their sin." (15:22)

There are many who say they are staying "in" the system, to try to be a "witness" to them, to win them. It won't likely happen. What is more likely is that they will drag you down with them into compromise. Remember, they are NOT SAVED. And Paul is quite clear about a Believer's relationship with someone who -claims- to be "Christian", but is like the devil: "...now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother...not even to eat with such a person.." (1Cor5:11) Do not tolerate them, and engage in friendly 'dialogue' with them, nor consent to "fellowship" with them. They are of the world, but pretend to be "christian". They are of the worst sort! The rest of the world may not know God's

Word, and are in "ignorance" for which "God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.." (Ac17:30)

But for those who have God's Word, and rebel, Paul declared to the Jews: "Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, that they should not see with their eyes nor hear with their ears, that they should not understand with their hearts and turn, and I should heal them. Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" (Ac28:27-28)

And for Believers who find themselves in the midst of these unbelievers, calling themselves "church", but who are not saved, the Word is clear:

"Therefore, Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." (2Cor6:17) "Come out of her, my people, so that you not share in her sins, and so that you not receive of her plagues" (Rev18:4)

If your experience is at all like some of mine have been, when you come out of them, it will be with sparks. It will be because there were Scriptural differences: They were being disobedient, and you were wanting to be faithful...and so, you will have been proclaiming God's Word, God's Truth to them. This is what Jesus said about those who truly have God's Holy Spirit...

"..the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness concerning Me. And you also will bear witness, because you are with Me from the beginning." (15:26-27)

The Spirit of Truth - John 16

"However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all Truth; for He will not speak things originating from Himself, but whatever He hears He will speak.." (vs13)

This is, perhaps, the #1 key verse regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit today. If people would compare their theologies to this one verse, it is likely that 90% of today's errors regarding spiritual matters would disappear. In this passage Jesus explains the Holy Spirit's ministry. Any theology and teaching -must- be in agreement with this passage, or it is in error.

First of all, Jesus explains to the disciples that He is leaving for awhile. He has already said He is going "to prepare a place" (14:2), and that He is coming back to "receive" the Believers to Himself. (14:3) In 14:18 He also, however, encourages them that He is not leaving them high-n-dry as "orphans" while He is gone, but that He is "coming". He explains that "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things.." (14:26) Now, here, in this passage He explains how that is to happen, and what the Spirit's ministry is.

First of all, we should understand that the Spirit's ministry is not limited to Believers. There is one theology that teaches that a person is saved, and then they must 'pray' to receive the Holy Spirit. And so, if any sort of spiritual activity is observed, the person in whom such activity is visible is, thus, presumed to be a "Christian".

Thus, understand at the outset, that -all- Christians have the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary to 'pray' for a special 'anointing'. When a person is saved, they are "born of the Spirit" (Jn3:6, Gal5:25, etc); and if a person is lacking God's Holy Spirit, Scripture is quite clear: such a person "is not His". (Rom8:9) They are not saved. Those groups that spend their time praying for "the spirit" to anoint/fill them? They are not saved. They are not Christians. (by definition)

On the other hand, if you see God's Holy Spirit working in someone's life, that does not say they -are- saved, either. The Holy Spirit's work is not limited to Believers. Back around Noah's time it is recorded, God saying, "My Spirit shall not continually strive with man, for indeed it is in flesh to sin.." (Gen6:3) Jesus informs us that part of the Spirit's work is that of "convicting the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment". (vs8)

Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.." (6:44) However, if "no one has seen God" (1:18), how can Jesus' statement be true? Because God "is Spirit". (4:24) In response to recent considerations about "testing" those claiming to be saved, prior to accepting them into Christian service, one subscriber shared how when

certain 'strangers' came to their home that they expressed something of the order, "The Spirit of the Lord is in this place!" Apparently these 'strangers' were also Believers. Believers can know each other by the "witness" of the Spirit. (Rom8:16) And it is the same Spirit who convicts the unbeliever; as the subscriber also said that some can't leave their home fast enough.

The Holy Spirit gives a "bond" between Believers, and also provides the 'pepper spray' that chases them away when they are not. When a Believer is around unbelievers, without a word being spoken, often the unbelievers will accuse the Believer of "criticizing" and "judging" them. Remember, the Believer hasn't said a word. Who is it 'judging' them? The Holy Spirit, into their -own- conscience. The Holy Spirit "convicts" the sinner. When God 'draws' a sinner to Christ, it is through the Holy Spirit convicting the sinner of his sin; and thus, of their need to come to Christ for forgiveness.

And just as Believers can know each other through the Holy Spirit, the world also knows the Believer through the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit convicts them of sin, He also convicts them of what is righteous. One reason today's ecumenism and one-world religion accepts some denominations, and not other small-obscure groups, is because they know through the Spirit's conviction what is sin and what is righteous.

And thus, they also -know- the judgment that is due them. Why do you suppose certain elements are so 'militant' to promote their abortion and gay agendas? Because they actually -know- they are sinful, but have jaded themselves against God's judgment; they have deliberately "seared" their consciences. (1Tm4:2) And the only way they can continue on against their conscience is to "kick against the goads". (Ac9:5) And the only way they can do that and not feel the "pain" is to mind-numbingly turn off their consciences, and "[cry] out with a loud voice, [stop] their ears, and [run] at [them] with one accord.." (Ac7:57) like they did when they martyred Stephen.

However, on the other hand, just because something "spiritual" might be in evidence, does not guarantee that it is -God's- Holy Spirit, either. Just as "many antichrists have risen up" (1Jn2:18), there are also "deceiving spirits" who proclaim "doctrines of demons". (1Tim4:1) And they appear "as ministers of righteousness". (2Cor11:15)

And while writing this, as I happened to take a little break right 'here' to go do a little shopping, one of my stops was to get some 2003 calendars. (After the holidays they are 50% off.) As I was browsing the various categories (with their pictures), there was one with the title, "Places of the Spirit". The pictures had to do with ancient ruins dealing with Greek mythology, oriental pagoda, structures from India... along with a few hut-like structures from central African regions, and things dealing with overt witchcraft. And none of them even hinted at any pretenses towards "Christianity". And yet they were invoking the term, "spirit". So, yes, God is

Spirit; but God's enemy works in the realm of the spiritual, also. They are the forces of "...spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies.." (Eph6:12)

So how does one discern between the demons, and God's Holy Spirit? Jesus explains the Holy Spirit. If what you see is not like Jesus' description of the Holy Spirit, you can be certain it is Satan's counterfeit.

First of all, we know one thing from His name, "Spirit of Truth". (vs13) If anything comes from God, such as Jesus Christ, it is characterized by "grace and -TRUTH-". (Jn1:14,17) If you see a spirit characterized by falsehood and lies, you know it is not from God; it comes from the "father" of lies (Jn8:44), Satan.

One surprising characteristic of charismania and cults is that they lie. Cults lie to recruit their members. They either tell out-and-out lies, or withhold part of the truth (same thing). Just like Islam lies, claiming to be a "peaceful" religion, when in fact, their Koran teaches warfare. Quite often I have found, and others have confirmed it from their experiences, that charismania is one of the 'worst' in this. They will initiate contact with a Believer, and if the Believer suspects something is not quite right with them, and -asks- whether or not they are 'charismatic', quite often they will lie, saying they are not; when, in fact they are. They know the -truth-, and they also know that if they approach a knowledgeable Believer straight up-front, they know they will be rejected. So, in order to 'infiltrate', they -LIE-, claiming to NOT be "charismatic", trying to gain a foot-hold of camaraderie, so that they can, then, cleverly slip in their charismatic doctrines to 'wear down' the Believer. Typically, then, once discovered, they become angry and will often resort to open blasphemy, slander and other verbal abuse.

Whatever the form of the group that you confront, if they are 'secretive' about their beliefs, that is another form of lying. If you cannot get them to 'talk' and 'tell' you their beliefs, but you must, rather, 'go' hear their -guru-...that is not how God works. He says, "For this commandment which I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you to understand, nor is it far off. It is not in the heavens, for you to think: Who shall ascend into the heavens for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it? Nor is it beyond the sea, for you to think: Who shall go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it? But the Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." (De30:11-14) God's Spirit is -TRUTHFUL- and tells you up-front what is of God.

Next: the Holy Spirit does not create "new things". He does "not speak things -ORIGINATING- from Himself.." (vs13) And right here, this eliminates a whopping big percentage of what goes on today. The claim by many is that they are seeing visions and getting "spirit-filled" with "NEW REVELATIONS" (new truths) that their so-called "spirit" is generating. That is not from God! The Holy Spirit does not -originate- new things.

But rather: the Holy Spirit speaks "whatever He hears" (vs13) The Spirit is a messenger. In the past we have likened Him to the nervous system. Christ is the "Head" of the body, and Believers are "members". (Eph1:22-23, 5:23, Col1:18, 2:19) The Holy Spirit is the nervous system relaying messages from the Head to the Body Members, and back. And the reason Body Members know each other to be 'part' of the Body, having the "witness" (Rom8:16), is through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit "makes known to you" from Christ (vs14), and our prayers return to Christ through the Spirit. (Rom8:26-27)

So, when we hear -a- spirit speaking to our spirit, how do we know if it is the Holy Spirit, or if it is a demon? Does it present the Word to us? Remember that Jesus is called the "Word". That the Word is, -very- 'God'. (Jn1:1) Jesus said that the Spirit would take of Him (Jesus) and relay it to us. We also know that God's Word "stands firm in the heavens". (Ps119:89) The "faith" (what we believe) was "once for all delivered to the saints" (Ju3), and that if anybody (including an angel from heaven) were to come proclaiming something different, they are "accursed". (Gal1:8-9) Thus, what is God's "solid foundation" which "stands firm"? (2Tim2:19) The "Holy Scriptures" which were "breathed by God" (2Tim3:14-17), as the Holy Spirit "propelled along" the "holy men of God" (2Pt1:21) who penned the words on paper.

You see, it's kind of like giving your fingerprint as you sign up for something, and then later come back to act on that account: are you -really- who you say you are? How will the other person know? When you produce your finger, and they match your print with what they have on record. It's like the mystery saga where some pendant, art object or playing card is torn. One person takes one half, the other the other; and they go their ways and are separated for a period of time. Then at some future date when the mystery is being resolved, and the one person is sending their representative, they bestow their half to the messenger. The parties meeting in some secret place have never seen each other before, but when they meet, they produce their own individual "half" of that torn object...and they know each other is 'authentic' when the two halves 'match'.

However, you see, with the Holy Spirit the match is even closer... He is like the fingerprint. The Holy Spirit gave the words to 'write' the Scriptures. Thus, He knows what He wrote. If He whispers to your heart through His "anointing" (1Jn2:27), that 'whisper' is going to tell your heart the same thing written in the Scriptures. If that 'spirit' whispering in your ear tells you something -different- than what the Holy Spirit breathed into the Scriptures, you -know- WITH CERTAINTY that it is NOT -GOD's- Holy Spirit... but is a demon of satan.

When a Believer knows God's Word, and another person comes along claiming to be a "Christian", but is in disagreement with God's Word... they

are not in agreement with 'you' (and your indwelling Holy Spirit), you - know- they are of another spirit.

"We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error." (1Jn4:6)

They are of the "spirit of error", and the Believer is of the "Spirit of Truth".

The Lord's Prayer: Part I - John 17:1-8

Re: Glorifying the Son and Father

"Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to Heaven, and says: Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.." (vs1)

When all is said and done, when creation looks back at this period of time in human history on this earth, when this creation has been burned up and those who are obedient to God are in His presence for eternity, what will have been the #1 primary objective to it all?

The exaltation and glory of God the Father.

Believers are repeatedly exhorted to "..do all to the glory of God." (1Cor10:31) In 'that' Day, even those who rejected God will give glory, as they bow the knee, confessing "..that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father". (Php2:11) And ultimately, when all is said and done, even the glory that Jesus receives throughout what Scripture calls the "Day of the Lord", Jesus will give back to the Father: "Now when everything is subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who subjected everything under Him, that God may be everything in all things." (1cor15:28)

But right 'now', on the way to the cross, Jesus prays, "glorify Your Son". John speaks several times of Jesus' death and resurrection as His being "glorified". (7:39, 12:16, etc) And Jesus speaks of it, also. (12:23, 13:31, etc)

Oh, but...the cross was such a dastardly deed perpetrated upon His person. He was beaten up, had his hair plucked out, thorn spikes gouged into His scalp, whipped to where the flesh would have been hanging in shreds, nailed to the cross with spikes the size of railroad spikes. How can -THAT- be called "Glory"? as the prophet proclaims, ".. He has no form nor splendor that we should regard Him, nor anything spectacular that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men; a Man of pain, and knowing infirmity; a hiding of faces; being despised, we have esteemed Him not." (Is53:2-3) ?

Because, it is because of His humbling Himself to that cross, in order to take away the sin of the world (1:29), that God exalted Him with a name that is above every other name, for which reason "every knee shall bow". And then, He did not remain in death. He did not "see corruption" (Ps16:10, Ac2:27), but "God raised Him from the dead.." (Ac3:15, 13:30) He was victorious over the "sting of death" by paying the penalty which the Law required (1Cor15:55-56). The Law required "death" as the "wages of sin"; but Jesus triumphed over sin and death by rising from the dead; thus

is possible: "...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom6:23) Where Adam and Eve sinned, and were banned from the Tree of Life (Gen3:22-24), Jesus provided that Life by giving His own. That "multitude which no one was able to number" who were "washed in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev7:9,14)... the glory of their eternal life comes from Jesus Christ.

This is what Jesus is praying, as, scarcely in a few minutes He will be 'captured', and the next day crucified.

Now consider for a moment: When people speak of "salvation", what is the basis for salvation? Most people say things like, "...having a 'relationship' with Jesus..." And indeed, salvation comes by no other (than Jesus), "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men that is required for us to be saved." (Ac4:10,12)

But what does Jesus say? Jesus is praying to the Father and says, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God..." See to whom Jesus gives the preeminence? The Father. And then, "...and Jesus Christ whom You sent." (vs3) Who is the greater? The one sent? Or the one sending? The one sending. It was God (the Father) who is recorded as having "loved the world" that He "sent" His Son. (Jn3:16) Jesus continually said, "I always do those things that please Him". (Jn8:29) The things Jesus spoke and taught? "I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him." (8:26) Jesus was the manifestation of God's "essence" (Heb1:3), as He says to Philip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father..." (14:9)

Our judgment is before the Father, and it is Jesus who is the "Mediator" between God and man. (1Tim2:5) And notice that the atonement Jesus makes available was not provided only for a "limited" number of people (there is a segment of post-Reformation theology, a "doctrine of demons" 1Tm4:1, that proclaims what they call, "limited atonement": that Jesus' death was only for those that God had gone along, eeny meeny minee moh, I picked you, you and you, and the rest of you, tough luck, Jesus didn't die for you!); but Jesus' propitiatory work is for sins, "not for ours (Believers) only but also for the whole world." (1Jn2:1-2) ..if only they will repent "towards God (the Father)" (Ac20:21) and "receive" Christ. (Jn1:12) Remember, the verse says, "God so loved the -WORLD-..." not some limited 'elect' few. (Jn3:16) But just because God loved the world, doesn't mean the whole world will be saved (like another false doctrine that some proclaim called, "Ultimate Restoration", wherein they think to suggest that in the end, it doesn't matter...all will be saved because God will "restore" them, even though they didn't repent), because not the whole world is "believing into the Son", but is "disobedient"; thus the "wrath of God abides on [them]" (Jn3:36)

Now notice the 'partnership' between the Father and Son with regard to salvation. On another occasion Jesus speaks (understanding that in salvation one "confesses with the mouth the Lord Jesus" -Rom10:9-10):

"Therefore whoever shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father in Heaven." (Mt10:32) "...and before the angels of God" (Lk12:8) And in the next section (next month) He speaks of the Believers' preservation.

But Jesus did not go and 'get them' on His own. They were given to Him by the Father: "...the men whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your Word." (vs6) As Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him..." (Jn6:44)

The glory to the Father and Son is all related to redemption. The "Lamb" was proclaimed "worthy" because He had "...redeemed us to God by [His] blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation..." (Rev5:9) Thus it is proclaimed, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Rev5:13)

Notice that hand-in-hand with the glory of the Father and the Son is the "eternal life" the Son gives to those given to Him by the Father. (vs2) Thus, what is Christ's 'trophy' of His victory over sin and death? The CHURCH. As Christ is "seated at the Father's right hand", all rule and authority was given to him related to the "Church". The Church, of which Christ is the "head", is the "fullness of Him who fills all things in all..." (Eph1:20-23) Who is that? The Father. Did you get that? We observed this in the Ephesians series: Jesus, bringing the Church to the Father, is part of God's glory; that which brings honor and glory to Him before all creation. The Church is His "fullness"...that which makes Him "complete".

Let's also observe a couple other things in order:

Notice Jesus' prior existence. John was proclaiming that, even though he (John) was going before Jesus, to introduce Him to the world and prepare His way, and we know that John was born six months prior to Jesus, John said, "He who arrives after me appeared in history before me, for He existed before me." (1:15) Here, Jesus speaks of the glory He had "before the world existed". (vs5) He is, indeed, Deity.

But 'now' He has come to the conclusion of His earthly mission: "I have finished the work which You gave Me to do." (vs4) As Paul was nearing the end of his earthly life, he was of such a communion with God that he could also say with certainty, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." (2Tm4:7) What was Jesus' ministry? "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world."

And what was the result of His work? "They have kept Your Word." (vs6b) He did not rejoice before the Father that His disciples were 'dialoguing' and tearing down those pesky 'walls' of doctrine. But they were KEEPING Doctrine. Keep this in mind for next month's section about the "oneness"

with one another and God. (vs21) Unity amongst fellow-believers and with God has as its foundation God's Word; Doctrine. And keeping God's Word (Doctrine) is the basis for "glorifying" the Father and the Son. You want to glorify God? Keep His Word.

But you see, this -keeping- of God's Word is not a matter of "legalism". A keeping of lists of dos and donts. God's Word is not something like rule books, and traffic signs; but God's Word is something to be "received". (vs8) Israel had Moses' Law, which, if they broke commandments, for many infractions they were stoned to death. It was a Law unto death. (Rom7:5,etc) And when Israel was not of such a heart as to be obedient to God, God's promise for Israel's future was that He would "write" His law into their "hearts". (Jer31:33) But regarding Jesus' followers, those who eventually came to be called "CHRIST-ians", their characteristic is that they "keep" God's Words, not because they are forced to; but to them God's Word is the "law of liberty" (Jac1:25); a Believer has been made "free" from sin and death; the "liberty by which Christ has made us free.." (Gal5:1) And that is possible because the Christian is one who has "received" God's Word into the heart. (vs8)

So again, something we continually harp on: If you see groups of people and entities that spend their energies and motivations to "tear down walls", the "walls" of -DOCTRINE-, BY DEFINITION... THEY ARE NOT SAVED. They have not received God's Word into their hearts; it is not an integral part of them; otherwise, they would not seek to destroy it; otherwise, they would be destroying part of their own essence! Followers of Christ, those who have been taught by Him through the Holy Spirit (Jn16:13), if they are "glorifying" God, by definition also have "received" God's Word, and are "keeping" it. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (1Jn2:3-4) And if he is a "liar", who is the "father of" lies? They are not Christians, but are of the devil as their father. (Jn8:44) And the things they teach and are "devoted to" are "doctrines of demons". (1Tm4:1)

Finally, a true Believer knows that what Jesus taught, that which comes through the Holy Spirit, is actually from the Father. They recognize that Jesus came from the Father, that in addition to having been a great 'man', that He is, also, very God. The disciples had concluded a few minutes earlier: "By this we believe that You came forth from God." (16:30) As John will write on a later occasion...

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of Life; the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us; that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us;

and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."
(1Jn1:1-3)

The Lord's Prayer: Part II - John 17:9-26

Re: I Pray for Them

"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them." (vs9-10)

First of all notice that Christ's work of 'intercession' is not for the world of unbelievers. When unbelievers sing from Handel's Messiah "He makes intercession for us" (Rom8:34), they, as well as those of the false christendom, seem to assume that Jesus is at the Father's "right hand", interceding for the WHOLE WORLD. Carry that thought a bit further, and you can easily progress to that false doctrine we mentioned last month called, "Ultimate Restorationism"; a sort of "pan-theism", that in the end, it will all "-pan-" out for everyone, even if they didn't repent. They also sing from the Messiah, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom8:31) Thus, they speak of a "loving" God who "accepts" us all. And that branches out to the inclusive qualifier... God accepts us "just as we are"...without repentance and change.

But please notice the fuller context of those words that they sing and claim to believe. Christ makes intercession "for the SAINTS". (Rom8:27) And if the reader keeps track of the overall context in Romans, they would understand that Paul is writing to Believers, thus, when he says that Christ makes intercession for "us" (Rom8:26,34), "us" refers to -BELIEVERS-. Those who have "received" Him. (Jn1:12) When John later speaks of Jesus' "advocacy" for us, he is writing to his "little children". (1Jn2:1) Again: Believers.

But John goes on to say that Jesus is the "propitiation" for "the whole world". (1Jn2:2) You see: there is a difference. Propitiation is the work Jesus came to this world to do, to make atonement for sin, to redeem sinful man. There is a difference between "advocacy/intercession" and "propitiation/redemption". Typically, the only sort of people who work as advocates on behalf of others are 'lawyers'. They get 'paid' to represent a 'stranger'. The only sort of person who would put their 'neck' and reputation on the line to plead for somebody for 'free', is somebody who is a 'relative' or a close-and-dear 'friend'. Jesus purchased the Believer with His own blood (Ac20:28); thus, the Believer 'belongs' to Him. In addition, Jesus calls His own His "friends". (Jn15:15) The Believer, as Christ's "wife" (Eph5:23~), takes on Christ's name: CHRIST-ian. Thus, since we belong to Christ, He has every reason to advocate for us before the Father: when we stumble, and God sees it, Jesus says, Please don't mind that, he's 'Mine', he is yet "flesh and blood" (1Cor15:50); he is yet "dust" (Ps103:14); but he is "with" Me. (Ac4:13) Accept him just as You do Me.

But a person who has seen God's power and creation (Rom1:20), and has been faced with his sin, and has REFUSED TO REPENT, and thus also has not "received" Christ's cleansing (How is one 'saved' if they haven't first acknowledged their sin and repudiated it? If they view themselves as already being "OK", not needing to repent; by natural deduction, they also have not been cleansed by Jesus' blood; because a person who doesn't accept that they are 'dirty', will not see the need to 'wash'. They are not saved!), does not 'belong to' Christ. There is NO REASON for Jesus to plead his case before the Father.

In addition, unless the Father "gives" them to Jesus for saving (vs6), they don't come to Jesus Christ. Again: they do not "belong" to Christ. If they haven't even been 'assigned' to Christ, even in the 'stranger' relationship by which attorneys are 'hired', again: Jesus is not 'representing' them before the Father. They are not part of His 'case-load'; they are not part of His 'docket'.

So, what about the reasoning many give? When being crucified, didn't Jesus pray, "FORGIVE them, for they do not know what they do" (Lk23:34)? Doesn't that mean the WHOLE WORLD is "forgiven"? (This is what some teach: that the 'gospel' they proclaim informs people of the fact that they are 'already' forgiven. They only just need to be aware of that fact) After all, God "so loved the WORLD that He sent" Jesus to die. (Jn3:16) Well, what did Jesus say about Judas, who betrayed Him? "It would have been good for that man if he had never been born." (Mk14:21) Where was Jesus' forgiveness there? When Judas betrayed Jesus, he knew very well what he was doing; and 'Whom' he was betraying. He had been there when Peter confessed, "You are the Christ" (Mk8:29) And Jesus said that the one who 'knew' and disobeyed would be beaten "with many stripes", but the one who was ignorant would be "beaten with few". (Lk12:47-48) Judas had spent 3 1/2 years with Jesus. The Romans who were crucifying Him, did not know who He was. It was only 'after' the crucifixion, that the Roman commander comes to understand and exclaims, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Mt27:54) Yes, God does "overlook... these times of ignorance" if one "repents". (Ac17:30) Yes, God sent Jesus to die for "the world" to give "eternal life" to as many as "believe" Him. But not 'all' the world is "believing into" Him; but are being "disobedient". (Jn3:16,36) And if a person is 'rejecting' Christ, why would Jesus serve as "advocate" to such a person? He doesn't.

Yes, Jesus' redemption and propitiation is 'available' to all who "call upon the name of the Lord" for salvation. (Ac2:21) But the "world" has not called upon God; they reject Him. Jesus "offered up Himself" (Heb7:27); and in that "offering", also OFFERS salvation to all, to "whoever desires" the Water of Life. (Rev22:17) He invites: "Come to Me.." (Mt11:28) But the world is not receiving the "gift" (Eph2:8) He is offering. His hands are outstretched to the world, pleading with them, "Come now and let us reason together, says Jehovah: Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as

wool. If you are willing and obedient..." (Is1:18-19) But they are -not- "willing"; instead, rejecting His love and mercy. And regarding the "acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk4:19) by which He came, Jesus is a 'gentleman'; He does not "strive nor cry out" (Mt12:19); He does not force His gift where He is not wanted.

Thus, Jesus does not intercede for the world, just believers.

Notice also, that while Jesus actually proclaimed these words close to 2000 years ago, this prayer applies to Believers even today. Notice: "I do not pray concerning these alone, but also concerning those who will believe into Me through their word" (vs20)

Realizing that Jesus is praying -about- 'Believers', this understanding should make the next parts much easier to understand:

Jesus prays, "...that they may be one as We are...as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me...I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made complete in one, and that the world may know that You sent Me, and love them as You love Me." (vs11,21,23)

This is -NOT- the same thing the pope proclaimed in his 1995 "Ut Unum Sint"! Jesus is -NOT- talking about a unity and love between Believers and non-believers! NOTE THIS WELL! Jesus is -NOT- speaking of ecumenicity: the combining of all the world's religions, denominations and factions into 'one'. Jesus is speaking of the "oneness" of -BELIEVERS-: those God gave to Jesus (Jn6:44), having come to God in repentance (Ac20:21), and received Jesus in faith. (Jn1:12, Ac16:31) Jesus is praying about the same ones we spoke of from last month's article; those who are "keeping" His Word. (vs6) Those of today's ecumenicity do -NOT- "keep" God's Word. Those of the eastern religions do not even pretend to know the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel". (1Ch29:18) Those of Islam worship Allah. Those of Rome follow pagan tradition. And those of charismania are busy "tearing down walls" of -Doctrine-. If they have a choice between being in God's Word, or being "spirit-filled", they choose their demons. None (NONE) of these have come to Christ. They are not the ones Jesus is praying about. They are of "the world"; that entity about which He was -NOT- praying. (vs9) The oneness Jesus prays about is not a "unity in diversity".

There are several cohesive factors in this oneness. Jesus gave His Word. (vs14) And as a result, one commonality for Believers is that the world "hates" us. Remember Jesus promised, "in the world you have affliction" (16:33); "if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (15:20) A Believer can engage in so-called "dialog" with the world on a purely 'intellectual' level, and can 'get along'; but if a Believer proclaims the 'absolutes' of "Thus says the Lord" from the Scriptures, that is when the world's hatred begins to spew forth. That is why there has been such a

concerted effort by the unregenerate to pervert the translations of God's Word; because they cannot "endure sound doctrine". (2Tm4:3) They cannot stand it. That is because, God's "Word" is very God, Himself: "the Word was God" (Jn1:1); and they are in rebellion against God. Furthermore, if you proclaim the 'absolutes' of God's Word amongst a group of people claiming to be "Christian", and they accuse you of being "judgmental" for sticking to the Scriptures, that's a dead-giveaway that they are not 'real' Believers; because real Believers, by definition, have "received" God's Word into their hearts (vs8); and if they don't receive the Scriptures you proclaim, you know that they do "not hear us" because they are "not of God". (1Jn4:6) They are not in "oneness" with God through His Word.

Peter exhorts the Believers to "be holy". (1Pt1:15-16) How does one be holy? Jesus prayed about that. "Sanctify them by Your Truth." (vs17) And what is "Truth"? "Your Word is Truth." Again: the Scriptures.

And what is the result? "..that they may be made 'complete' in one.." (vs23) What does Paul reiterate as to the source of a Believer's "completeness"? The Holy Scriptures which God breathed. They are all that is necessary for a Believer to be "complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2Tim3:14-17) And the Scriptures are the foundation for Believers to be in unity with God and each other. The Church is "built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets" (Eph2:20) "Apostles and Prophets"; another way of saying, "The Scriptures".

Now, God has left Believers on this earth for a time. But His intercession for us, also, is that we should be kept "from the evil". (vs15) However, just because we are yet residents of earth, we are not -OF- the world, just as Jesus is "not of the world." (vs16) Paul defines it as "our citizenship is in Heaven". (Php3:20)

You see...there is a purpose for our remaining. Believers are 'messengers' "sent..into the world". (vs18) For what purpose? For "..those who will believe into [Christ] through their word" (vs20); to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mk16:15)

However, even though the Believer is in the world, being "hated" by the world, we are kept safe. His "care" for us assures that we will not be "lost". (vs12) That's 'Eternal Security'. Yes, the world might persecute and kill these bodies, but Jesus promised, "And do not fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul." (Mt10:28) Paul assures us that there is - nothing- in all of God's creation that can "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord". (Rom8:31-39)

And this love which Jesus has for us is the same love that assures that He will keep His promise. He promised, "I will come again and receive you to Myself.." (14:3) And this is what He prays, "I desire that they also whom

You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You gave Me.." (vs24)

And what is the ultimate outcome? "And I make known to them Your name, and will make it known, that the love with which You love Me may be in them, and I in them." (vs26) Knowing God and His glory.

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." (Rom11:33-36)

I AM: Gave Himself - John 18

"Then He asked them again, Whom do you seek? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I AM. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way..." (vs7-8) And after Peter strikes off the ear of Malchus, Jesus says to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" (vs11)

"The Lord Jehovah has opened My ear, and I was not rebellious, nor turned away backwards. I gave My back to those who strike, and My cheeks to those who pluck; I hid not My face from shame and spitting." (Is50:5-6)

"And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. Having said this, He breathed out the spirit." (Lk23:46) "...I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. This precept I have received from My Father." (Jn10:17-18)

As this article is being written, war with Iraq has just begun. As we have been in anticipation of war again, this past week there have been various TV specials regarding warfare, Iraq, Saddam, "Profiles" of various troops presently serving in Afghanistan, interviews of troops ready to go to battle, etc. One of those TV specials this past week-end interviewed the first US prisoners Iraq captured during the first Gulf War. The famous one was the one they 'broke', and persuaded to talk on world TV, denouncing his country. But the ones we hadn't known about until recently were the others who, even under duress of extreme beatings and other torture, did NOT crack. Beatings so severe that the one had his skull cracked as he 'flew' through the air from what he assumed must have been something like a big plank whacked across his head. As these men recounted their experiences, telling of the horrors at 'hearing' the beatings their fellow-soldiers were receiving; but even worse, anticipating what they, themselves, would be expecting to receive when it was their 'turn'; the firm resolve to -NOT- 'talk', NO MATTER WHAT. Now these, certainly, were beaten -against- their will.

Many people look at Jesus' crucifixion, thinking to themselves that, after so many 'successful' attempts to elude His captors, that 'finally' Judas "betrayed" Him, and with their large troop of people with weapons, they - finally- "captured" Jesus. If I recall correctly from years ago, I think I've also seen some would-be depictions of Jesus' crucifixion in movies, where He is shown 'struggling' to free Himself after being captured, but that the superior 'strength' of the Roman soldiers held Him firm, despite His efforts to get free.

But is that what really happened?

Imagine a pilot, once his plane has been shot down, walking purposely towards Baghdad, knowing he'd be captured and tortured. Ridiculous! you say. And you would be correct. Part of their training deals with how to "survive" if they are downed; how to stay alive, and elude capture, until rescue efforts can be mounted.

But Jesus, "knowing all things coming upon Him" (vs4) goes out to meet the mob! The days prior to this He had set His face resolutely -towards-Jerusalem (Lk9:51), and along the way has been explaining to the disciples that He is going to be captured and killed. (Mt26:2,etc) We already know from the various Gospel accounts about the beatings, scourging, crown of thorns, etc. (19:1-3) at the hands of Pilate, and Herod's soldiers. (Lk23:11)

But the fascinating account that the other three Gospels do not address, is only found in John. If any proof were needed as to Jesus' power and authority, even over His own 'capture', it is this little incident that happens as Jesus goes out to meet the mob:

Jesus 'initiates' contact with His 'captors'... "Whom do you seek?" (vs4) They, of course, respond, "Jesus of Nazareth." (vs5) He replies, "I AM!" Now, while many translations form this reply into the usual variant of the verb "to be" that we would use for ourselves in a similar situation of the form, "I am [He]" (with the added italicized "He"), this verb is the same response Jesus gives when He says, "Before Abraham came to be, I AM." (Jn8:58) This is the same name God gives to Moses to tell Israel when he asks, When Israel asks after God's name, when Moses has told them that God has sent him to lead them out of Egypt, "What is His name? what shall I say to them?" God gives His eternal memorial name, "I AM THAT I AM". Moses was to say, "I AM has sent me to you." (Ex3:13-14)

That occasion was to culminate in the first Passover.

'Now' Jesus is about to "fulfill" all those years of Passover observances by offering Himself "once for all" (Heb7:27, 9:26) as the "Lamb without blemish and without spot". (1Pt1:19) And He responds with God's eternal name, "I AM".

A bit later, when Jesus is on trial, they are going to elicit His 'confession', "Are You the Christ,the Son of the Blessed?" and He will respond "I AM". (Mk14:61-62) And when Pilate hears the 'accusation', he is going to question Jesus' more intently (next month 19:8~). But notice how Jesus sets up the 'authenticity' for His confession...

When He replies with God's eternal name, "I AM", it says, "..they fell backwards and were thrown to the ground." (vs6) Most translations simply say they went backwards and "fell" to the ground. And while that may be 'technically' correct, the word also carries the aspect of being "thrust",

related to another word that means "fly". Exactly 'what' happened? How far "backwards" did they go? How hard were they flung to the ground? It doesn't say. But we can understand from the context that they-all didn't just suddenly decide to lie down on the ground for a little rest and relaxation; they didn't all accidentally 'trip' and 'fall' on cue; because Jesus then asks them again, they reply again, and He answers again, and this time says, "..if you seek Me, let these go their way." (vs8)

As if to say: You're looking for Me? Well, let Me first show you just -who- is 'in-charge' around here. Whoosh...plunk! Ok, do you understand that? Good! So, here I am, take Me, but let My disciples go.

Remember, Jesus is "the Word". (Jn1:1) He created all things, and in Him they "consist". (Col1:17) And He does this, being the "express image of [God's] essence", by the "-WORD- of His power". (Heb1:3) Throughout His earthly ministry Jesus was continually saying, "Truly, truly, I -SAY- unto you..." And so, just speaking His own name, held jointly with the Father, He demonstrates His Deity and power.

As Peter whacks off Malchus' ear with the sword, and Jesus tells him to put it back in its sheath, Jesus says to Peter, "Or do you think that I am not able now to pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mt26:53) Now, if all a person reads is the Matthew account, that word "or" might seem to 'only' be related to the exhortation to put the sword away. But when we see in this passage how Jesus has knocked the mob over backward with a 'word', would it not seem obvious that He is also trying to help Peter "see" what he has just seen. Peter can understand "thousands" of forces coming to "rescue" Jesus. But in actuality, Jesus didn't 'need' those angels, as He had just demonstrated by answering "I AM" with power. As if to say: Shall I (Jesus) be rescued by your sword, Peter? Or by angels? I've already just demonstrated My power to repel the enemy, were I to so-choose at this time.

Nobody was really quite understanding Jesus' mission, and wouldn't, until He had died and risen again. It was Peter, also, who when Jesus was foretelling His own crucifixion, was saying to Jesus, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall never be to You!" And Jesus turned and rebuked satan. (Mt16:22-23)

Those of the Crusades and of Protestantism have lashed out at Jews over the centuries, calling them "Christ-killers!" In actuality, Jesus died on a 'Roman' cross. If Jesus had died at the hands of the Jews, He would have been stoned, as they retorted before Pilate, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." (Jn19:7) The Law said that blaspheme against God was to be punished by stoning. (Lev24:16) Which they attempted to do when He had proclaimed, "before Abraham... I AM"; it says, "Then they took up stones to throw at Him.." (Jn8:59) But Jesus died on a Roman cross.

God's power was evident to the Romans, too. As Jesus hung on the cross, there was a major eclipse of some celestial body traversing between the sun and earth, causing it to be dark; and the proximity of this heavenly body to earth also caused several large earthquakes, both when Jesus was on the cross, and when He rose from the dead. And after Jesus has cried out "It has been finished!" (Jn19:30), and then proclaims, "Into Your hands I commit My spirit" and then breathes out the spirit (Lk23:46) as He 'gives' out His own life; it says that the centurion standing by exclaims, "Truly this was a righteous Man" (Lk23:47); "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mt27:54)

Even that celestial body, whatever it was, was part of God's creation, created by the "Word" of Jesus. All the bodies of the heavens were created way back at the beginning for "signs and seasons" (Gen1:14) As the Scripture says, He was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev13:8)

Yes, in that most 'famous' verse of all: God so loved the world that He "gave" His Son to die. (Jn3:16) But considering that Jesus was the "Word" spoken, that created everything, He created into the universe the precise time when He would die on the cross. God the Father "gave" His Son, Jesus. But Jesus, Himself, gave Himself; from the creation of all things with His "fingers" (Ps8:3), to the exercise of His "arm": "Therefore His own arm brought salvation unto Him.." (Is59:16)

Jesus didn't HAVE TO go to the cross. He could have let man die in his own sin. But the all-powerful Master of the universe "humbled Himself" (Php2:8); and "gave" Himself. As they came for Him, He knocks them onto their fannies forcefully so they know who's Boss: This is who "I AM". Ok, now, here I am, 'take' Me; I'm 'yours' to do with...

When the media sometimes shows us scenes of riots, and people on the ground, being beaten and kicked about the head, the victims are usually seen cradling their heads in their hands and arms, trying to protect themselves from the onslaught. But it says of Jesus, "I hid not My face from shame and spitting.." Here I am: Do your thing! Most people when faced with the concept of cruel mistreatment, shrink away and try to avoid it. But I almost sense a bit of incredulity in the tone of Jesus' words to Peter, "Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" As if to say: Well, OF COURSE I WILL!

And it seems as if Peter, then, learned of this himself. After the Resurrection Jesus foretells how Peter will suffer and die for Christ. (Jn21:18-19) In his epistle Peter says, "...knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ made known to me." (2Pt1:14) I don't know if it is true, but it could be that this verse refers to what is told, how Peter, knowing of plots against his life, was leaving the city to escape; and as he is nearing the edge of town, Jesus appears to him and informs

him that his work is not yet finished there; whereupon Peter, understanding the meaning, assents, turns around, and returns into the city; where he was then martyred...legend says, not counting himself worthy to suffer as his Lord did, 'gives' himself, and requests to be crucified upside down.

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Gal2:20)

I AM: King of Israel, Son of God - John 19

"Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him...according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God. Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more terrified...Do You not know that I have authority to crucify You, and authority to release You? Jesus answered, You could have no authority at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. ("..the authorities that exist are ordained by God.." Rom13:1) And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross...JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS...Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, Do not write, The King of the Jews, but, He said, I am the King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written." (~vs1-22)

Jesus posed a question to His detractors, "And He said to them, How do they say that the Christ is the Son of David? Now David himself said in the Book of Psalms: The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool. Therefore David calls Him Lord; how is He then his Son?" (Lk20:41-44, Ps110:1)

This question addresses two things about Jesus: 1) That He was Jewish, and 2) that He was Deity. Being the "Son of David" meant being heir to David's 'throne' as ruler of Israel. Of the One called, "Wonderful, Counselor, The Strong and Mighty God, The Eternal Father, The Prince of Peace" Israel also knew the rest of that prophecy, "Of the increase of His government and peace upon the throne of David there will be no end; and upon His kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from now on, even forever." (Is9:6-7) They knew from Isaiah the prophet that Messiah would be both "God" and "King of Israel".

So, when Jesus was on earth...

God the Father, whom Israel knew by the name, "Jehovah/Yahweh" (Is42:8), proclaimed Jesus to be "..My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt3:17) and exhorted, "Hear Him!" (Mt17:5)

John the immerser, who came preparing the "way of the Lord" (Mt3:3) proclaimed "behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (Jn1:29)

Jesus came, proclaiming Himself to be the Son of God: "..before Abraham came to be, I AM.." (Jn8:58) When the mob came to arrest Him, and they answered that they were looking for "Jesus of Nazareth", He answered "I AM" and threw them to the ground with the Word of His name. (Jn18:6)

As those possessed by demons came bowing to Him, they would cry out, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" (Lk4:41) "..have You come to

torment us before the time?" (Mt8:29) Perhaps helping the unbelieving to understand why the demons might "shudder" (Jac2:19)

At the leading of the Holy Spirit, Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Mt16:16)

Pilate, the one to whom God had given "authority..from above" as a ruler, proclaimed officially, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews". For Pilate to place that label upon Jesus essentially placed the weight of the entire Roman Empire behind the label. Pilate represented the Roman Empire in that part of Israel of that day. That's like when Colin Powell or Donald Rumsfeld make statements, the whole world listens; every bit as much as if President Bush makes a statement. In other words, the government of the world's ruling empire of that day proclaimed Jesus to be the "King of the Jews". He did not do this lightly. He questioned Jesus at length, "Are You the King of the Jews?" (8:33) "You say it" (Lk23:3)

And as the events of the day unfolded further with the visit from some celestial body that blocked the sun's light, causing earthquakes, and when the Centurion on the scene (compared today, perhaps, to General Tommy Franks?) saw how Jesus cried out "It has been finished!" (vs30) and then said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Lk23:46) as He 'gave' His life; he exclaims, "Truly this was a righteous Man!" (Lk23:47) "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Mt27:54)

But...

When the high priest asks Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" and Jesus replies, "I AM", they tear their clothes and exclaim, "You have heard the blasphemy!" and condemn Him to be "worthy of death". (Mk14:61-64)

The mobs of (Jewish) people barely a few days prior had been yelling out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mt21:9) But with not much effort now were persuaded to cry out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" (Lk23:21) "..His blood be on us and on our children." (Mt27:25) But, Oh my! How history has shown how that request was granted upon their children through the pogroms and holocaust, etc..!

God sent His Son (Jn3:16) and Jesus "came to His own" (Israel); and while everybody else in the whole world recognized who He was, "..His own did not receive Him." (1:11) Thus, Jesus pronounced "Woe!" upon them. The people of Nineveh, who, even though they were Gentiles, but had repented at Jonah's preaching, would condemn Israel in the judgement. (Mt12:41) Tyre and Sidon, also, would have repented if they had been preached to. (Mt11:21) (Might it not make for an interesting study to learn 'why' they were not preached to. Israel was supposed to be

God's light shining in an otherwise depraved world, not all that far away from Tyre and Sidon.)

The demons bowed to Jesus, trembling. The Cannanite woman came bowing to Jesus, asking for "crumbs" from the children's table. (Mt15) Strangers from the east worshiped Him as a child. (Mt2) Rome's representative honored Him with His correct title at His crucifixion. But His own, whom He had redeemed out of Egypt, rejected Him. Jerusalem, the place where God had said He would put His name in the midst of the earth (1Ki11:36), when God sent His Son, they were of such a heart of rejection that Jesus weeps over it, saying, ".. If you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes...because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Lk19:41-44)

Israel at Jesus' first coming did not recognize Him. Many throughout the world now do not honor Him. The demons, although knowing Him, have rejected Him and rebelled as a permanent condition. And yet, because of Jesus' humbling of Himself to die on the cross, the Father has now raised Him to a special place of honor, such that...EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW. The demons already confess Him to be Lord, but on That Day, everyone else will, also "...confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Php2:9-11)

Now, there is a certain element that has taken passages like this one, and proclaim a false doctrine called "Ultimate Restorationism". They misappropriate Peter's words about the "restoration of all things" (Ac3:21), and claim that this "every" knee bowing means that 'all' will ultimately be "restored" to fellowship with God through redemption. Apparently they have missed how the judgment of the unsaved is "forever and ever" (Rev14:11); and how during the kingdom when Messiah reigns, this earth will be "restored" (fixed) again, as described in places like Is11:7 & 65:25 how the enmity between wild animals will be pacified as the "lion shall eat straw like the ox" as the world will no longer be in "groans and travails" (Rom8:22) as is the case now due to the curse of sin.

Notice carefully that it says that every tongue will "confess -THAT- Jesus Christ is Lord". (Php2:11) It does not say they are repenting of their sin, which is the cause for judgment (Mt11:20, Rev9:20-21,16:9,11) and "receiving" Christ. The demons confess that Jesus is the Christ, but they are "reserved for judgment". (2Pet2:4) And any of mankind who refuses to repent also partakes in the Lake of Fire which was originally designed for the "devil and his angels" (Mt25:41, Rev12:9, 20:15)

They may go all the way to their grave denying God and His Son Jesus Christ. But a day of reckoning is coming. There are two kinds of bowing: The kind done willingly in reverence, and the kind forced upon the rebel. When a rebel is forced to bow, such a bowing does not indicate a repentant heart, but indicates his forced acknowledgment of who is 'higher'

compared to himself. Before the rebels are cast into the Lake of Fire, they will have bowed to Jesus Christ; and they will have 'confessed' (acknowledged) that He is Lord.

Not everyone who says (and sings) "Lord, Lord" is getting into Heaven. Just because someone confesses that "Jesus is Lord" does not guarantee that they are saved Believers. Just because people swoon the words of God being "an awesome God" does not mean they have fellowship with Him; because -every- created being -will- make this confession. A "few" will confess it in the glories of God's presence. But the "many" will do so just before they are hurled into "destruction". (Mt7:13-14, 21-23)

The Scriptures are written to reveal God to mankind; along with His Son Jesus Christ. The time to believe in Christ as God's Son is 'now', before - that- Day, the Day of Judgment: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2Cor6:2)

Just as Isaiah in the O.T. is dedicated to revealing the Father to mankind, in a similar way this Gospel of John is dedicated to revealing God's Son, Jesus Christ.

John says of his writing, "And he who has seen has borne witness, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he speaks the truth, so that you may believe." (vs35) "..these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (20:31)

That the Scripture Might be Fulfilled - John 19

"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst!" (vs28)

Two things can be observed about Jesus: 1) that Jesus is all-knowing, and 2) that Jesus' life on this earth at His first advent fulfilled Scripture. And in that, Scripture being fulfilled, proves God's nature as knowing and "declaring the end from the beginning". (Is46:10) Fulfilled prophecy proves the Scriptures to be God's Word, and thus, the very nature and character of God; His very essence.

One of the primary characteristics of God we observed in the "Who is God?" series from Isaiah was God's 'timelessness'. He fully encompasses all time and eternity. Eternity encompasses past, present and future. The nature of God's existence, thus His life, is "eternal". Thus, the life He gives when one is "born from above" (Jn3:3) of the Holy Spirit (Jn3:8, Rom8:9), is "-ETERNAL- life". (Jn3:16, 1Jn5:13, etc)

Toward the beginning of this series we observed how Jesus "saw" Nathanael sitting "under the fig tree" even though Nathanael was yet some distance away and they hadn't yet met; and observing Jesus' knowing of him, Nathanael then confesses, "You are the Son of God!" (Jn1:48-49) How many times did Jesus do non-normal things when threatened, because He knew that "His hour had not yet come" (7:30, 8:20) As the Jews are seeking to kill Him, He purposely sets His face towards Jerusalem, and tells the disciples the nature of His up-coming crucifixion. (Mk10:32-34) And then, in the upper room Jesus "knew that His hour had come.." (13:1) He also -knew- that He had "come from God" (13:3) As He is about to be taken into custody, He was "knowing all things coming upon Him.." (18:4) And so, even on the cross, He knew "all things" (vs28) and acts in accordance. And once He has risen from the dead, "...beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Lk24:27)

Jesus was continually claiming to be the I AM. His 'knowing' of all things was certainly one proof of the validity of that claim. But as far as people's perceptions were concerned, He was just one man. One refutation given by some to discredit Jesus' authenticity as -being- God, was the notion that, well: Anybody could study the Scriptures diligently, and then choreograph his own life to make sure he did certain right things at the right times to 'fulfill' those prophecies.

But... such a person first must be born and come to an age of understanding to be able to study and even devise such a plot.

Scripture said that Christ would be 'born' of a virgin. The Jews were continually asking Jesus for a "sign" to prove His authenticity. (Jn2:18,

6:30) In their Scriptures it had been prophesied, "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel." (Is7:14)

How did Jesus fulfill this?

Mary was with child "...from the Holy Spirit" (Mt1:18) at the time of the proclamation of the angel Gabriel (Lk1:31,35) And contrary to the taunts of the unbelievers who suggest that Jesus was a 'hippy' of illegitimate birth, as He was also taunted by the Jews (Jn8:41), it says very specifically that Joseph "...did not know (have sexual relations with) her [Mary] till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS." (Mt1:25)

When the wise men came seeking Jesus, it was fulfilled prophecy that led them to Bethlehem (Mt2:5-11) fulfilling (Mic5:2)

When Herod went on a rampage to try to kill Jesus, and they fled to Egypt (Mt2:13-15) it fulfilled "...I called My Son out of Egypt." (Hos11:1)

As mothers were wailing as Herod was killing all the babies (Mt2:16-18) it fulfilled "...Thus says Jehovah: A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not." (Jer31:15)

And when they moved back from Egypt and settled in Nazareth it apparently fulfilled some other prophetic proclamations that Israel knew about, that aren't in our written Scriptures, "He shall be called a Nazarene". (Mt2:23)

Just a note here about this last item: Some skeptics scoff at what they think is a discrepancy, that something in the N.T. should speak of a prophetic utterance that can't be found in our O.T. Let us not forget that not everything every prophet ever uttered actually was included in the written Scriptures. Jer36:32 speaks of Baruch scribing at Jeremiah's mouth a new scroll to replace the one King Jehoiakim burned in the fire, and it says, "And many words like them were added to them." And yet, those 'added' words are not recorded for us in Jeremiah. When Peter preached, it says "...And with many other words he testified and exhorted them..." (Ac2:40) but only a synopsis is recorded for our benefit. John closes his gospel by saying, "And there were also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (21:25) And also says, "And truly Jesus did many other signs before His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (20:30-31) So... just because this prophecy about Jesus being a "Nazarene" isn't found in the O.T., do not discount the Scriptures. If one considers how many large libraries contain millions of documents of human history, and consider that the Scriptures are

contained in just one (1) book, is it not going to be obvious that there is much history that is not included. But God has seen to it that we do have enough to know Him, and to be saved. Perhaps God left this little puzzle for the purpose of some to "...see, but...not perceive"? (Is6:9) as was the case in Jesus' day (Mt13:14, Mk4:12, Ac28:26), and still is today!

But notice that all these prophecies about Jesus were fulfilled before He was even of an age to -do- anything about them. They were done -to- Him in conception, and during infancy, "...before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good..." (Is7:16)

So then: in this passage we have several prophecies fulfilled. The soldiers casting lots for Jesus' clothing (vs24) fulfilling (Ps22:18) When they gave Him the vinegar (vs29) it fulfilled (Ps69:21) When Jesus gave His life by saying, "Into your hands I commit My spirit" (Lk23:46) it fulfilled (Ps31:5) When the soldiers did not break His legs (vs33) it fulfilled: "He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken." (Ps34:20) ...which also fulfilled centuries of Jewish observance in Passover and the sacrifices. The Passover lamb was not to have any of its bones broken. (Ex12:46) Jesus WAS the fulfillment of Passover, "...as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1Pet1:19) Our REDEMPTION!! And when the soldier pierced His side (vs34) it fulfilled Zech12:10. And the very nature of His crucifixion, something which was done for only a historically relatively 'short' period of time by the Roman empire, thus also prophesying the historical period of time when it all would be done, being 'nailed' to the cross... "they have pierced My hands and My feet." (Ps22:16)

Again, for the skeptics who would suggest that Jesus "choreographed" His own death as a 'man', look at the above-listed things and proclaim to us how many of those things, like at His birth, were done -to- Him, and separate from Him. And also, how many were done -after- His death.

You see: God "sent" His Son (1Jn4:10), and proved that it was, indeed, His "beloved Son" (Mt3:17), by proclaiming (declaring) centuries before the fact, and fulfilling every detail.

Thus, if all those past prophecies were fulfilled to-the-letter, we can also have confidence that God's future prophecies will also be fulfilled, just as given: we can be assured that He will also fulfill His promise to come and "receive" us to Himself (Jn14:3)

Today, more than at any other time, the false prophets and messiahs are proclaiming that there will be "NO RAPTURE". And even the fact that there would be such a false doctrine in these days was prophesied: "...knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming?" (2Pt3:3-4)

There is another prophecy that has been observed for quite a few years, the "wicked servant" saying in his heart, "My master delays his coming..."

(Mt24:48) We have seen that in the so-called 'post-trib' doctrine. But as all their predicted dates have come and gone, and as the various ones they have confidently affirmed to be -the- antichrist have pittered away into obscurity, and they have been proven to be -false- prophets, now they are saying that there will be NO RAPTURE.

But when they proclaim such things, they blatantly refute Jesus' very direct promise, that He is preparing a place for us, and He says, "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (Jn14:3)

And this even is further described in detail, that the "dead in Christ" will first rise from the dead. Being "in Christ" indicates that they are the "Church", the disciples that were first called "Christians in Antioch". (Ac11:26) That's not the O.T. saints who were raised when Jesus was raised (Mt27:52); nor is it the martyr-saints of the seven-year period of Daniel's prophesied 70th week who refuse the beast's "mark". (Rev20:4-5) It is the "dead in Christ"; Christians; the Church; those who have died during the period of time this article is being written. They will "rise first". (1Th4:16)

What happens to these when they rise? We are not told what sort of timeframe is involved, but we are told that they will rise, and "then" the Believers who are alive at that time when they rise, will be "..caught up together at the same time with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." (1Th4:17) This is the event, being CAUGHT UP, that has received the expression "rapture"; because by definition, that's what "rapture" means.

These that were alive and caught up... they obviously, then, DO NOT DIE, do they. Just like Enoch and Elijah who were caught up to God without death, so too will Church-age Christians be caught up, without death. Is there any other passage that speaks of this? "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1Cor15:51-52)

Yes, the ones who claim there is NO RAPTURE scoff at this passage: 'Where does it talk about the rapture???' they scoff. But to a person with their spiritual eyes open, are not the two passages speaking of the same thing? In the one it speaks of the dead rising first, and the live ones joining them. The other starts by saying, We're not all going to die (That's what "sleep" means); -and- the dead will also be raised.

There are sooo many past fulfilled prophecies that could be mentioned, not to mention all the things that are going on 'now' with Israel, the middle east, and other world power alignments; all... preparing for the final events prophesied, just as prophesied. But since this series is the Gospel of John, this should be enough for now.

Jesus promised to come to "receive" us (Believers) to Himself. How can we know that He will keep His Word? Well, all the prophecies that were given about -Him- (Jesus) were fulfilled. Jesus fulfilled everything the Father sent Him to do. (Jn8:29, 17:4) If that is so, then there is no reason to doubt that He will also fulfill what He has promised for the future; the past validates and assures the future.

And the Scriptures further-explain 'how' it is going to happen: in a resurrection and rapture. Jesus promised it (Jn11:25-26, 14:3), the apostle Paul defined it (1Th4:16-17, 1Cor15:51+) In past validation of future promises: Jesus promised that after three days He would rise from the dead (Mt27:63, Mk8:31), which He did as the angels proclaimed, "He is not here, but is risen!" (Lk24:6) and was seen by witnesses (1Cor15:5+)

So, how can there be any question about Jesus coming for the Church with a resurrection and rapture? There is none! It -MUST- be so....

The -faithful- Church that has "kept the Word" of Christ will be 'kept' from the time of judgment, which as prophesied, is also -SURELY- coming "upon the whole world" (Rev3:10) The promise is that we (who are Believers) have not been appointed to wrath (1Th5:9)

"...that the Scriptures might be fulfilled..."

See Also Addendum: "As it was...So will it be" & Q/A -Dead in Christ?

It Has Been Finished! - John 19

"So when Jesus had received the vinegar, He said, It has been finished! And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." (Jn19:30)

"And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. Having said this, He breathed out the spirit." (Lk23:46)

If we combine these two (partial) accounts, perhaps it might have read something like: And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, It has been finished! He then said, Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit; and bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

Jesus came to this earth for a specific mission, He did it purposely from His own will, and saw through to its completion.

As the writer of Hebrews reviews for us: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You have not asked. Then I said, Lo, I come (in the volume of the Book it is written of Me): I delight to do Your will, O My God, and Your Law is within My heart. I have preached righteousness in the great assembly; lo, I have not restrained My lips, O Jehovah, You know. I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not hidden Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly." (Ps40:6-10, Heb10)

For 4000 years mankind had offered animal sacrifices. But "...it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.." (Heb10:4) The blood of animals "after their kind" is not the same blood as of mankind. Each created being is of its own flesh. (1Cor15:39) Each flesh also has its own unique blood. And mankind is -all- of "one blood". (Ac17:26) When man is murdered, his blood is to be avenged "by man". (Gen9:6) When man sinned, 'sin' was imputed to all men. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to every person, because everyone sinned." (Rom5:12) God had promised that sin would result in death (Gen2:17), and thus the penalty for sin is death. (Ezek18:4, Rom6:23) If man is to have any hope of Life, his sin must be avenged/atoned by (some) man's blood. Just as Abel's blood cried out to God from the earth when he was murdered (Gen4:10), there is an accounting of man's sin with God. (Mt23:35)

By faith (Heb11:4) they observed what God instructed regarding animal sacrifices after Adam and Eve sinned, when He also made coverings of animal skins and clothed them (Gen3:21), after promising the "Seed" of the woman (Gen3:15) for a future date. Until Jesus came to fulfill 4000 years of promise, Believers acted in 'Faith'. The symbolism of the shed blood of an animal.

God loved the world and sent His Son. (Jn3:16) In order to be qualified to be the propitiation for our sin (Heb2:17), Jesus took on "flesh and blood". (vs14) And whereas the O.T. priests "bore" the sins of the people symbolically when they were sprinkled with the blood of animals, thus bearing their sins before God's mercy seat (Lev16), and as they ate of the sacrifices they "bore" the congregation's iniquities (Lev10:17, Num18:1); Jesus offered Himself: born of a woman (Ga4:4), being the "Seed" of the woman (Gen3:15) and when He was crucified, He -became- sin for us. (2Cor5:21) Since the O.T. priests themselves were sinners, they possessed no intrinsic ability to justify and atone. So when they carried the blood and sprinkled it, it was a visual representation of what Christ would do. In their eating of the sacrifices, it symbolized the sacrifice -becoming- part of them as the meat was digested and became part of their bodies...thus symbolizing Christ's work.

In the same way, Jesus proclaimed that it was necessary to "eat" Him for Eternal Life. (Jn6:54) He was illustrating, taking something they had been observing for centuries, and proclaiming: I AM the One who is fulfilling all this. Just as you ate the animals, as I fulfill this on the cross, you must now eat Me, and digest Me. This is how those who partake in Christ in this way are "one" with Him. (Jn17) This is why correct translations will speak of believing "-INTO- Him". (Jn6:29, 17:20, Ga2:16, etc.)

So Jesus came, first preaching "righteousness in the great assembly". He preached the sermon on the mount, the parables, healed the sick, raised the dead, and invited: "Come to Me..." and have rest. (Mt11:28-30); Come and eat (Jn6:35) Come and drink to overflowing (Jn7:37-38, 4:14)

So when it came time to be crucified, as He prays to the Father He says, "I have finished the work which You gave Me to do." (Jn17:4) And then He gives understanding to those coming to take Him, by knocking them to the ground while proclaiming His joint name with the Father, "I AM". (18:6) And then 'gives' Himself to them. Just as He gave the message faithfully (Ps40:9-10), He also gave His body to those who beat and whipped Him. He did not shrink back, cradling His head in His arms to protect Himself against them: "I hid not My face from shame and spitting" (Is50:6)

And when it came time to die, He also 'gave' His life. He "laid down" His life. The Roman soldiers, who were used to knowing how much a human body could take before it would die, were not expecting that Jesus would be dead yet. When the end of the day came along, in order to speed up the process of suffocation, they would break the legs, so they could not 'push' up with their feet to free up the constriction of the chest cavity for breathing that resulted from being hung from their arms the way they were. When they came to Jesus, He was already dead because they (the Roman soldiers) did not "take" His life. Previously He had proclaimed, "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." (Jn10:17-18) The Romans did not 'kill' Jesus. He 'gave' His life a ransom. (Mt20:28)

All the way from what most people thought was His 'capture' to His death, God was in full control of everything, as we learned last month "that the Scripture might be fulfilled". (vs28)

It did not happen as the world's historian theoreticians suggest, that Jesus was born an exceptional man, and had political aspirations, and a wonderful heart of wanting to better the situation for Israel, but got cut off short in the prime of His life in betrayal and death....and never got to fulfill His goals and ambitions. Like so many 'good' men, where in the struggle between good and evil, sometimes the bad guys kill the good guys. Or others will postulate that Jesus (the 'man') was merely a deluded old fool who had some pipe dreams, but wasn't possessed of the 'realities' of the global political situation of His day, and was sucked under by it..."poor fella!" And how many other such ideas are circulated...?

No! Jesus was in FULL CONTROL. He came on a mission, fulfilled it, and then died. The Roman officer on hand when He died concluded, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Mt27:54) because when Jesus yielded up His spirit, there was a big earthquake...a -BIG- earthquake that split rocks. (Mt27:50-51) And this went on during the darkness of a solar eclipse. (Mt27:45) And certainly, if he heard Jesus 'give' up His spirit, the centurion also heard Him shout the proclamation, "It has been finished!" Being a military officer commissioned with an assignment, he would have recognized the announcement of one on a mission, who had successfully completed it victoriously.

"IT HAS BEEN FINISHED!"

A very interesting proclamation. KJV renders it, "It -is- finished!" Certainly, close to the correct meaning. However, the verb there is 'perfect' tense. To say that it "is" finished is certainly a proclamation. A present-tense edict. But, taking a simple dictionary definition, "perfect tense" is a "verb form expressing action completed prior to a fixed point of reference in time". In other words, when Jesus cries out to all creation as He did, it was by then a 'done-deal'. It was not -just- 'now' being accomplished, just 'barely' before His death. Phew! We 'just' made it in time! Pant, pant! ... No!

It's a done deal. Like a person writing their will, "I, being of sound mind...blah, blah, blah", Jesus was proclaiming, Knowing all things, being in full control all along the way, having 'given' Myself and fulfilled every prophecy... the Work I was sent to do is now complete. I just fulfilled it. It has been done..."once for all time". (Rom6:10, Heb7:27) And in case you need proof... that which the high priest needed to do every year, I have completed, and I will prove it... He "entered the Holy of Holies once for all." (Heb9:12) and then tore the veil from top to bottom (Mt27:51), revealing direct access to God (Heb4:16) and the Mercy Seat.... because it is "by grace (mercy)" that we are saved. (Eph2:5,8)

The proclamation that was against us to death, He took it and "nailed it to the cross" (Col2:14) conspicuously for all creation to see; He took on rulers and authorities and "triumphed" over them. (vs15) Proclaiming "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1Co15:55)

Contrary to the false doctrine of Rome, the wounds of Jesus are -NOT- "-still- bleeding". They have Him 'still' crucified on the cross. Satan cannot stand the fact that he was defeated, that he could not pollute the woman's Seed line, that he could not wipe out Israel into unrecognizability, that he could not destroy David's seed (2Ki11:1), nor kill Jesus as a baby (Mt2). But if he can deceive people into thinking that Jesus is 'still' bleeding, that His work of the cross is still 'continuing', he at least keeps them from receiving redemption from sin. He can make them think that Jesus lied on the cross when He made His triumphant shout. Is it any wonder, then, that the translators from Rome muddied the verb tense there! To say, "It -is-finished" can accommodate both past and present tenses, making allowances for Rome's doctrine of the continual crucifixion. Scripture does not say Jesus is "crucified forever" but rather, that He "-LIVES- forever to make intercession..."! (Heb7:25) He was not left in Sheol, nor did He suffer corruption. (Ps16:10) By the fourth day He would have begun to decay. (Jn11:39) Jesus was resurrected after three days! When they keep Him crucified, they are "..seeking the living among the dead...He is not here! He is risen!" (Lk24:5-6)

So... "It has been finished!" was Jesus' battle cry of victory!

Thus, as the people sang to David, "...and David [has slain] his ten thousands" (1Sam18:7), the song that is sung to the Son of David is, "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation... Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing! Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Rev5:9,12-13)

As a result of Jesus' finished work of redemption: for the one who comes to God in repentance, and to Jesus Christ in faith (Ac20:21), receiving Jesus (Jn1:12) with the whole heart (Ps119:58), there is nothing that can separate us from the "love of God in Christ Jesus". (Rom8:32-39)

Just as Jesus made proclamation in the 'perfect' tense, if I may do an out-of-context play-on-words... Jesus' work makes us...

"-Perfect- and complete, lacking nothing." (Jac1:4b)

See Also Addendum: Q/A - Three Days of Jesus' Death

He Saw and Believed - John 20

Then Simon Peter came...and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then [John]...went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that it was necessary for Him to rise again from the dead. (Jn20:6-9)

Back when this was first drafted as a 'portion' in 2001, there had been a movie on TBN documenting 'proofs' of Jesus' resurrection. Various apologists from time to time produce works and publish books to 'prove' that Jesus rose from the dead. (This is being moved out of the Portions and being made into an Article, because it is perfect for this spot in the current John series)

So... why is 'proof' of Jesus' resurrection necessary? Because if Jesus did not rise from the dead, our "faith is vain; [we] are still in [our] sins" (1Cor15:17) and the world would be correct in scoffing at us and "pitying" us (vs19) for believing in such "hokus pokus in the sky, in some great by and by". Jesus' resurrection is at the very core of Eternal Life. Where the world focuses on the living "here and now", Scripture teaches that we "die" to sin. (Rom6:2) That we "died with Christ". (Rom6:8, Col2:20) But we believe that if we die with Him, that we "also live with Him". This is the closing king-pin of the Gospel, that Jesus "died for our sins..that He was buried.. AND that He -ROSE- again the third day according to the Scriptures". (1Cor15:3-4) This was the message the early Church preached, and was the reason for much of their persecution from the Jewish elite, that "they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts4:2) And it was the basis for Paul's imprisonment when the Jews were after his life. The "hope of Israel" (Acts28:20, 23:6, 24:15)

One of the prime functions of the apostles was as "witnesses" to Jesus Christ. You see, the "Gospel" Paul summarizes he does not give by itself, but includes the fact that the Gospel comes with documentation.

When Jesus rose again, He "was seen..." (1Cor15:5) It is not some made-up story... some vision with no proof of authentication. Paul lists all those who saw Him. And indeed, as Jesus commissions the message they are to proclaim, He gives the 1) Crucifixion and 2) Resurrection (Lk24:46). That's the "Gospel" Paul proclaimed in 1Cor15. The expected response to the preaching of the Gospel is "Repentance" (vs47). And the outcome of that response to the preaching of Christ's Death/Resurrection, Repentance, is "Remission of sins".

And then notice... "And you are witnesses of these things". (vs48)

Jesus did not compose/manufacture a "story" and "theory" by which to organize a "cult". No. He actually "died" and "rose" again. But when He rose He did not just "disappear". He proved His work. When He was healing "everybody" He touched, it was said, "He has done all things well". (Mk7:37) And when He died, His soul was not left "in sheol/hades" (Ps16:10, Acts2:27) He was not a "martyr" to some "cause".

But rather, He "-gave- His life" (Mt20:28) to redeem us.

Besides showing Himself as "flesh and bones" (Lk24:39), what proof is there? What was it that John saw, which made him "see and believe", even before Jesus appeared to them?

The burial clothes.

Some of today's modern translations (e.g. NKJV) get this passage wrong. The face cloth was not "folded". (vs7) Folding indicates something a person might do if they were doing what was rumored, that the disciples came and "stole His body" away. (Mt28:13-15) If one was going to "unwrap" the wrappings, what does one do with the cloth? It cannot be wrapped again without 'something' to give it form. Thus, unless one is going to leave a disheveled 'pile', they are going to "fold" it.

But the text actually says it was "rolled/wrapped up" in its own place where the head would be. The cloth that had wrapped the body was wrapped where the body had lain, and the face cloth was wrapped, separate from the body wrappings, where the head had been. All of this, still "wrapped".... but -EMPTY-. No body. And due to the burial ointments that would have dried hard, they would have been in the 'shape' of the body that had occupied them. But since Jesus had risen, it was like an empty cocoon! That's why the angel invited, "See the place where the Lord lay" (Mt28:6) This was said to the same women who previously had watched how/where He had been laid. (Mt27:61) They had watched Joseph (of Arimathea) wrap the body and bury it. They saw 'where' the body was laid, and 'how' the wrappings had been wrapped. The wrappings were still there just as Joseph had done it, but Jesus "...is not here; for He is risen.."

Thus, John "saw and believed".

Now... just as the priests would wave the sheaf of the firstfruits on the "day after the sabbath" (Lev23:10-11) after Passover, and Jesus' resurrection is "Christ the firstfruits" (1Cor15:23) it goes on to say regarding "each one in his own order... afterward those who are Christ's at His coming".

"..in Christ all shall be made alive" (vs22)

Speaking to Believers, now... do you realize that what Jesus did, we will do also? When "He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is". (1Jn3:2) A "firstfruit" is an indication that the rest of the harvest

is to follow in similar fashion. The "dead in Christ will rise first" and then at a given moment those who rose and "we who are alive and remain" will be "caught up together at the same time with them" to the Lord. (1Th4:16-17)

Just as John "saw and believed" as he saw the empty wrapped clothes, when the Church is resurrected/raptured, many are also going to "see and believe". No (to you scoffers), it is not a "secret" rapture! The Believers are not "slinking away" quietly. God will be announcing the event with a "shout" and a loud "trumpet". (1Th4:16) Elijah did not slink away when God came for him. It was a rather spectacular event with a whirlwind and a chariot of fire. And his mantle fell to the ground and Elisha picked it up. (2Ki2:11-13) A "mantle" being a "cloak/garment".

You see... when Jesus resurrected, the only clothes He had were His burial clothes. When He hung on the cross, He was hung naked, and the soldiers gambled over His clothing. So, those clothes He had, when He rose, were left behind in the condition they had been occupied by His body. And John "saw and believed".

In like manner, at the rapture I somehow suspect our clothing will be left, as they were being worn at the time the Lord called us to Himself. Socks inserted into laced/tied shoes, extending up into the pants legs. Shirts will be tucked into the pants. Ties will be tied to the collars of empty shirts, sleeves filling out the inside of the coat, etc., only empty.

And also... When Jesus comes to "receive [us] unto [Himself]" (Jn14:3), somehow I really doubt that very many of us will be "alone" by ourselves. I expect that there will, again, be "witnesses". Many of whom will, again, "see and believe". And just as the first witnesses were mostly all martyred for their witness, those in the coming 70th week will also be martyred for their "testimony/witness of/to Jesus". (Rev12:17, 20:4)

Personal Relationship with Jesus? - John 20

And [the angels at the tomb] said to [Mary Magdalene], Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him. And when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away...." (vs13-15)

This little passage evokes within me such emotions that no words can express. The last few times I've read it, I have ended up with tears in my eyes, and a big knot in my stomach. And also, there are profound questions. Who, exactly was this Mary? And what was her relationship with Jesus? ...to evoke such pathos?

We know that she was one of those who followed Jesus "ministering to Him". (Mt27:55) "...out of [her] possessions." (Lk8:3) In other words, she came from a background of some means; and Jesus-and-company did not take up offerings as they travelled, to cover expenses. She also had been demon-possessed, whom Jesus had healed. (Lk8:2)

What, exactly, was the 'relationship' between her and Jesus? That work-of-blasphemy "Jesus Christ Superstar" (from the 70s) portrays her, if I recall correctly, as an ex-prostitute, who was 'now' trying to figure out how to be Jesus' lover, singing, "I don't know how to love Him..." Many from the world assume that she and Jesus were "an item"; that she was also the woman who "was a sinner" (Lk7:37); and that after Jesus had forgiven her, that she became His lover; and that He also fantasized about her while hanging on the cross. And there are many variations on these themes out there. But of such blasphemies, there is no shred of any Scriptural suggestion to these things! They are the concoctions of sinful man, who would seek to discredit Jesus; elevating themselves in their own minds, by bringing Christ down to their own gutterial level.

But if Jesus had been with -any- woman, what a mixed-up mess THAT would have been! He proclaimed that in Heaven they "neither marry nor are given in marriage". (Mt22:30) Since He was "from above" (Jn8:23), knowing He was to be crucified, and then would ascend back to the Father, that would not have been a life of love to marry a woman, only to leave her behind. He would not have been practicing what He preached! And how could He become "one" in such a manner with sinful humanity, and then be fit to be the "Lamb...without spot and without blemish", to provide redemption? (1Pt1:19) And if He had been with a woman to have offspring, then what about the Scriptural expression, "sons of God"? It would soooo pervert holiness and the entire Scriptural doctrine of the "spiritual" birth (Jn3:8) so as to totally confuse the basic doctrines of

Redemption and Salvation. Since I'm not as well-read in worldly things as many self-presumed 'scholarly' types, I am not aware of any instances; but if I am thinking the possibility of these thoughts, what are the chances that there are actually some cults out there, claiming to trace their lineage back to Jesus through Mary Magdalene? But this concept is not of sufficient predominance to have become part of the major religions making claim to having "judeo-christian" roots (that I'm aware of). We know this was not the relationship between Jesus and Mary. But if people were to suggest that it was, these are some of the implications that would be involved. And in addition to the blasphemous false icon, Mary the "mother of god", would be the other unthinkable: Mary of Magdala, the "wife of god".

So now, moving along here...

Out of the women (plural) who went to the tomb (Mt28:1, Lk24:1,10), why did Mary Magdalene come back to the tomb (presumably following after Peter and John?), and then after Peter and John leave, does she stay there, crying? Now, truly, different people have different emotional makeups. It is claimed that women are "more emotional" than men. And among women, some are more emotional than others. But everytime I read this passage, in recent years, my spirit and soul burrow -deep- into this scene. Mary is not being -merely- "emotional". She is gut-wrenched over Jesus' death; and now that, by appearances, it appears His body has been 'stolen' (the story the soldiers were paid to tell Mt28:12-15), she is beside herself with grief. Her soul has been ripped out from her. I sense a very special kind of 'love' she had for Jesus. Some special relationship that is not recorded otherwise, except for us to speculate about it from this incident.

And why, out of all the disciples (even John, "whom Jesus loved" - Jn21:20), did Jesus make a special point for a 'personal' and 'private' meeting like this alone with Mary? If John was the disciple "whom Jesus loved", was Mary the woman Jesus loved? Along with Martha and Mary? (Jn11:5) In a similar sort of bond by which Jonathan and David's souls were "knit" to each other? (1Sam18:1) I don't know the answers to these questions. But whatever the case, it is quite clear that something unspeakably -deep- existed for Mary about Jesus. As this article ends, I think it will become clear why we are making such a big deal about this.

And so, with that as background, it is more than a little bit encouraging, the things we can learn from this passage. Some people, once they come to grips with the depths of their sin, and see the grandeur of God's righteous holiness, they sometimes despair of God's ability to save them: How could God save me? after all that I've done? I'm unsavable!! This passage demonstrates to us God's compassions towards us, His mercy. Whatever is in our souls, He knows us. (Heb4:12-13) "For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." (Ps103:14) He cares about us (1Pt5:7) - deeply- on the 'individual' level.

It also shows us that, just because a person has a "personal relationship" with Jesus, it doesn't necessarily follow that the person is saved. (Do you need to re-read that last sentence?)

It is obvious that Mary had a deep 'love' for Jesus. But was that sufficient? She's clinging to the concept of this 'man'... but where is her heart focused? As we shall see...she was 'blind'.

I'm not going to try to map out the sequence of every detail of the events, to coordinate them all between the four gospels (that's not the purpose of this article). But it is obvious that Mary goes to the tomb the first time with the other women, as they are prepared with more spices to anoint the body, and are wondering how they will get the stone rolled away. (Mk16:3) But on their way, there is the earthquake and the angel rolled the stone away. (Mt28:2) So that, when they get there, they find the stone 'already' rolled away. (Jn20:1, Lk24:2) As they see the body missing, the angels appear, "He is not here, but is risen!" (Lk24:6) And in that conversation the angels ask them to "remember" how Jesus had told them all these things, and it says, "And they remembered His words." (vs6,8) So they go tell the Eleven, and Peter goes to have a look. (Lk24:12) As one might hear the account told by various people, this seems to be a more 'general' account, as told by Luke; as Luke had gathered all the bits of information from all the eyewitnesses to compile this treatise to Theophilus. (Lk1:1-3) Luke was not himself an eyewitness, but he compiled from all the different sources as they told the bits and pieces they remembered.

Here in John we have a more 'personal' eyewitness record of events. Now as the other women are apparently excitedly telling the general group that they had seen the angels, and the report that Jesus was risen, it seems here that Mary specifically seeks out Peter and John more privately (perhaps while the rest are all in a hubbub?) to say similar things to them. (vs2) Only, she doesn't seem to convey what the angels have said, that "Christ is risen", but rather she says, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." In other words: Yeah, the others are all excited, but the truth is... The body isn't there. He's missing!

In other words, she has heard what the angels said, as they exhorted the women to "remember" Jesus' words...and they "remembered" Jesus' words. But she is NOT BELIEVING it. She's still looking for a DEAD BODY, when the angels had already asked "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" (Lk24:5) The angels have proclaimed Jesus' resurrection, but Mary comes to Peter and John (two of the three Jesus regularly showed special things: raising of Jairus' daughter Mk5:22+; transfiguration Mt17, etc...these are two 'leaders' of the group): His body is missing, and we don't know where it is!

Last month we observed how John then goes, sees the burial clothes, empty, and believes. But Mary hasn't yet got it figured out.

"Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away..."

"Mary!"

For you who grew up with expected standards of behavior, and experienced the necessary parental discipline to guide you, remember those times where you were either fully misbehaving, or were on the 'verge' of misbehaving, and if your name was "John", to hear "Jooooohn!" There were two things: 1) You -knew- your parent's voice, 2) and you -understood- the 'tone' of their voice at that moment. You knew that you had better -quickly- modify your behavior, or you knew to expect certain consequences. At dog competitions, there might be -many- 'masters' calling to their dogs, and all the dogs will be hearing all the -various-masters...but the dog hears -his- master's voice (like the old 78's and RCA Victor.) and obeys the commands. Somebody calls up a loved one on the phone, and says, "It's me." It is not necessary to say, "This is your husband, named so-n-so, whom you know and love, as we are married." "It's me" is sufficient, because the hearer knows the voice of the one calling.

"Mary!" And she turns around, grabs Him by the feet, "Rabboni!"

As I look at this at this moment, I am wondering if the words in parentheses, "(which is to say, Teacher)", were added by others after John wrote this narrative originally, because "Teacher", which is a correct translation of the Greek there, does not really convey the meaning of "Rabboni" adequately, like the parenthetical note claims for it. The word appears only twice. Once here in Jn20:16, and the other time when Bartimaeus is brought to Jesus, and he addresses Jesus as "MY MASTER....that I may see again" (Mk10:51)

The word means, not merely "honorable sir, teacher"; but with greater honor: "Master, chief, prince" (This is why I wonder if someone, perhaps a copyist? added this note of 'explanation' later. To say "teacher" doesn't really seem to fit. KJV says "master" there, which I'm sure is from the older English where, for instance, school teachers were called, school masters. The KJV "master" means the same thing as today's "teacher". But "rabboni" conveys a higher position of elevated status. One of 'greatness'. My spirit says it doesn't belong there (in the Greek); but lacking proof, it is left in the VW-edition)

As Bartimaeus was imploring the "Son of David (in other words "Messiah") have mercy on me", proclaiming Jesus' Deity, so is Mary here.

Please tell me where to find His -body-. "Mary!" You -ARE- alive! You -ARE- the Master/Chief/Prince. You -ARE- the Exalted One!

I would suggest that, in that instant, Mary -knew- Jesus was more than a mere man...but that He was very God. It was that very moment that she "first believed". (Rom13:11) Perhaps like Thomas? Unless I see the nail holes, and put my hand where the spear went in. Perhaps Mary heard what the angels said, that "He is risen"... But...I don't know...this is all too much to take in! Where's the -body-? Where's the proof?

Is Mary being like the other disciples whom Jesus chided, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken." (Lk24:25) ??

Or perhaps...?

If Mary had previously been demon-possessed, she had likely experienced many of the things today's charismania boasts with claims about: this sign, that miracle, that great work over there, this other experience. Perhaps, being in that realm, she also heard the claims of conjurers, but saw the fakery? So now, here these heavenly/spirit beings (like she had seen before in her demonic trances...remember: demons are fallen angels) are making claims that "Jesus is alive". But yeah...I've seen all -that- before! Don't you be foolin' around with me now! Jesus healed me of these demons; but now He's dead....and the demons are back!!? Don't be messing with my mind! Stop this foolin' around! Show me the body, and I'll be on my way...

And she hears His voice, "Mary!" ..and as Thomas would say a week later, "My Lord and My God!" (vs28) That's what "Rabboni" meant in her heart. And notice Jesus emphasizes: "My Father and your Father...My God and your God" (vs17) No...this is not a reversion to demons. This is the REAL THING!

So, let's make some application here. Earlier we said that it is not enough to merely have a "personal relationship" with Jesus. This is what Mary had, but she had not yet (in her heart) come to -believe- that Jesus was -very-God. The blind man whom Jesus had given sight to scarcely a week or two earlier was confronted, "Do you believe into the Son of God?" (Jn9:35) The Ethiopian's faith was confirmed with the statement, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Ac8:37) Mary, yet in unbelief, wanted to drag away His dead body... So, she had had a "personal relationship" with Jesus. But she was not yet saved. The "Gospel" includes the belief that Jesus rose again from the dead. (1Cor15:4) Otherwise, Eternal Life is one big farce! (1Cor15:17-19)

I hope some of you are now beginning to shudder greatly! Is not one of today's primary "gospels" the so-called gospel of the "personal relationship" with Jesus? Some of you call yourself a "Christian" because you were told you needed a "personal relationship" with Jesus, so you -prayed- a so-called "prayer" and "asked Jesus to come into your life"...for that alleged "personal relationship". But were you exhorted to "repent" of

your sin (Ac2:38) and "receive" Jesus (Jn1:12), "believing" on Him (Ac16:31)? Not for that "personal relationship", nor to be your "friend...to be with you to the end"...but as your "Rabboni"? "Your Master!"?

Don't worry, the "relationship" will follow, as Jesus promised through the indwelling Holy Spirit. (Jn14:23, 16:13, etc)

But if Jesus is not your Master, He will never be your "friend". A high and lofty "prince" and "master" is one under whom one subjects himself. If a person "humbles" himself and submits to the Master, then the Master will "exalt you". (Jac4:10) But if a person comes along looking for a "relationship"...well, the world is full of those! And they are all going together down the "broad way" to "destruction". (Mt7:13)

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me." (Jn10:27) When Jesus called to Mary, she heard the voice of her "Master".

Certainly, Jesus said, "No longer do I call you servants...but I have called you friends.." (Jn15:15) Truly, this is the relationship that comes to be between the Lord and the Believer. But it must -start- with Jesus being Master, and the repentant sinner being the servant. Remember, Jesus also said, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for SO I AM." (Jn13:13) Yes, we become the Lord's "friends"...but we never stop being His "servants". Just because Jesus says, "no longer do I 'call' you servants" does not mean that we have ceased to be His servants. After all, look at the disciple He "loved", fallen in a faint when John saw His glory. (Rev1:17) That's not the response of a "friend" who is not also a "servant". The 'emphasis' changed: One who is only a servant obeys out of 'fear' and 'duty'; but a friend obeys out of 'love' (Jn14:15, 1Jn5:2-3) And there is "no fear in love". (1Jn4:18)

Yes, the "relationship" will develop, once you are in the family of God. But you must first listen to the right voice. There are many "invitations". Satan has many "ministers of righteousness" (2Cor11:15) giving out invitations, putting on their trance-like out-of-body "light" shows. (vs14) But if satan is inviting...where do you end up? If you accept his invitation, the "relationship" you have is with whom? Certainly NOT Jesus Christ!

But...but... Hold on just a minute! Didn't Jesus invite, "Come to Me and I will give you rest? (Mt11:28) Didn't Jesus pray to the Father "that they may be one...with Us"? (Jn17:21,etc) Isn't that "one"ness a "personal" relationship? Well, yes it is...but it is only for those who have "kept God's Word" (vs6) (saved ones). "NOT" for the "world" (vs9)

For the world, what is in store is "death". The "wages of sin is death". (Rom6:23) The "soul who sins shall die" (Eze18:4) What is required is the "redemption" that is provided by Jesus' blood, the "remission of sins" (Col1:14, Eph1:7) which is given to the "repentant" sinner (Lk24:47,

Ac2:38) when "by faith/believing" (Ac16:31, Rom3:28) the person "receives" Jesus Christ. (Jn1:12) When the person, thus, receives Jesus, then and only then is there authority to be called a "child of God". And only then can there be any basis for a so-called "personal relationship" as the new "baby" in Christ (1Pt2:2) is now calling out "Abba, Father". (Rom8:15, Gal4:6)

But if a person seeks to gain entrance to Heaven, to God's presence, the need is not for love, or relationships. The thing that keeps a person out of Heaven is -SIN-. "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has uttered perverseness. No one calls for justice, nor does anyone plead for truth; they trust in vanity and speak lies. They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity..." (Is59:2-4)

Contrary to those snake-oil invitations, God is not in Heaven wringing His hands, yearning for "relationships" with man. As long as man rebels, God's attitude is: Get out of My sight! Today's society doesn't like this word, and they come up with all sorts of politically correct, psychologically expedient words to replace it. But the word is "Sin". SIN! SIN is the SEPARATION between man from God. When man merely seeks a "relationship" God says, Get away from Me, sinner!

For many years there has been this epidemic called, "easy believerism". It preaches a watered-down so-called "gospel" that is "seeker friendly". It's primary doctrine is "only believe". It's next-of-kin invitation is the "personal relationship" with Jesus. This is a 'pleasant' gospel. All you have to do is realize your own 'worth' before God, and go-forward, and once up at the altar, somebody will lead you in "-THE- prayer"... and you don't even have to learn it... just "repeat-after-me". And hockus-pockus, you're now a "christian". (Any of you who believes in this stuff: please produce a Scripture, so we can all see it, that proclaims this doctrine, either "-the-prayer" that was formulated by God to pray, or even the command from God with any words resembling: "pray this prayer to be saved") This 'method' does not look at sin. It rarely even talks about "hell". When Luis Palau was in town almost 20 years ago, he specifically made the statement with words something like this: "I don't like hell. I don't like to talk about hell. So this week I'm not going to talk about hell. I'm going to talk about Heaven." And he had hundreds of people "go-forward".

Jesus talked more about "how hard" it was for certain kinds of rich self-righteous people to get to Heaven. (Mk10:23) And Jesus spoke often about the "outer darkness" (Mt8:12), "hell fire" (Mt5:22) and the "weeping and gnashing of teeth". (Mt22:13) John, while pointing out: "Behold the Lamb of God" (Jn1:29) spent more time warning against the "wrath to come". (Mt3:7) Unless you acknowledge your sin, and the impossibility of your getting to Heaven as long as you are a sinner, you will never (NEVER) get to Heaven!

Sin requires atonement. Something Jesus provided when He died on the cross. (That was a very ugly, bloody mess! It would not have been 'appropriate' on your white-cloth-draped altars! And it would certainly chase people away from your churches! They certainly would not 'feel' wonderful, and leave with "batteries all charged up"!) And His resurrection provides and guarantees Eternal Life. (Rom6:3-7, etc)

Phew! "So complicated and grotesque!" you say? How can anybody be saved, if all -that- is required? Well, like Jesus answered a similar question, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Mt19:25-26) While being complex, it is also simple and childlike. (Mt18:3, 19:14) And also remember that it is a 'heart' thing (Rom2:28-29, Ac15:8, Ps7:9)... God knows your heart...

"Blessed are the PURE in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt5:8)

So...

Whose voice are you hearing? The demons who would impress you with their conjurings and spirit-filled 'experiences'? The false prophets purporting to promise you pleasant things they have no authority to promise, in the context of your proud, "hard and impenitent heart"; storing up for yourself "wrath"? (Rom2:5)

Or have you come to the end of yourself, and is -JESUS- calling your name? And if so, What are you responding? If Jesus is calling you, and you answer Him in the affirmative... all those aforementioned 'complexities' will vanish away into the "simplicity that is in Christ" (2Co11:3)

See Also Addendum: Jesus, Mary & da Vinci Code

My Lord and my God! - John 20

"The other disciples therefore said to [Thomas], We have seen the Lord. So he said to them, Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not ever believe. And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace to you. Then He said to Thomas, Bring your finger here, and look at My hands; and bring your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing. And Thomas answered and said to Him, My Lord and my God!" (~vs25-28)

Like we observed several years ago in the portion, "Bring Your Finger Here" many people condemn Thomas for what appears to be unbelief. Indeed, Jesus invites Thomas to "not be unbelieving". He is often called, "-doubting- Thomas". But I don't see in this incident where Jesus 'chides' Thomas as He did the two on the road to Emmaus, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken." (Lk24:25) I dare say Thomas is likely like a lot of so-called computer 'nerds': analytical, thoughtful, purposeful, one to figure out and dwell on the cause/effect relationship of things.

Earlier, as Jesus is heading back near Jerusalem, to Bethany (a stone's throw from Jerusalem), where He will raise Lazarus from the dead, as the Jews have been seeking how to kill Jesus, it is Thomas who resolutely articulates, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." (Jn11:16) Thomas looks at things 'realistically'. No sugar-coating or rose glasses

Thomas had seen how Jesus had died. Those Roman soldier had worked Him over real good. Scripture tells us, "His appearance was disfigured more than any man.." (Is52:14) "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before its shearers is mute, so He opens not His mouth." (53:7) Does this mean that He didn't even scream out in pain? If so, is that part of why they taunted, "Prophesy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?" (Mt26:68) ?? When He wouldn't utter a sound, hitting Him harder to try to elicit some indication that their punches were having an effect?

What is it about the male gender that seeks to beat each other up? Even the other morning as I went for an exercise walk around the neighborhood, these kids (perhaps around 7-8 yrs old?) were playing in this one yard, and the little boys were punching themselves in their own faces, having great 'fun' at it! As I came walking along past where they were, they came up to me, proudly displaying their activity to me. So when I asked them something like, "Are you trying to hurt yourselves?" they responded with gleeful satisfaction, "Yeaaaahhh!!"

But Thomas saw Jesus hanging on the cross. He saw the beat-up face, the ripped back, the stretching nail holes. He heard Jesus cry out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mk15:34) And after all the blood that was coming out of just about every part of Jesus' body, then the soldier pushed the spear into His side, and whatever blood was left came gushing out.

You -JUST- DON'T DO ALL -THAT- to a human body, and then claim the person is "alive"! It's just not possible! That is not 'reality'! The human body can only take -so- much, and then it's DEAD. And what they did to Jesus, which he had seen, far-exceeded all that. Jesus is alive? NO WAY!!! And you say He just 'appeared' out of thin air? What sort of hallucinogenic stuff have you-all been smoking, anyway?

In fact, the rest of them, the first time, thought they were hallucinating, too; thinking He was a ghost. And He had to convince them by eating some food, and inviting them to "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." (Lk24:39)

"Thomas, bring your finger here, and look at My hands; and bring your hand here, and put it into My side." (vs27) Investigate the proof, and see the evidence for yourself... and BELIEVE.

You see, right here, Jesus' words and actions are counter to most cults. Most cults lie. They recruit people to join them, but rarely do they tell 'all' their beliefs, until the person has joined and made the pledges to secrecy; or has been brainwashed sufficiently to where they are not likely to flee...only then are the beliefs fully explained. In some societies the cult doctrines are given incrementally, as a person binds himself to the organization with greater and greater blood-oath curses of fidelity. And most cults also initially lie about their beliefs, to entice the unwary who thinks they are joining something different than what they actually are.

But Jesus openly says to Thomas: You don't believe anybody can go through what I did, and now live? Come, Thomas, look. Bring your finger here and touch. Investigate. Understand the truth.

Did Thomas then go touch the scars? Somehow I really seriously doubt it! He burst out: "My Lord and my God!" (vs28) Same as Mary last month, "Rabboni!" My Master! Jesus has suddenly appeared in the room, and he -knew- Thomas' heart. First topic of conversation was the very things Thomas was churning around. This Person was addressing the very "thoughts and intents of [his] heart" (Heb4:12) There is only One who can do that! That is the very domain of God "who knows (and searches) the heart" (Ac15:8, 1Sam16:7, 1Ki8:39, Ps44:21, Jer17:10) Like the woman of Samaria, "He told me everything that I ever did. Is this not the Christ?" (4:29) It is the same basis by which people are saved when they hear the preaching of God's Word (not demonic babbling): "And thus the secrets of

his heart become revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will do homage to God and proclaim that God is truly among you." (1Co14:25)

Thomas was looking for physical evidence, proof he could analyze, put under a microscope and sort out, look at DNA samples, blood types, enter the data into his computer and have a result spit out the other end. But Jesus gave evidence to his -HEART-.

Jesus -gave- him 'Faith'. Remember, if you have a correct translation, your Bible will say, "Faith -OF- Jesus Christ" (Rom3:22, Ga2:16, Php3:9) Salvation is "by grace through faith" (Eph2:8) Many people stop there, not understanding that it is a "gift of God". Or if they see the "gift" there, they think it is only the "salvation" that is a gift. People try to stir up faith, or conjure it up in some mystical experience. But even that FAITH by which we "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Ac16:31) COMES -FROM- Jesus Christ. It is -HIS- FAITH which He imparts to us. Thus, there is no reason to worry about having "enough" faith. If it is -His- faith, it -IS- "enough". This is what Jesus gave to Thomas.

Thomas confesses Jesus as his God; indicating that which had just happened in his heart. "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom10:10) Jesus gave Thomas His faith, and Thomas explodes with confession.

However, throughout the centuries, most people have not been privy to what Thomas saw. In fact, Jesus did not even appear to the Jews or the Romans who crucified Him. He appeared to "witnesses". (Ac3:15, 10:39,41, Lk24:48, 1Cor15:5-8) And Jesus says, "Blessed are those not seeing and yet believing" (vs29) Because, the very definition of "faith" is "...the certainty of things hoped for, the EVIDENCE of THINGS NOT SEEN." (Heb11:1)

So, the obvious question: On what basis, then, do people believe into Jesus Christ? How can they know all these things that happened, so as to believe? If a person could not see Jesus crucified, and then raised again, what is their proof?

"..these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (vs31)

THE SCRIPTURES!

Do you see why the enemy of our souls has made it such a campaign to pervert the Scriptures with all the unfaithful translations and paraphrases? Because he doesn't want people to be saved. He wanted Jesus to "do homage" to him (Mt4:9) in his quest to be "like the Most High". (Is14:14) If he couldn't corrupt Jesus, at least he can work at keeping people from faith in Christ. Thus, if people don't know who Jesus is, and what He did,

because they are reading a corrupt version, then they won't be saved, because it is -only- through Jesus that we get to the Father. (Jn14:6) There is "no other name" by which we are saved. (Ac4:12) That "name" is not the correct pronunciation and diction of "Jesus" vs "Yeshua" vs "Yahshua", etc...but it is the PERSON AND WORK that the name (however it is uttered, in whatever language) represents.

Why do we need to know of Jesus? Because His words, He being the "Word that is God" (Jn1:1), are the "words of Eternal Life". (6:68) That's why we have the Scriptures. That's why John wrote this. So that, as we learn of Him through the Scriptures, His Holy Spirit can grab the attention of our hearts in conviction (16:8), so that He can also be "-my- Lord and -my- God"...the "Lord [who] is -my- Shepherd..." (Ps23:1) -my- Rabboni (vs16), -my- Master (Mk10:51).

"So then faith (salvation) is of hearing, and hearing through the Word of God." (Rom10:17)

You Follow Me! - John 21

"Simon Peter said to them, I am going fishing. They said to him, We are coming with you also. They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing." (vs3)

The other day in an e-mail exchange with somebody, the subject of "jobs" came up. Actually, in this case, since the 'job' in question was a church music position, in a very real sense, it was about "ministry". Discussing the difference between "pushing" on doors to try to open them, vs -waiting- on the Lord to "open" doors. The observation between the two of us from our past experiences that, when we went PURSUING AFTER some ministry, things pretty much fell flat, or were fraught with problems; but when the Lord was opening doors, that was when things were according to His will; and things progressed according to God's plan.

Mary has come through the emotions: Show me the body! Thomas has skeptically: I can't believe unless I can put my finger.... And Peter; oohh, Mr. Peter! Blusteringly: I'LL NEVER DENY YOU! But now in utter failure, having denied the Lord, seeing the empty tomb, seeing the Lord appear in the room where they are gathered... but for the most part, Jesus is NOT AROUND day-in and day-out, like has been the case for over the past three years. He hasn't been fishing in all that time, working his "job", because following Jesus around in ministry has been a different life.

But Jesus is (essentially) gone. Now what? I'm an utter failure! I couldn't even stick up for Jesus when it counted most, and now look at me! Well... I guess I better start thinking about providing for my family. 'Can't just be sitting around here twiddling my thumbs, staring at the walls; all of us sitting around in silence staring at each other. What is there to say to each other? We thought Jesus was going to be Israel's "deliverer" (Ac1:6), but He died; and now He's no longer around. What's left? Gotta face 'reality' and get back down-to-earth. What else do I know? What else can I do?

I'm going fishing. Yeah, we're with you.

And notice John gets right to-the-point: "...THEY CAUGHT NOTHING."

"Children, you do not have any fish do you?" (vs5) Hey fellas! You didn't catch anything, did you... No!

"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." (vs6)

Notice this exchange is different from the first time Jesus gave this command. Jesus began and ended His ministry with telling them to cast the net out the boat, for fish. The first time Peter retorts, "We have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." (Lk5:5)

This time the text does not tell us that they argued. Jesus commanded, and they let down the net. They obeyed. Why? Even though they are emotionally downtrodden right now, have they been so-used to obeying the Lord, that it was like second nature to them to do so? Even though they weren't mentally cognizant that it was Him, they knew His voice? (10:27)

Also notice that each time, as they are laboring for themselves, that they were catching NOTHING. They were fruitless.

The first time, as they had caught nothing; and then obeyed Jesus, they caught a whole bunch to where the net began to tear and the boats began to sink. As they are all marvelling, Jesus says, "From now on you will be catching men." (Lk5:10)

This time, they again catch a lot of fish, but the net does not tear. And then Jesus has a conversation with Peter; similar to the first time; but wrapping up the heart of the matter...

"So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord; You know that I am deeply fond of You. He said to him, Feed My lambs." (vs15)

Rather than look at the 'three-times' Jesus asks, and Peter answers (with different kinds of "love" and "fondness"), let us see if we can understand the overall -heart- of the matter with Peter. We often tend to shake our heads at him, because he was always speaking first, and thinking later. (Like us) He blustered out to Jesus in the storm, and then began to sink in doubt. (Mt14:31) Confidently asserted that he would die with Jesus, and then denied Him.

Peter, do you love Me more than these? Some people speculate whether Jesus was asking after his love compared to the other disciples.

However, when we see Peter's entire legacy with Jesus (having been in this same place myself before the Lord in a similar 'discussion', I 'recognize' what is going on here. I've been there!), I truly believe that Jesus at this moment is confronting the very core essence of Peter's existence. Jesus is asking Peter to "count the cost" to follow Him. (Lk14:28) Peter, there is a scales before you. Take everything you know; your life, your fishing, your family, your friends, your failures (you know you are not a success: both times we've had this conversation, you had caught 'nothing' until I came along) and put them on one side. Now, put Me on the other side. Which way is the scale tipping?

When Jesus confronts each one of us He does the same thing. If you have not faced this 'discussion' with Jesus, it is quite possible you do not know Him; or at best, you are not what you should be; you are stagnant.

Take your life: your childhood with all its happiness and hurts, your career, your marriage, your possessions, education, dreams, everything that is -you-... put it on one side. Jesus is on the other side. It's a "Y" in the road, and you are steam-rolling along, non-stop... you HAVE TO make a choice. Which way do you proceed?

THAT is what Jesus is asking Peter. It's now or never, Peter!

Oh, but, but... Look at the schools I went to. Look at my 'successful' career. Look at this empire I've built with my own bare hands. Companies, streets, parks and institutions are named after me. People look at my life and wish to be like me. You're asking me to give up ALL THAT?

Earlier Peter had said, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." (Mk10:28) Well, right now Jesus is confronting him, as if to ask: HAVE YOU REALLY? Have you REALLY 'left' it ALL? Where is your love for Me? (Remember: within this entire context is the fact that Peter had denied knowing Jesus, and when he did so, Jesus even though on trial, when the rooster crowed, had looked over at him. Lk22:61 Sorta like when you were a kid, and misbehaved while out in public, and got that look from dad that said: we'll 'talk' about this later when we get home. So, this conversation is finishing that which was begun earlier) You're such a tough guy, huh? You're gonna die with Me? Are you even "deeply FOND of Me"? (vs17)

This cut Peter to the quick. It was one thing to hear Jesus preach to others. Amen, Lord! Preeeach it! Give it to 'em, with both barrels! And if they reject, "...Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" (Lk9:54)

But what about -you-, Peter? "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife (Yes, even wife! The one with whom a person is "one flesh". She might not be saved. She may not love the Lord the way you do. When -you- are following the Lord, she is not your "partner". She answers to the Lord 'individually', just like you do. Rom14:12) and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." (Lk14:26) Here we have the nitty gritty 'application'. "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it unto eternal life." (Jn12:25)

Now Peter, while you're sorting this all out in your heart, realize that of your own abilities you were not successful. In the career that was your trade, you were catching nothing. I came along, you obeyed Me, and you reaped to overflowing. Back then, I told you that you would be "catching men". Now, let's expand on that: "Feed My lambs (vs15), Tend My sheep (vs16), Feed My sheep." (vs17)

Notice the 'full' ministry of a shepherd. Just as John repeats to the Fathers, Young men and Children. (1Jn2:13-14) The ministry isn't merely to GET THEM SAVED. No, it also includes "feeding" the flock. And also "tending" the flock. When my uncle used to raise sheep, there was feeding, shearing, bobbing their tails, tending to the needs when they would get tape worms, and other medical procedures. A person gets saved, and then the 'lamb' needs "feeding". There are all sorts of needs of the sheep that need "tending"; exhortation, warning, counsel, encouragement, etc. But just because a lamb grows up, that does not mean the care stops. The adult sheep need "feeding", too.

Peter, you were staring at the walls, and at each other, and decided to go-it-alone, and go fishing. You caught nothing. But this is what -I- want you to do. And on Pentecost under the Holy Spirit Peter preached and 3000 were saved (Ac2:41), and as the Church grew, it was worldwide: They "turned the world upside down" for Christ. (Ac17:6)

However, if you've decided you love Me, here's what you will face. As Paul (Rom1:1), Jacob (Jac1:1), Judas (Jud1:1) and Peter later would write (2Pt1:1) "a BONDSERVANT...of Jesus Christ". According to the dictionary, a "bondservant" is one who is "obligated to serve without wages". Typically, where a "slave" might have been purchased from a trader, a -BOND-servant was one who, having come into debt and hard times, had deeded himself to the master as a means of paying his debt. By his own efforts at life he, essentially, had 'failed', and was at the end of himself, with no way out; and his creditor became his master, ordering his life.

Peter, your life will not be your own. "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish. This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, Follow Me." (vs18-19) Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified.

But Lord, what about this fellow? (vs21)

U-u-uh! (wagging index finger) You never mind him! As a bondservant you do not "judge another's servant" (Rom14:4) Like training a dog to walk a tight leash, and it is cranking its head around to see what other dogs or things of interest there might be to go chasing after... -YANK-! "Nooo! Heel!"

"If I intend for him to remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." (vs22)

They might be given a life of luxury, but you are always struggling to make ends meet. "You follow Me!" They might be pastoring a mega-church where they are popular and people like them, but you have barely a

handful of sheep and you have a lot of enemies. "You follow Me!" They might be president or director of a missions board, bible college or seminary, and you are standing at the local park or street corner passing out tracts in the rain. "You follow Me!"

Besides: many of them only have sheep 'clothing' on, but "inwardly they are ravenous wolves." (Mt7:15)

I've shared this before in another context, but it's been awhile and fits here. Shortly after I had married my unequal yoke, I was still floundering in terms of what to be doing for my 'career' in life, after university. My desire was to serve the Lord in ministry, and knew God's 'call' was upon my life. But the 'doors' were not yet 'opening'. And so I was doing various little things while 'treading water' (so-to-speak), "waiting" on the Lord. (Ps27:14)

Then at one point, there was a family get-together at which my father-in-law, a successful businessman, a member of his church's board of elders, took me aside and counseled me. As he knew my heart's desire to serve God, his counsel was to sit down, figure out 'what' it was I wanted to do in ministry, and then just "go-for-it". (You know...like a person making a business plan, and then implementing it) The basic mentality was: If I didn't pick some direction, and start out... I'd never get there.

By contrast: When Israel followed God in the wilderness, sometimes they were on the move. But at other times, they stayed put for periods of time. "...they kept the charge of Jehovah, at the mouth of Jehovah..." (Num9:17-23)

So anyway, I followed father-in-law's advice. I did some things. But my life was yet to be turned upside down, inside out, topsy turvey, as I would eventually come to realize I had married into an unregenerate pack-of-wolves, and my unequal yoke would counsel me in directions for the deliberate purpose of getting me -OUT-OF- ministry, and I would ultimately find myself 'alone'. A miserable FAILURE! Kinda like where Peter was.

It was at -THAT- point that the LORD got my attention, and what I should have continued "waiting on the Lord" for, came into being. It was His doing. The doors that He opened. The steps that He arranged. In the direction He led. It was no longer me sitting down and making plans, and "going for it". Other than writing studies and mapping out tentative mailing schedules for them (schedules that He often changes), I have not 'made-a-plan' in many years...except, perhaps, for things like vacation trips, or going shopping.

Peter failed under his own efforts. (Like PB failed under his) But with Jesus, there is a big catch of big fish...

However, we must give our lives as bondservants...and "follow" Jesus. Not leading out, "going-for-it", and asking Jesus to walk along-side me and "bless -my- endeavors"...

But rather, like when the Lord knocked S/Paul down, as he had been militantly pursuing his own agenda, and humbled him...

Saul replies, "Lord, what do You have in mind for me to do?" (Ac9:6)

True Testimony - John 21

"This is the disciple who bears witness concerning these things, and writes these things; and we know that his testimony is true." (vs24)

"This...disciple", the one to whom Peter points and says, "But Lord, what about this man?" (vs21) The disciple "whom Jesus loved". (13:23) This is the one who was given the extraordinary privilege to write this gospel that addresses Jesus as the "SON OF GOD" (1:34,49, 9:35, 10:36, 11:27, 19:7, 20:31)

Two and a half years ago we began this series. The book begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (1:1-4)

The Bible begins by saying: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Gen1:1, 2:7)

Throughout the Bible, when it records man speaking to other men about God, or praying to God, God's identity is intimately wrapped up in His essence as "Creator". Two examples: "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of Heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands." (Ac17:24) "Our help is in the name of Jehovah, who made the heavens and the earth." (Ps124:8)

One of man's primary rebellions against God is regarding His work as Creator. Thus, the ludicrous and unprovable -theories- related to so-called "evolution". And as the saying goes, "Repeat a lie often enough and loud enough, and write books about it, in people's minds it becomes -fact-"; thus it has become with evolution. Most people 'assume' evolution to be true. But they cannot prove it.

Hand-in-hand with rejecting God as "Creator" is man's rejection of God's "Documentation" of His essence and work as the Creator. The Scriptures.

Man in his foolishness excavates some archaeological site, finds some OBSCURE 'corner' of some piece/fragment of artifact, and from that SINGLE PIECE of pottery, wood or metal, will conclude a complete narrative of the people who made that MINOR piece of material, even concluding their social structure and religion. They will find some minor ancient bone FRAGMENT, and from that single piece, backwards-reconstruct the entire animal, suggesting it's eating habits, behavior; and most of all, its place in the Darwinian order of evolution. They might find an obscure clay tablet with a FEW MINOR INSIGNIFICANT words of an

ancient language, and will conclude an entire litany of the culture and commerce of the peoples who inscribed those few words.

On the other hand, the Scriptures: There are HUNDREDS/THOUSANDS of pieces of manuscripts that were copied over the centuries. They take these segments, even crossing the century boundaries, being able to match up text from one century, and having it agree with other segments from other centuries, to come up with the whole of the Scriptures as we have them today. The Scriptures, made up of 66 books, written over a span of roughly 1500 years, various segments by various -different- "holy men of God" (2Pt1:21), and copied over a span of 3500 years by how-many-hundreds of copyists and translators; has a seamlessly continuous message that agrees with itself from beginning-to-end. It is the message of God Most High, Creator of the heavens and earth, who created man, who called out a nation for Himself (Israel Gen48:4, Ex19:6, 1Pt2:9), who promised and fulfilled His promise to send a Redeemer, His Son (Jn3:16), the "Seed" of the woman (Gen3:15), and Abraham's "Seed". (Gen22:18) And who made the promise to Israel that if they disobeyed, they would be scattered to the winds to the "four corners" of the nations, but from there He would regather them again. (De30:4, Ezek36:24, Is11:12, Jer23:3) And after roughly 2000 years of a barren wasteland, today, just according to Scriptural prophecy, there is again a nation called "Israel".

But man's wisdom REJECTS the Bible as...what? "UNRELIABLE"? Not enough "proof" as to its "authenticity"?

They reject the Biblical account of Noah's flood, even though there are also -many- native cultural folk-lore accounts of an ancient man with a boat/canoe/raft, who saved all living things during a flood; and instead postulate the so-called theory of "uniformitarianism" to support evolution. Guess what? The Bible even predicted this theory way before man came up with it; the Bible prophesied that man would have this theory in the "last days"; "..For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were since the beginning of creation. For of this they are WILLFULLY ignorant: that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water." (~2Pt3:3-6)

Thus, evolution, which man thinks disproves the Bible, is actually a point of UNMISTAKABLE 'PROOF' -OF- the Bible...because the Bible (God) prophesied that "uniformitarianism" (evolution's primary foundation) WOULD BECOME a philosophy of the last days; just as it is, as we see it.

And even though God's people (Israel) stare them right in the face, and are the substance of practically each day's news lately, and is the focus of current geo-politics, they label their maps with "Palestine"; not "Israel". This even includes so-called 'christians'!

For one example of this: Recently I made a project of converting all the old DOS PC-Bible Atlas maps (Parsons Technology) into a format compatible for use with Online Bible, for my own more convenient personal use (the old DOS program does not run on today's large HDs without making special configurations, or running it off a zip disk, etc), and was amazed that NOT ONCE do any of those maps label Israel as "Israel". Either the map will be 'blank' in terms of a label, or it says "Palestine"...and that's even from something claiming to be "Bible" Software!! Even those promoting something that would be considered to be so-called "Christian" rejects Israel's true God-given name. That is because the very name, "Israel", means literally, "The Mighty God prevails". And they want none of that! IN THEIR HEARTS.

But remember why the Scriptures have been written? "...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (Jn20:31) When the Law was given, God gave it very simply. It does not require the extensive imaginative contortions so-called scientists go through to contrive their theories of evolution and so-called "histories" of past civilizations, based on a few miniscule pieces of artifacts. But God gave it: "And these Words which I am commanding you today shall be in your heart." (De6:6) And again: "..the Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." (De30:14)

Ahhh but...that's the key. The HEART. The heart of man is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I Jehovah search the heart, I examine the soul, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." (Jer17:9-10)

The Scriptures don't have enough "proof" of "authenticity"? It is not the purpose of this article to wax apologetic regarding the Scriptures. However, there are so many hundreds/thousands of fulfilled Bible prophecies that history authenticates. And also, any time science discovers truth, if Scripture addresses the subject, Scripture has always been true. e.g. For how many years did man's wisdom say the world was "flat", and some were even martyred for suggesting otherwise, as being "heretics"? But all along, the Scripture spoke of the "circle of the earth". (Is40:22) Well, any simple picture from outer space verifies the truth, does it not.

There is likely 100-to-1000 times more "evidence" (or more?) for the truth of Scripture, than the evidence that often convicts a criminal in a court of law, to receive the death penalty. The so-called "preponderance" of evidence.

And yet, man in his wisdom rejects it, because he does "not know God". Therefore God devised something that to man is the "foolishness of the message preached". (1Co1:21) It is a thing called "Faith". Even though

there is so much "evidence" to prove God's existence and the authenticity of His Scriptures, God's requirement of man is "Faith".

Salvation is a "spiritual" birth, "from above". (Jn3:8,3) We are told that "faith is of hearing, and hearing through the Word of God." (Rom10:17) But how does man receive God's Word?

"This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Ga3:2)

Man keeps looking for empirical "evidence", evidence which is -already-staring him in the face, and shouts out to him, "the Heavens declare the glory of the Mighty God; and the firmament proclaims His handiwork." (Ps19:1) "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Heb11:6)

What is faith? "Now faith is the certainty of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb11:1)

In a strange sort of way, when it comes to man's relationship with the Creator God, this is the 'twist' to it all: Even though all the evidence stares man in his face, he is only able to believe and understand that evidence through faith in that which is not seen. (read that sentence again) "No one has seen God at any time..." (1Jn4:12) But God has shown Himself through His Son (Heb1:2-3) and His works: "Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men." (Ps66:5) These are the things by which God "...did not leave Himself without witness.." (Ac14:17)

The reason man cannot receive all of God's obvious evidence, is because the evidence is that which God placed there. And the "natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1Co2:14) You see: to understand all this evidence that is lying all around, for the obvious observation, it requires having the "mind of Christ", being instructed by the Lord. (1Co2:16) It is that built-in "conscience" in the "heart" that all mankind is born with. (Rom2:15) But unless man acknowledges the Most High, he will never receive it. It is a matter of the HEART.

But the evidence is there, obvious, for the taking, by FAITH. God's evidence is true. His "holy men" who wrote His Word were true.

Their "testimony is true".

Amen!

Addendum Section:

As Moses Lifted up the Serpent ©2001

READER QUESTION:

Just a quick question that I would like your insight on..... I hear very often how "Moses lifting up the serpent " is comparable to Jesus being lifted up on the cross. I have never felt comfortable comparing a serpent with Jesus. What am I missing? I do not see the connection, other than the lifted up part.

VW ANSWER:

This comes from Jesus' own words, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.." (Jn3:14) The figure is not the "serpent", as much as it is that the bronze serpent was "hung" up on the pole. (Num21:8-9) A form of a "serpent" was made because it was serpent bites from which the people were dying. But the concept was that, if a person had been bit, they were then to 'look' to the bronze serpent Moses erected (a type of Christ being hung on the cross in the 'future'), and they would not die. In the same way, humanity is dying of sin. But when they 'look' to Jesus' death on the cross, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those believing into His name.." (Jn1:12)

It happened to be the serpent. But if that incident had been some other animal by which they had been dying, the object of the incident was that it was raised up on the pole... signifying the salvation Jesus would provide when He would come 1500 years later and be hung on the cross. The people were dying of the serpents, thus, a serpent was hung up. Humanity is dying of "sin"; thus, when Jesus died on the cross He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed." (Pt2:24)

In the wilderness the people did not 'do' anything for salvation to be healed of the serpent bites... they merely 'looked'... putting their faith/repentance into a response. In the same way, salvation from sin is not any "work" (Eph2:9), but putting faith/repentance into a response and receiving Christ. Like the old song says, "Look to the Lamb of God, Look to the Lamb of God, For He alone is able to save you, Look to the Lamb of God"

"knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your vain way of life received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1Pt1:18-19)

Illusions of Light ©2002

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."
(2Cor11:13-15)

"How you are fallen from the heavens, O shining one, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!"
(Is14:12)

A little object lesson this time:

I have tended to lag behind the very latest computer technologies. Why, I've even still got a couple of 286's at the store. My main 'fast' computer is only a Pentium 233. A couple weeks ago I finally bit the bullet and installed Windows 98 on the main home computer.

As I was reinstalling many of my applications, and rebooting the computer numerous times in this process, at one point I was suddenly 'captivated' by how "bright" the new Windows 98 bootup splash screen looks; you know, the one with the sky/clouds and the big "Windows" logo in the middle. As I was fussing with some notes at my desk, even out of the corner of my eye, I was noticing this "brightness" to the screen, compared to 95.

So, I started looking and analyzing why this should be the case. Where the clouds in 95 look more 'natural', the clouds in 98 have been modified to give the appearance that the Windows logo 'radiates'. The clouds have been made to emanate from all around the Windows logo, to give the illusion that the logo is "bright" and radiant. If you notice this, the logo, itself, hasn't changed. But they are playing "light tricks" -behind- the logo, to make it 'seem' that the logo radiates.

As I was noticing this, I was immediately reminded of that one dream I had about 10 years ago. I've shared it with the subscribers in the past, but it's been a few years. These truths we need reminders of periodically. In these days many people are seeing dreams and visions, thinking they are receiving special new revelations from God and Jesus. They pretty much -always- include bright lights, shining and radiance. And as we were reminded of in Tuesday's Q/A, God used dreams a lot to speak to people in the O.T. In fact, Elihu reminds Job that that was how God spoke to people, "For the Mighty God may speak once or twice, yet no one regards it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, while slumbering on their beds, then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction. In order to turn man from

his deed, and conceal pride from man, He keeps back his soul from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. (Job 33:14-18)

Trouble is, just because it is a dream, does not guarantee that the source is -always- God.

Let me illustrate from this dream I had: During this period of time I was having many dreams. I had just experienced the most traumatic series of events in my life, and was reeling from it all, both emotionally and physically. I believe many of the dreams were from God, to give me insight into the true nature of the events I was experiencing and the people involved. I believe it is even quite possible (likely) that at least one of those dreams was prophetic, of what is yet to take place. (As of this writing, it is beginning to be about a similar number of years that Joseph experienced between his dreams of his family bowing to him, and their actual fulfillment when he was ruler in Egypt) I'm still waiting on the Lord to know the truth of it all.

But in the midst of these various dreams, there was one notable one: In this dream there was a very bright light source, and a taaaall individual speaking to me. So tall that I did not even look up to see the 'face'...the face would have been way up in the heavens. But the speaking of this 'messenger' was soothing and peaceful to me. Yes, I felt 'loved'. The message was of such a nature that I almost felt I should get immediately out of bed to go to the door to greet the person who was supposed to be arriving. But, for some reason, I did not...but settled back to a sound sleep...peacefully.

As events unfolded, and I learned some truths, it turned out to be the case that 'part' of this messenger's words were true. But also, part were not. In following days and weeks, I found myself 'evaluating' this dream...as I had been doing with all the dreams. You see... I wanted to know God's Truth.

Yes, in this dream, there was a very bright light. But upon evaluation in hindsight, the light source was -BEHIND- the tall figure. The tall figure was quite reminiscent of the tall figure depicted on the Led Zeppelin album "Stairway to Heaven". The actual messenger in my dream had been dark/black, just like on that album cover. But the light source behind the messenger gave the -ILLUSION- of what many people report from their dreams, the "bright lights". Yes... just like the Windows 98 bootup screen.

In all those other dreams, there were no bright lights. When Joseph saw the sheaves and stars bowing to him, it is not recorded that he saw bright lights. (Gen37) Pharaoh only saw stalks of grain and cows. (Gen41) Nebuchadnezzar saw a statue and tree. (Dan2,4) Daniel saw animals. (Dan7) Peter saw a sheet with animals in it. (Acts10) None of

these saw "bright lights", nor did they come away from the experiences with -feelings- of "being loved", with messages to be proclaimed to others of, "live life to the fullest", and "love one another", etc. In most cases the dreams were cause for anxiety, sleeplessness and being sold into slavery; or at the least, uneasiness in the contemplation of God's will.

On the other hand, when Moses had been in God's presence, he came down from the mountain, and his -own- face shown. (Ex34) The angels that announced Jesus' resurrection were -wearing- "shining garments". (Lk24:4) These did not have some -other- light source either shining on them, or behind them radiating out from behind them, giving mere 'illusions' of light.

According to the dictionary, "illusion" indicates, "an erroneous perception of reality, erroneous concept or belief, condition of being deceived by a false perception or belief", etc.

Isn't it interesting how today's "[c]hristian" entertainment and 'worship' industry makes use of spotlights, fireworks and light shows in their stage acts/performances. Who is called the "angel of light"? Satan. (2Cor11:14) And his ministers are called "false apostles and deceitful workers.." (vs13) His ministers have even given him a 'name' which God only speaks of him descriptively. God calls him the "shining one" (Is14:12), but his servant have honored him in their translations with the Roman/Latin-derived name of "Lucifer".

But this follows his avowed purpose, to be "like the Most High". (Is14:14) But his light is not -in- himself.

So, who -is- Light? "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that GOD -IS- LIGHT and in Him is no darkness at all." (1Jn1:5) All satan can do is appear as his 'dark' self, while using spotlights, light trickery and illusions of light.

If you experience them, or hear of people who have visions and dreams of light and brightness, do not believe the messengers of those illusions. Analyze them, like I did, and understand the truth of the trickery. There is nothing intrinsically 'bad' about Windows 98; we're just using it as an object lesson; but next time your computer boots up, and you look at that 'dazzle' behind the Windows logo, remember that that is just how satan deceives.

If you are seeing some bright lights, it is not from God, because no sinful man can see nor approach His light. He says, "for no man shall see Me and live" (Ex33:20) The very fact that these visions have man approaching and rushing through these lights is self-evident proof that they are -not- of God.

God's light is within Himself. Jesus Christ is the "blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and eternal power. Amen." (1Tim6:15-16)
Jesus said, I am the Light of the World

One Goat (Numbers 28-29) © 2002

"Command the children of Israel, and say to them, My offering, My food for My offerings by fire as a soothing aroma unto Me, you shall take heed to offer to Me at their appointed times." (Num28:2)

These two chapters summarize, in quick order, all the various offerings Israel was to sacrifice, along with the amounts of flower, oil and wine to be use for each type of animal sacrifice.

It covers the Morning and Evening daily sacrifices (28:4), the Sabbath offerings (28:9), the offerings for the "beginnings of [the] months" (28:11), along with the offerings for the pilgrimage feasts throughout the year, from Passover (28:16) thru Sukkot (ch29).

Now, in 29:12 begins an eight-day period of time where they offer -many- animals, day-after-day. They start out on the first day offering 13 bulls, 2 rams and 14 lambs (28:13), and daily that number decreases until on the eighth day they offer 1 bull, 1 ram and 7 lambs. (28:36)

But, I wonder how many have ever noticed, while reading through all these "boring" specifications, while -all- these animals are being "burnt" (29:13) "with smoke" (Lev2:2,3:5,etc) as a "soothing aroma" (29:13), that also, every day, there was...

"one goat as a sin offering" - "one kid of the goats as a sin offering" (28:15,22,30, 29:5,11,16,19,22,25,28,31,34,38)

For all these offerings as a "soothing aroma" before God, done by making the sacrifices "smoke" like a gigantic incense censer, in amongst all that fire, heat and smoke of these multitude of other animals is the little "kid of the goat". I'm reminded of Elijah at the cave, and God brings along the fire, wind and earthquake, but God's voice was only heard in the "still small voice" (1Kg19:12) God's glory was seen in the pillar of fire and smoke over Israel, but when Moses and God communicated, Moses went to the "tent of meeting". (Lev1:1)

When Jesus died on the cross to take away our sin, His disciples, even, scattered from Him. He was all "alone" on the cross. Everyone was "staring" at Him. (Ps22:17) He felt forsaken (Ps22:1) But His work on that cross "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." (Ps103:12)

Jesus' death fulfilled the annual ritual of the "scapegoat". (Lev16) The blood of a bull was used to purify the high priest in order that he could fulfill the rest for the congregation, without being struck down dead due to his own sin. But it was the blood of the one goat that the

thusly-purified priest then took and sprinkled in the Holy of Holies, for the sin of the congregation. Once the sacrifices had been made, and the blood sprinkled, then the priest would lay his hands on the head of the live goat, symbolizing the laying of Israel's 'sin' upon the goat, and it would be led out into the wilderness 'alone', symbolizing the TAKING AWAY of the sin of the whole congregation.

Some people think that salvation has come by various means, depending upon which 'dispensation' a person lived. They think that some were saved by offering animals, others by keeping the Law (thus "works"), and others by faith-alone. But as Numbers ch28-29 review all the sacrifices throughout all the feasts, as we considered from Leviticus ch23 how they represent the various dispensations, throughout all these feasts there was the common theme...the:

"one kid of the goats as a sin offering"..."the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Rev13:8)

No matter the dispensation, salvation has ALWAYS been through Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". (Jn1:29) And salvation has ALWAYS been based on the "precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1Pt1:19) who "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev1:5)

And man's receiving of Christ (Jn1:12) has always been based on "grace through faith". (Eph2:8-9) By faith Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice (Heb11:4), and Abraham "believed God" (Rom4:3, Gen15:6) "Faith" is not only a N.T. doctrine. Salvation has ALWAYS been based on belief "on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts16:31) based on the sacrifice of the...

"one goat as a sin offering" (Num29:38) ...the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Rev13:8)

"And the Word of Jehovah came unto me, saying: Son of man, how is the wood of the vine, the vine branch, better than any other wood which is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can men make a peg from it on which to hang any vessel? Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for any work? Indeed, when it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for any work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned."
(Ezek15:1-5)

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me there is not a thing you are able to do. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is dried up; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned." (Jn15:4-6)

Not long ago, in one of the weekly mailings to the subscribers, a Q/A item observed the claims of some of today's noted religious leaders, proclaiming: "We are gods" In addition, over the years this ministry has existed, we continually refute the so-called "gospel" today's church proclaims: You are worth sooo much to God. While you sit there feeling unworthy because you are plagued by self-esteem issues, you need to understand just how much you are worth to God. He looks at you, and sees that worth...that's why Jesus came. What you need to do is see yourself as God sees you (OF GREAT WORTH), and ask Jesus to become your friend, and He will go along beside you for the rest of your life, wherever you go; and you can begin to lift your head up high, and proclaim to the world, "I'm worth it!" And since the Bible says that we will be "like" Him, we can simply "agree with God" and proclaim, "Yes, I am; I am like god! Actually, when it boils down to it, I am god!"

But a god has powers. A god has powers to do things, and make things happen. He creates, he blesses, he metes out revenge against disobedient subjects. Right?

What does man do? He cannot create. Anything he does, he does -with- that which already exists. Anything supernatural he claims to do, he is only able to do after he has 'worshipped' for a period of time, and become "spirit-filled" with the spirits that inhabit the environs of the earth; thus, it is not really him doing those things, but the spirits he has given himself over to. He cannot give life to anything; that is God's domain. (Jn5:21, 1Ti6:13,etc) Even "-the- gods" cannot do that!

Man, in and of himself, you cannot make anything with. If he dies, he

rots away into dust, and becomes maggot food.

Jesus said of Believers, that we are branches of the vine. Can you build anything with a vine? A house? A knickknack? A tool? Can you even make a 'god' (idol) from it? Does it even 'stand' on its own?

My grape plant is finally this year, after 13-14 years of unfruitfulness, producing over a dozen clusters. Last year only two. The year before that, one. And before that...nothing. These vines do not stand upright like the apple tree next to it. They must be 'supported' on this grid-work I built for them onto the old children's swing-set frame that was back there. Orchardists must use mechanisms to hold the vines up, so that the clusters can 'hang' down from the vines. Vines are held up by "arbors". When the vines are unproductive, and die, they are cut away. When I trimmed mine away these past many years, I did not take them and stack them with the other scraps of lumber that are here and there, waiting for some occasion in which they would be 'perfect' for some project. They are useless. I chop them to fit the garbage can and throw them away. In societies where they gather firewood, vines might be thrown into the fire to help cook the meal. But even there, a vine is not a sort of material that will produce a very 'useful' heat. It mostly takes up space and is in the way. You certainly cannot bank the stove with it to have the fire last all night. Really, it is worthless.

So, if Jesus calls Believers "branches" of the vine, where does modern christendom come up with the notion that we are "worth so much" to God? Where does christendom scrounge up the idea that we are to be busy DOING EXPLOITS for God? If we cannot even hold ourselves up, but must be supported as a vine is, how can we claim to boast in doing anything 'for' God? How can the claim be made that God is somehow "powerless" without our efforts on His behalf? That we are to "command" God this or that? A little different context, but the truth remains: "...remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you." (Rom11:18)

But if Jesus went to the efforts to redeem us with His blood, what is the purpose for our existence? To "bear much fruit". "In this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; thus you will be My disciples." (Jn15:8)

I've been very frustrated with my grape plant over the years. Please understand, I know nothing about such things, but as I see them grow, and try to do what seems to make sense to my mind. The plant was purchased and transplanted according to the instructions. According to some guidelines somebody else copied for me out of a book they had, there should have been fruit by the third year. I was beginning to feel like the one Jesus spoke of, "...why does it encumber the ground?" (Lk13:7) After the winter, each spring I would watch it to see if it survived. (We bought two, and the other one died early-on) Buds would

pop out...but life would extend only 'so-far' out the old vines, and beyond that, it was clear...it was dead. So I would trim the dead away, hoping the vines would grow out to some significance and fill up the trellis I built.. But year-after-year, there was no fruit. Sadly, just like the Church!

This year, finally, the vines have been growing out strongly, enough so that I had to train them back upon themselves, and the trellis is COVERED with growth...and there is "fruit"!

THAT is what Believers are to be. Fruit-bearers. It's not anything we 'do'. These vines of mine, if I left them alone, they would be all over the ground, getting trampled. But I go out there periodically, and move the strings with which I've kept them trained to the trellis. The long ends, to train them back around. As clusters have sprung out crammed up into the foliage, working them loose and training them, so they can hang free and grow out full.

How many Believers -strain- at the Christian life? That is not our job. It is the "vinedresser's" job. Who is the vinedresser? The "Father". (Jn15:1) He is the Potter who fashions us out of the clay. (Jer18:4,6, Rom9:21) One reason we can be assured that "...all things work together for good to those who love God.." (Rom8:28) is because God is the one who is at work: "...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (Php2:13)

What is the vine's responsibility? To "abide" in Christ, allowing the nutrients of the Root to flow through us, to the fruit. It is not our job to make the fruit, nor to form it in the direction it is to grow. We are not to worry, "But Lord, what about this man?" (Jn21:21) We do not "judge another's servant" (Rom14:4) "You follow Me!" (Jn21:22) The vine branch is not an end-unto-itself. We are to bear fruit.

What is that fruit? "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control..." (Gal5:22-23) The aroma of Christ unto life. (2Cor2:16)

In past years when I have walked out to the back yard, that old swing set was looking like, well, an old rusty swing-set, with some boards attached. This year when I go back there, there is this lush growth of vegetation, and beautiful fruit hanging from it. And from the past couple of years, I already know this particular plant produces -very-SWEET grapes. Yummy. To my eyes, after all those years of nothingness, it's a wondrously beautiful sight! Sometimes I have even felt giddy, happy and excited over it, and if there was somebody else to share the joy with, to dance around in circles: "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Lk15:10)

Jesus spoke of "abiding" in Him the very evening He was taken to be crucified. As vine branches, we are exhorted...

"And walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." (Eph5:2)

"For the love of Christ holds us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again." (2Cor5:14-15)

As It Was...So will it be (Joshua 23:15) © 2003

"Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which Jehovah your God has spoken to you, so Jehovah will bring upon you every evil thing, to destroy you from this good land which Jehovah your God has given to you. When you have transgressed the covenant of Jehovah your God, which He has commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of Jehovah will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land which He has given to you." (Josh23:15-16)

While at first glance you might be thinking we're going to be "negative" again here, to talk about God's "punishment" for disobedience, this is actually a supplement to June's article; somewhat to add confirmation and validity to something that was addressed there. There we observed how Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection FULFILLED PROPHECY. And furthermore, the fact that, since He had fulfilled 'past' prophecy to-the-letter, that we can have firm confidence in His promises regarding the 'future'; His promise to come and "receive" Believers to Himself (Jn14:3) in resurrection and rapture (Jn11:25-26). The fact that past fulfillment authenticated, validated and guaranteed His promises regarding the future.

In this passage in Joshua, God is specifically spelling out this same concept to Israel.

Let's review a minute: At the promises of God beginning with Abraham, Israel was redeemed out of Egypt, they were given the Law and further promises about inheriting the land of Canaan originally covenanted to Abraham and his seed. They crossed the Jordan River, and had unprecedented military victories as they took possession of the land of promise. The land has been divided up between the tribes by lot. And now Joshua is getting old and he is giving Israel some closing exhortations before it will be time for him to die.

The account tells us: "And Jehovah gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; Jehovah delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which Jehovah had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass." (Josh21:43-45) And reviews to them the great prosperity they've inherited in the land. (24:13)

And so Joshua now reviews with Israel: "And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which Jehovah your God has spoken concerning you. All of them have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed" (23:14)

This is the context of our opening passage. God had promised "blessing" to Israel...if they obeyed Him, keeping His commandments, and not being diverted to idolatry. But now Joshua is also reminding them of the "curse". Here's how God had given it to them:

"Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of Jehovah your God which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of Jehovah your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, to go after other gods which you have not known." (De11:26-28)

God also exhorted them, that when they should come into the land of promise, and experience His blessings and would "...have eaten and are full; then be on guard that you not forget Jehovah who brought you out of the land of Egypt...You shall fear Jehovah your God and serve Him, and swear by His name...You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you...lest the anger of Jehovah your God burn against you and destroy you from off the face of the earth."
(~De6:10-15)

Is this not what we see around us. Quite often those who are overflowing with wealth do not trust in God, but in their own riches. As Jesus said about the near-impossibility for a person of wealth "to enter the kingdom of Heaven". (Mt19:23-24) Thus, also, in speaking of submission to one's "master", that no one can serve "two masters", He says, "It is impossible to serve God and mammon (money)." (Mt6:24)

God's desire for Israel was to shower them with blessing. Even in later years when they would be in rebellion, He would chide them to be obedient, and see if He wouldn't "open the windows of Heaven" to them in blessing. (Mal3:10)

Well, right 'now' Israel is sitting pretty. God has given them overwhelming victory over their enemies, and they are sitting in luxury of the wealth of the land.

Israel had obeyed God's commands: "As Jehovah had commanded Moses his servant, thus Moses had commanded Joshua, and thus Joshua did. He did not turn aside from anything of all that Jehovah had commanded Moses." (11:15) And God had fulfilled His promises to Israel, for blessing.

God had promised blessing in return for obedience. They obeyed; God blessed; AS GOD HAD PROMISED; to-the-letter. (every "jot and tittle" Mt5:18) And so now Joshua is exhorting them that JUST AS IT HAS HAPPENED that God fulfilled the "blessing" if they obeyed; warning them that, if they turn and become unfaithful, JUST AS SURELY would they experience the "curse" if they were to turn away from God to idols. God's past faithfulness to His own word for "blessing" would be just as 'faithful'

regarding the "curse". God promised -both-, conditionally; conditioned upon Israel's fidelity in following God. God has fulfilled the one condition. That fulfillment guarantees the fulfillment of the 'other' condition, if Israel rebels.

There are many who whine at God's Word: Surely a God of luuuuv wouldn't subject people to "torture-in-hell" for eternity. They do not see all of God's fulfilled promises; they do not understand; thus they do not accept God's Word that says, "...the soul who sins shall die.." (Ez18:4) And they don't accept that "...the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night.." (Rev14:11) That "...the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.." (Is66:24, Mk9:44)

If you happen to be one of those who thinks the Bible is full of "fairy tales", may I suggest to you that you keep your eyes on Israel in the coming months. Islam and the entire Arab world wishes to push them "into the sea" (forget those 'treaties' with Egypt and Jordan!). And the rest of the world is siding with the Arabs. And Israel's supposed "best friend" (USA) will be double-crossing them shortly; the process of that double-cross has already begun with this push for the "road-map"; as the CIA has also been busy training the PLO, and giving all sorts of military technical aid to many of Israel's enemies in the region. As God prophesied, "And -ALL- the nations of the earth will be gathered against.." Jerusalem. (Zec12:3, 14:2) Many have wondered 'how' America could fit such a scenario, being Israel's "friend". Well, that process is -already- underway!

Folks, keep your eyes open. If you don't believe the Bible...watch Israel in the coming months. Things are only just 'beginning' to ramp up to some rather spectacular events as God makes Himself known to the world. Israel has been in similar straits in the past, with overwhelming odds against her. Those are the situations God seems to delight in, to reveal Himself, both to Israel, and to the world.

But if your heart is sensitive to God's drawing upon your soul, hear how Joshua exhorts and chides Israel way back 3400 years ago: Before God called to Abram, his family served "other gods". (24:2) But God called Abraham, made a covenant with him, and Abraham "believed God" and it was accounted as "righteous". (Gen15:6, Rom4:3) Joshua reviews the highlights of God's fulfilled promises, and then exhorts: God fulfilled His promise for blessing; now if you disobey, He will fulfill the curse, also...

"Now therefore, fear Jehovah, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers have served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve Jehovah!" (24:14) "Now therefore, he said, put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto Jehovah the God of Israel." (24:23)

The exhortation to you is to respond as Israel did:

"Jehovah our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!" (24:24)

Dead in Christ? © 2003

[REFERENCING: "And this even is further described in detail, that the "dead in Christ" will first rise from the dead. Being "in Christ" indicates that they are the "Church", the disciples that were first called "Christians in Antioch".]

READER QUESTION:

If when we die we go to Heaven and our spirits are already in Heaven w/Jesus, what do the dead need to rise for? Their spirits are already in Heaven right? Is this referring to getting glorified bodies? I've never understood this part, please explain.

VW ANSWER:

Well...Adam was first formed from the dust of the ground. (Gen2:7) And it is to dust that mankind returns. (Gen3:19) It was into this dust-originated being that God then breathed into, to create the "living soul". The word "breath" from the expression "breath of life" also can mean "spirit". In fact, there are many places in Scripture where the words for breath and spirit might be easily interchanged, and their correct translation can only be done by observing the context. So, in other words; God started out, so-to-speak, with a lump of clay. (Rom9:21) And breathed 'spirit' into it, and gave it 'soul'.

Exactly -what- is spirit and soul? That is God's domain of total understanding. (Heb4:12-13)

However at death the body decays and becomes worm food (Job7:5, 21:26), but the spirit/soul goes to God's presence. In the O.T. they spoke of "Abraham's bosom". (Lk16:22) When Jesus died he promised the thief to receive him in "Paradise". (Lk23:43) During the 70th week, the souls of the martyrs are pictured being "under the altar". (Rev6:9) Whatever these places are characterized as, they are "home with the Lord". (2Cor5:8) Collectively we have come to call it "Heaven", God's dwelling. (1Ki8:30)

But according to Jesus' description to Nicodemus, the movings of the Spirit cannot be pinned down. (Jn3:8) How does one 'see' a spirit? Thus, God has put "the spirit of man within him". (Zec12:1) Our bodies are 'temples'...dwellings for the spirit/s. For a believer, they are a temple for the Holy Spirit (1Cor6:19) as the believer and God have oneness. (Jn17) For one who has emptied himself, the door is wide open for demons to come in and reside. (Mt12:43-45) In that passage Jesus calls the body a "house"...the same term that is used a lot in the O.T. regarding the temple.

But at the onset of sin, these bodies became corrupt...subject to death. (Gen2:17) These bodies of "flesh and blood [are] not able to inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption." (1Cor15:50) But the disciples watched Jesus ascend 'bodily' into Heaven. (Acts1:9) The

resurrection provides a body of "incorruption" and "immortality" (1Cor15:53-54)

Earlier in that chapter Paul discusses the "body" of the resurrection. He asks the question: "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" (vs35) He speaks of different kinds of bodies (substance) of animals and stars. And how when a seed is planted into the ground it dies...and shoots up a plant. The plant looks totally different from the seed. It's a similar transformation with our bodies. We die a "natural body" and are raised a "spiritual body". (vs42-45) Our earthly bodies are based on "dust" (vs47), and the new spiritual bodies are based on... whatever the "Lord out of Heaven" is. As John says it, at His "revealing" we will be "like Him". (1Jn3:2-3)

What is that like? We don't yet know, because we have not yet arrived there. The Lord tends to not give us all the details about things, until it is the right time. But that is what the resurrection/rapture is about: going to be with the Lord, and receiving the new glorified spiritual, incorrupted, immortal bodies....just like what Jesus was resurrected with. Jesus was the "firstfruit" ...and at the resurrection/rapture it will be "those who are Christ's at His coming". (1Cor15:23)

Three Days of Jesus' Death © 1999

READER QUESTION:

Would you please address the confusing subject of what happened to Jesus during the three days and nights after the crucifixion in one of your newsletters? There are so many different theories. I would like to know what you say about it.

VW ANSWER:

First of all, before we consider what Jesus -might- have been doing during that time, we should dispell a grievous error that some proclaim. We should understand something which DID NOT HAPPEN. There are many of the 'charismatic' persuasion who teach that satan "tortured" Jesus in hell. At least one of the major televangelists proclaims this; and I've heard/read it from other sources, as well. Such a thing did NOT happen! How do we know this?

Satan isn't yet -in- hell. Hell is a place that God prepared "for the devil and his angels" (Mt25:41) For -their- judgment. And that is yet future. Before Satan is in the Lake of Fire, he will first be cast out of heaven (Rev12:9) to the earth where he will assemble his rebellion against God in great wrath. After Babylon has been crushed, "an angel" will lay "hold on the dragon...and [bind] him a thousand years." (Rev20:1-3) This way, he will not be deceiving the nations while Christ rules. Then, at the end of those thousand years, he will be release for one final rebellion against God, after which he will be "cast into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone.." (Rev20:10)

When Jesus died for sin, Whose wrath did He suffer? It is the "wrath of God" (Rom1:18) which is meted out against sin. As Jesus hung on the cross, bearing the "sin of the world" (Jn1:29) He cried out, "My God, My God, why have -You- forsaken Me?" (Mt27:46,Ps22:1) Because, "it pleased -Jehovah- to crush Him; to grieve Him; that He should put forth His soul as a guilt-offering...He shall see the travail of His soul. He shall be fully satisfied." (~Is53:10-11)

Did Jesus go to "hell"? (Mt10:28,Ps16:10) to the "Lake of Fire"? (Rev20:13-14) (Since "hell" is cast into the Lake of Fire) What is the "heart of the earth"? (Mt12:40) Maybe He went to the "outer darkness"? (Mt8:12) I'm not going to try to speculate on these things. Some 'scholarly' types try to dissect Jesus into body-soul-spirit, and make some rather outlandish suppositions as they compartmentalize all sorts of variations of places "in", "up" and "down". But even Paul who was "caught up to the third heaven" (2Cor12:2) was not bold enough to explain -specifically- the experience, stating instead, "I do not know". But there are many who proclaim things "they do not know". (Jude10) And the scoffers have a field-day with the Heb/Grk picking apart the Scriptures, retorting that Jesus' teachings about "hell" were merely His metaphorical references to the 'garbage dump' just outside of Jerusalem, because they don't believe that a place of "torment"

(Lk16:23) where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt22:13) exists. There's a lot about the other side of life that we don't know. The fact that a place of torment and judgment, in contrast to the peace and rest of "Abraham's Bosom" (Lk16:22) and "Paradise" (Lk23:43, Rev2:7, 2Cor12:4), exists, is quite clear. And we are given just enough, all that we -need- to know.

While we may not know precisely where the "heart of the earth" is, where Jesus said He was going; we do know a bit about one thing He did. When He "once suffered for sins" He also "went and preached to the spirits in prison." (1Pt3:18-20) These "spirits" in prison were the ones destroyed in the flood, as Noah was "saved".

There have been many theological treatises speculating as to "what" He might have preached to them, and the outcome of that preaching. Some suggest that He proclaimed His triumph over satan and sin, informing them of their sealed fate and judgment. Some from the "ultimate restorationist" view combine these verses with 4:6 to suggest that, while they had died at the flood, they had to wait "in prison" until Christ would die on the cross, and once that happened, they would then "live according to God". That, even though they had been sinning and corrupting the earth, and God promised "death" upon sin, that, in the end, they were saved anyway. Or, modify this a bit, and Jesus preached, giving them the -option- at His preaching, to either receive Him or reject Him, and -then- either be saved or condemned. None of these, however, are found in Scripture.

Whatever the purpose of Jesus' preaching "in prison", we do know that "death passed on all men" because all have sinned. (Rom5:12) The predeluvian people sinned. They died. "The soul that sins, it shall die." (Ezek18:20) And if a person was not in the "Faith of Christ" (Phil3:9) when he died, "...it is appointed to men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb9:27) So, we can be sure that His preaching was -not- to offer them a "second chance".

Ultimately, whatever it was that God required in payment for sin, Jesus accomplished to God's satisfaction." (Is53:11) And it occurred before He was taken down from the cross, because He cried out "It is finished" (Jn19:30) and the "veil in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Mt27:51) signifying that the way for access to God -had- been [past tense] accomplished." (Heb9:8,22,28,10:19,22)

We do know that His soul was not -left- in hell. (Ps16:10,Acts2:27) Did His soul go to hell [and return] while His body was hanging on the cross? We do know that on the very same day He was crucified, He was planning to be "in Paradise" because He promised to meet the believing thief there. (Lk23:43) Thus, for Him to be able to enter Paradise, His work of atoning for sin had to have been completed. As for the rest of the details we must echo Paul's words, "I do not know; -God- knows."

Jesus, Mary & da Vinci Code ©2003

Based on: (ABC Prime Time 11/3/03 w/ Elizabeth Vargas)

Do you all remember from the September article from John ch20, about Mary Magdalene...how I speculated the kinds of thoughts that 'might be' out there someplace in the world, suggesting that Jesus and Mary had a relationship, and offspring; and of the hypothetical thoughts about the implications of anybody claiming to be descendents of Jesus through Mary? Well, if I was as scholarly educated as some are, I might have known that such thoughts already -definitely- 'DID' exist. ABC's Prime Time had a special on this very thing. (I caught the documentary about 7-minutes into the program, so missed the very opening presentation/s, to understand 'why' they were even addressing the matter in such a way. But once I saw what was on, I quickly got my laptop out by the TV so I could type myself some notes as it progressed, to remember details, to present here...some highlights...and then a closing thought, or two.)

The basic theory is that da Vinci believed this notion that Jesus was married to Mary; but since he lived during times when people were persecuted for having independent thought that might be contrary to the 'official' political/church doctrines, that he depicted it in his painting, "The Last Supper", by 'stealth'. The person portrayed sitting to Jesus' 'right' is not John, but Mary. And the way they are portrayed with their body angles, the space between them forms a huge "V", supposedly a symbol of fertility of the womb. And it was noticed that the (so-called) "chalice" from which they drank that night, is 'missing' from that picture; that the elusive "holy grail" that is the basis for so much folk lore and the imaginings of paganism, was actually "Mary", as symbolized by that "V" in his painting.

According to these legends, Mary is said to have moved to the south of France, and was known as the "vessel of this child" who was named "Sara". That there was a certain line of French nobles who were considered to be descendents of Jesus and Mary. Legends of the Maravingians (sp?) that a queen had been impregnated by a fish (symbol of Jesus)...into a complete "blood-line" of Jesus. In amongst these legends was the name "Templazars" (Knights Templar), which also happen to be part of the lineage for things regarding Free Masonry and the other "secret" societies that are said to be the "real power" behind world politics. Those legends, by the way, trace their alleged lineage clear back to Solomon.

Does this suggest a potential source for the antichrist? In a couple weeks our Jeremiah study will address God's command to Jeremiah NOT to be married; and in that study we'll address another contradictory legend that claims that Jeremiah migrated to the UK with Zedekiah's royal princesses, when all his sons were murdered, and supposedly sired descendents to Israel's royal line, who are now said (by this legend) to be sitting on UK's

royal throne. So, you see, there's at least two legends by which the antichrist can be presented to the world, as supposedly being of the seed of David (to deceive the "elect", Israel): one from France, and another from UK.

Interesting, also isn't it, that these are located in Europe, the source of the coming antichrist's power-base. It is Europe where, next to the Islamic world's hate, antisemitism is on the greatest increase, where when thousands from all the various EU countries recently were polled, given names of countries like N.Korea, Syria, Iran, Iraq...AND ISRAEL to consider, and then asked which country of all those, in their opinion, was the greatest threat to world peace, the vast majority responded, "Israel"!

So... where is the rest of the supposed 'documentation' coming from, to support this so-called da Vinci Code? Egypt. More specifically...are you ready for this? Alexandria. Does that name ring a bell in another context?

The "Secret Gospels" hidden in Alexandria. The Gospels of Thomas, Truth, Philip. The so-called "Gnostic Gospels". In these writings Mary is said to have been Jesus' "favorite". Some claim from these writings that Jesus regularly "kissed Mary on the mouth". Others, when being 'honest' say the manuscripts have a 'hole', that they say He "kissed Mary on the..." and then the next word is missing due to age and deterioration; leaving it to speculation. That Jesus' three closest companions were Peter, Andrew and Mary. (Contradicting the Scripture's mention of Peter, Jacob and John -Mt17:1,etc) That Mary was supposedly the "head apostle" (contradicting what appears to be Peter at first Ac1:15, and later Jacob Ac15:13, 21:18, Ga2:9) that the men were "jealous" of Mary's closeness with Jesus, that Jesus would choose a "woman" instead of them (men). That after Jesus had left, that Mary had visions, and she told Peter that some knowledge given to her, Jesus had purposely 'withheld' from Peter. And that this supposed "relationship" that they allege Jesus and Mary had is supposed to 'loosen up' the antiquated "unhealthy attitudes about sexuality" the church has; giving more "liberty" in these things. (Remember who it was that raised up the animosity that led to Stephen's martyrdom by stoning? Those from the "synagogue of the LIBERTINES... Cyrenians and those from ALEXANDRIA...Ac6:9)

It is THIS SAME SOURCE from which the manuscripts/documents come that are the basis for today's perVersions of Scripture. What have been compiled into what are known as the Westcott/Hort texts. That's the NIV, RSV, ASB, NASB, etc.

Seeing how these traditions have dragged the One who was "without sin" (Heb4;15), our Lamb "without blemish and without spot" (1Pt1:19) into the gutter of their minds...

Hopefully this will get the attentions of some of you who are still fence-straddling. Get rid of those perVersions!!! If they are anything more to you

than a "reference" sitting on your book shelf, and you are "using" them regularly because you 'like' them...then, GET RID OF THEM. RIP THEM UP and build yourself a little bon fire, or throw them into your fireplace, or the garbage! Seriously!!! Hopefully you now understand a little better the SWILL-PIT from which they originate...and why we have such a loathing for them around here!

And a closing observation: One of the participants in this special, one of their so-called "experts" who appeared on camera to add his two-bits' worth into the whole mix, was a professor from the formerly-esteemed Dallas Seminary...!

When this so-called "seed of Jesus" appears on the global scene, don't believe it. He is not coming out of the UK or France, or any place else. Jesus already warned against it:

"Then if anyone says to you, Look, here is the Christ; or, There; do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, Behold, He is in the desert, do not go out; or, Behold, He is in the inner rooms, do not believe it. For as the lightning comes out of the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Mt24:23-27)

He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Mt11:15)

Amen!